

A PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC EDUCATION  
DESIGNER PIANO  
TEACHERS ART MUSIC STUDENT  
MOTIVATION FORMS OF DELIVERY THE  
Piano Teaching  
LEARNING TO EDACISE PUBLIC

A Guide for Nurturing  
Musical Independence

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE JOURNAL  
PRE-EMPTING DEVELOPING  
TECHNIQUE STAGES OF CHILD  
DEVELOPMENT THE VERY YOUNG  
STUDENT METHOD BOOKS FOR BEGINNERS  
ADULT TUITION GROUP LESSONS  
PREPARING FOR TEACHING EXAMS  
POSTURE USE AND ABUSE OF THE BODY  
INTERPRETATION THE STUDIO TUITION  
AGREEMENT RESUME THE  
ACCOUNTING SIDE THE TRIANGLE -  
STUDENTS/PARENTS/TEACHERS  
A BASIC LIBRARY REPERTOIRE SELECTION THE  
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*Faith Maydwell*

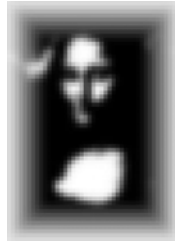


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# Piano Teaching

A Guide for Nurturing  
Musical Independence

*Faith Maydwell*



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Western Australia

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## **PREFACE**

I am not sure that I imagined specialising in piano pedagogy as a young adult but I do remember asking my professor shortly after completing a master's degree at university, "What do I call myself?" His answer was immediate. "Why? You are a MUSICIAN." Thirty years later I find myself feeling passionate about the possibilities of the piano studio and putting forward a way of teaching that emphasises the development of the whole person and the complete musician.

The journey has provided experiences in accompanying, solo recitals, concertos and broadcasts, teaching in tertiary institutions and music specialist schools, orchestral keyboard playing, examining and adjudicating. Not only am I grateful for the rich and varied background but I have seen first-hand how different areas of music making are complementary to others.

When I was completing two performance degrees at university, back in the 1970s and 80s, there were no specific teaching units for the piano students who planned to be studio teachers. This was despite the great majority of performance majors, on their exodus from university, teaching in some capacity to supplement their income. How I first taught was mostly influenced by what I had experienced in my student years. Over the decades, a range of teaching experiences and further study has contributed to a major shift in my approach.

I have always enjoyed teaching, but now look forward with great anticipation to the return of my students after a holiday period and regard music teaching as an exciting and privileged occupation.

Whilst teaching piano pedagogy at university and wading through the dullest of method books on the subject, something new would always be revealed. This is what I love about the subject. It is huge and it is intriguing. For instance, I thought I had the teaching of scales all wrapped up. However, over lunch recently with a piano teacher, I gained new insight by listening to a summary of her approach.

Should you decide to become a piano teacher, be prepared to be fascinated for a lifetime. Reading material is endless and there is always an intellectual or musical challenge to be met.

These pages reflect my observations and lessons learnt over the years.

I realise that people have many different ways of teaching piano. Tertiary teaching, in particular, showed me that important musical concepts need to be addressed in the early stages of a student's development. If this has not happened all is not lost as much can still be accomplished with hard work and good teachers. However it would be so much better if students were helped to be well-rounded musicians from the beginning. I often encounter adult students who do not know, for instance, how to use their body effectively at the keyboard, how to hear inwardly, how to produce a variety of tone colours – even how to learn a Bach fugue.

I hope that piano teaching continues to become more professional and that all teachers come to understand their privileged position.

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## ***Dedication***

*To my piano teachers  
Miss Piercy, Mr Huddle, Dawn Fisher,  
Wallace Tate and David Bollard*

*Faith Maydwell*



## INTRODUCTION

To whom is this book directed? To piano teachers who may be looking for a fresh perspective and to piano students who are thinking about piano teaching as a career. It is a manual that examines the why, how, what, who and when of the subject.

Piano teaching is a profession that is rewarding but also challenging. It suits people who are fascinated with human behaviour and an art form which demands some of the most complicated feats of human coordination. It must be remembered that to know the literature alone is probably too big a task for one lifetime.

As teachers we are extremely fortunate to be working in most situations with one student at a time. This allows for a closeness that is not possible in a group. Those who have been blessed with a good teacher who has unveiled the mysteries of music will understand the tenderness and respect felt for the person who has enriched their lives. I remember Miriam Hyde's keynote address, *Memories of My Nine Piano Teachers*, at the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Piano Pedagogy Conference in 2001. She eloquently recalled what each one of her teachers added to her pianism. Reading an article such as *Edwin Fischer – Remembering My Teacher* by Alfred Brendel (*On Music*, p. 328, A Cappella Books, 2001) shows how a teacher affects a person's life. My university teacher often recalled stories of his teachers and great pianists he had heard whilst studying in London. When I recounted this to one of my adult students she was amazed to hear that attending concerts by pianists such as Richter, Cherkassky, Michelangeli, Kentner, Arrau, Serkin, Curzon and Giles could have a profound effect on personal and musical development.

Sadly, from some students I hear accounts of educational experiences that have a negative impact. Recently I spoke to a mother whose daughter repeatedly endured the criticism of a music teacher who, amongst other things, called her unmusical. I don't believe children should be weighed down with criticism, which may cause the wrong preconceptions to be carried throughout life. Musicality is learnt. Even the tiny percentage of students who seem incapable of independent development can still enjoy music by imitation. Playing a piece of music beautifully by rote is more enriching than not to play at all. Piano teaching can build a student's confidence. The experience should be a happy and rewarding one for both student and teacher.

Those who have learnt from certain teachers will also have had the advantage of being part of a great composer/performer line, passing down ideas from generation to generation. Even in Perth, Western Australia – the world's most isolated city – I had a teacher whose lineage, in five steps, goes back to Beethoven via Liszt and Czerny. I had the good fortune to study with David Bollard for three years before he went to Sydney to become a founding member of the Australia Ensemble. He studied piano with Ilona Kabos for about a year and a half and then with Louis Kentner for four and a half years. He talked of the predominant qualities that emanated from their teaching. Kabos emphasised the need for the music to have a sense of direction and for the phrase to breathe in a natural way. With Kentner it was the importance of a beautiful cantabile tone and the awareness of the need to strive constantly to defeat the basic nature of the instrument, whose sound is produced by percussive means.

I have heard piano pedagogues deride musical lineages saying that this is totally irrelevant because teaching evolves with each generation. However, keyboard pedagogy has a close connection to the great masters. If we have the chance to hear at first, second or even fifth hand how a composer wanted his music to be played, are we not better off? David Bollard

told me he questioned Kabos about an interpretive issue in a piece of Liszt, and her reply was, “I *know* darling, I studied with his pupil!”

Sometimes a musician whose main interest is not piano can have a profound effect on a student’s life. A Hungarian musician highly regarded and who had a great influence on Kabos and Kentner, Leó Weiner, is listed in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as a composer and teacher of chamber music having studied composition with Zoltán Kodály.

It still excites me every time I think of this wonderful line of musicians that I now belong to and the privilege I have of passing my knowledge on to future generations:

Ludwig Beethoven

Carl Czerny

Franz Liszt

Arpád Szendry

Ilona Kabos

David Bollard

Faith Maydwell

We can learn much from our teachers on the subject of teaching whether they are a well-known concert artist or the neighbour next-door. I suggest that a list be made of the qualities admired in your piano teachers as well as the qualities which you do not wish to take with you into your career.

Be prepared as you examine teaching to change your view. Sometimes issues are not black and white. I remember my second teacher Mr Huddle who used to pick me up from school and take me to my home for lessons. The spider webs in the corner of his car used to fascinate me, as did his thick fingers which had the consistency of crocodile skin. He was a stickler for key signatures. I am grateful now for not flinching when greeted by a key signature of six or seven sharps, a skill which has greatly aided my sight reading, though his method of teaching this filled me with frustration and anger at the time. I don’t recall the method but I do strongly recall the feelings. In my teenage years Mrs Dawn Fisher helped me to focus during a difficult time. I remember being inwardly rebellious. Piano lessons during university were the highlights. I would look forward with eager anticipation to each lesson, riveted to the new score and listening intently to David Bollard as we examined music in minute detail.

Before the question of why one would want to be a piano teacher is addressed, let’s look at why we are attracted to this instrument in the first place. Over the past few years we seem to

have had a glut of piano books and piano films such as *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank*, *The Piano Tuner*, *The Pianist* and *The Piano Teacher*. It has always been an instrument associated with the high life. I have a folder full of accumulated advertisements of the keyboard and the grand piano's wing shape to help sell designer pens, restaurant meals and watches. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's survey, "What's the one piece of piano music you can't live without?" attracted 10,000 entries.

The piano has been and remains a popular instrument. Why? Here are a few suggestions:

- For many of us the piano was part of the furniture in the family home.
- A lucky few were taken to recitals as children.
- When striking a chord, we can feel the vibrations physically. For many people, the piano's main attraction would be its response to touch. It needs a touch full of nuance and subtlety.
- Dynamics on the piano vary according to the touch – not achievable on the harpsichord or organ. Sound matches body movement, so playing the piano can be intensely expressive.
- The ability to produce melody and harmony at one time can be exhilarating. The piano can be a whole orchestra if need be.
- To produce the sound is relatively easy. One does not have to use a lot of breath or need to tune the note. Nearly anyone can produce a satisfying result fairly quickly. (Of course this does not imply that it is an easy instrument to master.)
- It may be the piano literature that is attractive. It is the largest for any instrument covering many periods and styles.

It is interesting to ask students why they learn the piano. For the majority who take it up in childhood, it is the parents who make the decision for them because they in turn had learnt or owned a piano. One student desired to play the piano from the age of five, was given a piano when nine years of age but did not agree to lessons until she was twelve because peers had told her "piano teachers shout at you". It was the choir mistress who inspired her initially but also the fascination with the piano sitting in the corner of the classroom under the crimson quilt, undressed to be played for hymns at the commencement of the school day and grace before recess.

Adults' responses are more varied when asked the main reason why they commenced or recommenced lessons; curiosity as to why they could not play well as a child, to make up for the childhood years when they could not play, pianism is an essential part of their life, fascination of the piano sound, enjoyment of good music, a help for analysing and understanding good music, a need to be involved with beauty, career development and of course to be able to advance their pianism.

In our love affair with an extraordinary instrument, some of us are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to obtain the best sounds on the best instruments. Does this necessarily make such a person suitable for the teaching of music? Well, it is a good starting point but much more is involved with successful teaching.

## A PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC EDUCATION

Why is music important in a child's education? What music should we be teaching? How should we be teaching it? What is the main goal of the piano teacher? How do we achieve this goal on a week-by-week basis? The answers are involved in building a solid understanding of piano teaching.

Here are some of the areas that playing the piano affects:

- Articulating ideas
- Concentration
- Confidence
- Coordination
- Emotional language
- Historical knowledge
- Knowledge of the other arts
- Listening
- Memory
- Posture
- Reading
- Relationships
- Self-discipline
- Understanding of aesthetics
- Understanding other genres of music – symphonies, string quartets, etc.

The writings of Kodály stress the importance of music to the emotional, intellectual, aesthetic and physical development of the child. He even suggests that music should be at the heart of the school curriculum. We should be asking, “Why, when it is so beneficial to the child, has

our society allowed music to be pushed to the sidelines with little resources given to its study?”

It is clear that music study can have a great effect on a person's life and on society in general. A father of one of my students confided to me that at the tea table his six-year-old had declared, “Piano is very good because it makes you think and it makes you smart.” This alone would seem to justify piano for every child who wishes to learn. Add to this all the appreciation of beauty that enters life through it.

One of the most convincing philosophies of music I have read is David Elliott's *Music Matters* (Oxford University Press, 1995). So long as you can put up with words such as *musicing* and *praxial* this challenging book presents many convincing arguments on the importance of music education. He shows how and why the study of music leads to self-growth, constructive knowledge, enjoyment and increased self-esteem. Reading works such as this should not be avoided. When you see the big picture you are able to articulate your goals and explain why music teaching is an essential part of society. It is then relatively easy to answer many of the smaller questions such as what materials to teach and in what manner they can be taught.

Philosophy on music education needs to be strong because it is closely related to three areas of a piano teacher's life. Firstly, on a personal level, the job must be regarded as important. Teachers need to be convinced about what they want to achieve and how to achieve it. Without this strong direction and because of the isolated nature of the work, it is easy for the music teacher to become demoralised with feelings of doubt creeping in. If they understand that piano teaching is sharing one of life's most enriching art forms then the enthusiasm they have towards the subject will carry them through the tougher times.

Secondly, in the music studio there needs to be a clear long-term goal so the details of the week-by-week decisions will be made with a sense of purpose.

The third area where piano teachers can be a force for good is the community. If they have a chance to put forward an opinion in the public arena on the value of music education then they should do so. Recently, the university where I was teaching piano pedagogy halved the course due to economic considerations. Because of my sessional staff position I did not have any input into the decision, but I still used the opportunity to wave the flag for good teaching in this area. It felt as if my voice was weak on this occasion, though I believe we should always be willing to speak up on the subject of music education. Every opportunity that has the potential to help enrich and strengthen the arts in society needs to be taken.

If you can say “I want to be a teacher of piano because I think it is one of the most useful skills that I can help impart to humankind” then you are in a wonderful position.

Next, what is your major objective? What do you think is the main goal of the piano teacher? When I ask this question of first-year classes I always receive a variety of answers. Here are a few:

- To help students enjoy music
- To make great pianists
- To help students pass exams
- To have fun

These are worthy objectives but, for me, the main objective of the piano teacher is:

TO HELP THE STUDENT BECOME MUSICALLY INDEPENDENT  
AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE

Heinrich Neuhaus puts it similarly in *The Art of Piano Playing* (p. 172, Barrie and Jenkins, 1973). It's worth reading.

Independence implies musical maturity with the pupil brought to a stage of knowledge and understanding to be able to make good musical judgements. My goal is never to produce pianists but to help produce musicians. Pianists with fast fingers and a smooth action can still be inadequate musicians, lacking in interpretation and expression. Rounded musicians will understand their instruments as well as technical and posture issues. Better to be able to tackle any score accurately and expressively than to be able to play only a handful of masterpieces precisely. It is the former skill which will provide the opportunity for continual musical growth.

Why do I write "independent as quickly as possible"? It is easy to coast along thinking that piano playing is a long haul, so what's the hurry? We should be making that journey towards independence as short as possible because we never know when circumstances may change. If the student departing has not arrived at a certain level, then years of work could be completely lost. A teacher who had a studio for 50 years told me that she had never been able to get her students to sight read. I found this distressing. Was there no help for the teacher to find the key to developing this skill? All her students apparently went into adult life without one of the greatest joys of music – to be able to play new scores readily.

Of course, in the music field we rarely *arrive* – and are always travelling towards perfection. We may choose to have mentors for feedback throughout our life. However, there is a stage where we can feel comfortable with our musical decisions and are able to articulate the reasons for them. There may be only an occasional student we see arrive at this stage. Nevertheless, this is no reason to stop aiming for the goal.

Elliott (*Music Matters*, p236) succinctly answers these two important questions.

- Should piano lessons be offered only to the select few?

"... people are born with the capacities of attention, awareness and memory that enable them to learn to think musically – to make music and listen for music competently, if not proficiently. Musicianship is achieved through music teaching and learning; it is neither a gift nor a talent. True, some people seem to have high levels of musical intelligence and high levels of interest in learning to make and listen for music well. These factors may enable such people to develop musicianship and musical creativity more deeply and broadly than others. Nevertheless, the vast majority of people have sufficient musical intelligence to achieve at least a competent level of musicianship through systematic programs of music education."

- Why is learning music (piano) of such benefit to human beings?

"... for the values inherent in knowing how to make and listen for music intelligently are central to making a life; self-growth, self-knowledge, self-esteem, creative achievement, humanistic and cultural empathy, and enjoyment are central life goals and life values in all human cultures."

## DESIGNER PIANO TEACHERS

Given that teachers are in command of piano and musicianship skills, the piano teacher needs to be:

### **Caring**

A positive concern for the student will enable students to realise their potential. The concern needs to be for the total person and not just finger technique or musicianship skills. We do not give our best if different parts of our being are isolated. We feel special and comfortable only when our whole personality is acknowledged.

### **Honest and open**

Students eventually see through affectation. Good teachers allow themselves to be themselves and extend this right to the student.

### **Respectful**

It is exciting for students to learn but also at times confusing, frustrating and unnerving. There needs to be empathy with a student's changing circumstances. It is unacceptable to make comments such as "there is no way you will ever pass this exam". It might be the truth given the amount of work that the student is exhibiting but the teacher's description of the situation needs to be carefully worded. To do otherwise may cause the student irreversible psychological damage.

### **Flexible**

The other day a six-year-old came into the studio with her baseball cap on. I suggested that it be removed mainly because I wanted to see her face. She adamantly refused even after my second request. I decided not to insist because it is not worth upsetting a lesson over a baseball cap. I would sort it out with her mother and ask her to send her in without a hat for the next lesson. I was glad that I did not waste any more time on it because three quarters of the way through the lesson, the girl said "I didn't go to school today because I might have nits but Mum doesn't think I have them!"

### **Modest**

The lesson needs to be student-centred not teacher-centred. This is one area I battle with when teaching my adult students. Because they all feel like my friends it is easy to switch into the happenings of our week. Anything personal that needs to be discussed I leave for a cup of tea before or after the lesson. There are a few adult students who seem to be more happy discussing musical ideas rather than playing. I don't mind when I can see plenty of evidence of them exploring new music and teaming up with others for chamber music, lieder accompaniment, piano duets and so on. Musically, they are alive and well.

### **Astute**

One must be able to gauge what stage a student is at and assign the next level of music and technique. I have given up using one complete method for beginners. I find it much more appropriate to create a scrapbook specially designed for each student, created as progress and difficulties are revealed week by week.

### **Motivating**

Until students learn that the greatest reward is to please oneself, then the teacher has to propel the student along by whatever means available.

**Organised**

If you have many students at many different stages then a clear view is needed for sequential development. How this is organised – whether in the student’s book or in the teacher’s file – is personal but there must be a written form of the journey. This is the one area in life where my memory does wonders, much to the chagrin of some of my students. Even so I find myself more and more thinking and organising lessons so that no time is wasted. The once-a-week visit is already short enough.

**Patient**

At the end of one year I was presented with a gift and card from a university class of singers and instrumentalists. Within this year they had learnt scales and arpeggios in all keys, simple improvisation, figured bass, two recital pieces (memorised), sight reading to the end of Mikrokosmos Volume III, some history of the piano and some knowledge of great pianists. On the card “thank you for your patience” was written again and again. It was not my eloquence or my pianism that they appreciated the most but my patience! I don’t usually like being described as patient, but if it is patience which enables students to achieve those results in 26 weeks, then I will take pleasure in the description.

**Creative**

We are faced with problems moment by moment and may have to find the solutions on the spot. Students work best when they are alert so we need to be invigorated and on our toes, working hard to avoid stale and forgettable lessons. Questions need to be challenging and lead on to deeper thinking and problem solving.

**Focused**

Hearing and assessing every sound that passes through our ears can be exhausting work but we must strive to remain focused. Often after a full day of teaching I cannot even handle any music in the background. My ears long for quietness.

**Relaxed**

The studio atmosphere should be welcoming and supportive – not possible if you are rushing around and disorganised or thinking about something unrelated.

**Detached**

We are not mother/father figures. We are helping the student to be independent so there needs to be a degree of detachment.

**Encouraging**

After hearing a comment “I did not do so well last week”, I realised how harshly some people judge themselves. I thought I had given positive feedback but this student had apparently not heard it. Measuring out the right amount of encouragement is an art form.

**Inspiring**

It is your interests, especially in the arts, that students are attracted to. If you wish to be respected then your life needs to be an example.

**Appreciative of humour**

This is vital. Sometimes I roar with laughter with my students – and how wonderful it feels after intense concentration and focus. One week my 80-year-old student (I think she is younger) cracked a joke when she had a cracked rib: It was pain and pleasure as we chuckled together and as she tried not to disturb her sore rib.



### **Imaginative**

A willingness to pretend is a great teaching skill. Try out this exercise using any two lines of a well-known ditty; e.g.

WASH THE DISHES, DRY THE DISHES  
TURN THE DISHES OVER

Have your student recite the ditty portraying one of the listed attitudes below. Allow the student to pick a word without showing you. This way the student has to work hard to convince you.

- Menacing
- Dolce
- Sleepy
- Bawdy (adolescents and adults)
- Animated
- Dramatic
- Sad
- Humorous

An activity such as this can help the student understand and develop expression and projection. I suggest the teacher master this exercise first to be able to give illustrations.

Another useful exercise is for students to conduct. Through their gestures they can communicate crescendos and diminuendos, starts, stops and many other musical features. Students can take the lead while the teacher sings or plays the piano, the students showing how they desire the music to be expressed through movement alone. Again, the teacher needs to be proficient at the exercise to demonstrate it.

### **Communicative**

Be clear, succinct and mindful of the age group.

### **Firm**

A six-year-old had only a couple of lessons with me before she felt free enough to “express” herself at the piano by banging her fists up and down the keyboard. It was a sound to rival the unmerciful nature of Henry Cowell’s *Tiger* (1928), a solo piano work featuring double-forearm clusters and extended use of both fists. I was rather taken aback on two accounts – concern for my beautiful Fazioli and because I had not ever had to deal with such a situation before. A little surprised, I said to her, “hop under the piano, lie on the rug and look at the beautiful wood on the piano’s belly while I play you a little lullaby.” This worked. Realising that I could not send her under the piano every time she felt expressive, I searched for an ongoing solution. It was not the student’s fault. Her studio experience up to this time had been to do as she pleased with the teacher following her around. At the beginning of the next lesson before we even went to the piano we had an eyeball-to-eyeball session. I got down to her level and explained we had something important to talk about. I said: “If I am to help you become a fine musician then sometimes I have to listen to you and sometimes you have to listen to me. As you are not in the habit of listening to the teacher I may need to give you a little reminder. I’ll give a reminder by saying stop. I would like you to put your hands in your lap and to listen and if you do not do this I will pull the fallboard of the piano down and wait until you do.” I needed to do this only twice and the problem was solved. She started to listen and consequently made remarkable progress.

**In conclusion** I can hear you saying “you lost me on quality number three.” It’s okay. No one has all these qualities in the right proportion but it does not mean that we should stop working towards improving them.

## **COASTING, ROASTING OR TOASTING**

With what age group do you think you will be the most comfortable?

How many students do you imagine you will be able to cope with at any one time?

What level of piano would you like to teach?

How would you like to teach – in groups or one to one?

What sort of a teacher do you imagine you will be?

Over the years I have observed various types of piano teachers. Some are listed below. I am sure we will recognise glimpses of other teachers and ourselves or remember times when we might have been this way.

### **The Coasters say:**

“I love piano teaching because I trained as a pianist and there is much about the way I was taught which can be passed on to my students. I like the way I teach and am satisfied with the material I use – the method books I am familiar with from my childhood.”

“I love piano teaching because it gives me a pay packet.”

“I love teaching because you can drift along from week to week doing fun music and entertaining children and because it takes such a long time to master the instrument, no one really minds if results are slow in coming. I’ve been known to have students sit in preliminary grade for three years. If I take much longer than three years then some parents can start to ask questions.”

### **The Roaster/Boasters say:**

“I love teaching and the results I achieve. My students have a very healthy degree of fear when they come to lessons. They have even been known to look rather white and trembling before entering the studio and a great many of them cry when they leave. Of course it is just my weariness with the whole nature of piano teaching that makes me impatient. It’s nothing personal.”

“I love teaching because my students sit for exams and if I push really hard and if they ignore all those areas of music that are accessories – like sight reading and improvisation and harmony work – then we can progress through a grade a year and sometimes even two a year. The public achievements of my students are really important to me.”

### **The Toaster says:**

“I love teaching because when I answer the studio door I have similar feelings to being part of a toast at a celebration. Three cheers to life and to good music and to all the wonderful work that this student has achieved this week. I am prepared to design a special course for

each student tailored to their needs that will give them a well-balanced musical diet so they grow to musical maturity.”

If you are already teaching, try this test. Answer Yes or No.

- Have you sight read new music every working day of the past week?
- Have you listened to a new work of music in the past week – that is, *truly* listened, sitting still and concentrating on the music alone?
- Have you felt good when about to start a few hours of teaching?
- Have you felt good after a few hours of teaching? Has the journey been exhilarating and have you learnt something?

Aspects of the Coaster and Roaster that I do not have a problem with include:

- Lessons often profit from using material from the dim dark past.
- Learning does need to have an element of fun.
- Respect between teacher and student is important.
- A pay packet is a necessity.
- Goals play a big part in motivation.

Using fear and demoralising behaviour seems to motivate some students in the short term but it is a dangerous way to work. I have come across students who have a chip on their shoulder as a result of bad experiences during lessons. They may feel short-changed and resentful but I have found they mostly quickly recover their love of music in a respectful learning environment. For a few the damage has been too extensive and I have not been able to help.

What sort of teacher would you like to be? You can be the teacher that the students want you to be or the teacher that you decide to be. A short time ago from an experienced piano teacher whom I greatly admire because of the fine playing of her students told me that she was interested in the talk I gave at the last state piano conference on giving students a well-rounded musical diet. She agreed that it required creative teaching to produce *musicians*. Because her students were bent on achieving the next exam grade she felt that she could not follow my suggested model of teaching. She had decided to continue teaching in a particular way because of the pressure from her clientele. This does not diminish the respect I have for this teacher. However, I make this point to illustrate that we have choices and one of them is: “Do I want to help create whole musicians or students (or parents) who are determined to pass one exam per year?” I am not against exams per se but I am when it means that certain areas of music making are ignored because of lack of time.

We can be of whatever design we determine. I hope that Toasters will be in the majority.

## ART MUSIC

How do we know what to include in each lesson? What are the essential aspects of music making which need to be part of each student's development? I see the eight areas below as important elements:

### **Aural**

This is priority number one. Is the student hearing the symbols on the page? Many students wait until the note is sounded before they can hear it. Reading is more fluent and accurate when the mind can imagine the sound before it arrives. Any error can quickly be identified. How is our inner hearing best developed? By making sure that all the elements of the music are secure. Can the rhythm be drummed out on a table? Can the melody be sung, all intervals judged without the help of the piano and the light and shade of the voice express the phrasing? Can the chords also be pitched singing up and down them? Can the articulation be vocalised? These sorts of activities can take place from lesson one although I find it most useful with beginners to work the other way around for a while: Teach them a simple tune by rote so that the sound is experienced and then look at the layout on the page. Once the confidence is there, starting with short simple examples, work from symbol to sound.

Another important aspect of aural teaching is to make sure the students are hearing the sounds they are producing. Not hearing them is the core reason for unmusical playing. When first asked "what did you hear?" transfer students are often unable to answer. In fact they can even be a little indignant because they think they have done well just playing the right notes and rhythms. "And you expect me to be able to hear the sound as well?" Well, *yes*. As well as playing at the moment and preparing for what is ahead, one must judge what has passed: three activities, simultaneously. No wonder it takes time to master.

### **Repertoire**

Students are eager to expand their repertoire. Of course an occasional oddball revels in scales and technical work and readily bypasses the music. Sometimes I feel I am part of a small minority willing to stand by the quality of the keyboard works of the great masters. The renowned music educator, Kodály, believed only music of the highest artistic value should be used! An eighth-grade student joined my studio declaring: "I hate playing Bach – it's boring." I wondered what had put him off enjoying one of the best composers of all time. Eight months later the first movement of the Italian Concerto ended up his strongest and favourite work for his final-year school examination. It would have made me sad to have let this talented student enter adult life without an understanding of this great composer.

While I support the use of good-quality examples from pop, jazz and blues, I do not believe they alone should be used to the exclusion of the "serious" literature. It is the best-quality music that teaches us the most about music. We can negotiate pop styles if well trained in classical genres but it is rare to find the student who can work the other way around. In fact I have not come across one yet. There is plenty of good-quality music, so why not go for the best?

My piano pedagogy students ask how to determine whether music is good. Two features need to be present for it to rate as worthy of my attention. It must be interesting – rhythmically, melodically or harmonically and it must be able to stir my emotions.

## Technique

It is no good trying to learn wonderful repertoire without the means to play it. We have to build the student's facility and strength slowly, a training that is on a par with that of a first-rate athlete. The minute mile will just not appear overnight. I favour using scales and arpeggios and their variations as the foundation. This is occasionally supplemented with a special exercise from the Hanon, Brahms or Dohnányi exercises. Creating an exercise out of the music that is being studied is also part of my strategy. I wish I had had more guidance on the matter of technique during my student years. I would spend much time working at exercises to get my fingers to play faster and faster. However, time was lost. It would have been better using some of this time exploring new music and broadening my horizons. I was perhaps avoiding thinking and feeling. One can go quite catatonic while working through Hanon. At the same time this area cannot be sidestepped. I once heard an adult perform one of Brahms's Op.79 Rhapsodies in an eisteddfod and one measure seemed to meld with the next as the fingers ran completely out of control. It was hard to determine just what part of the piece was being played. If the basic tools are not there then all good intentions will not make the music work. (See also Developing Technique on page 40)

## Memory

Every aspect of music making involves memory. Without it, for instance, how can we maintain accidentals until the new measure? Motivic figures often return and to remember the fingering gives an instant advantage. How can we make a piece belong as a single design if we do not remember the way we expressed the first entrance of the main theme?

I had little experience with memorising pieces as a student. My sight-reading ability and the speed at which I could prepare a score were what got me through tertiary education. I remember performing Liszt's *Totentanz* with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra without music, mostly through muscle memory – a scary scenario. Fortunately all went well. I did not realise that memorisation was a skill that could be learnt thoroughly.

Memorisation is best taught from the beginning. It should not be left to the student so that those for whom memory work comes naturally succeed and the others feel like failures. I have not come across any natural memorisers who are really doing the job thoroughly. Most rely heavily on muscle memory and a lucky few have elements of photographic memory. At the end of a lesson I suggested to a new student: "If you feel like memorising your sonatina please do so." All I had time to say was look for the patterns and try to retain them. I then showed him a scale in the work and we worked out what key it was and what degree it started and ended on. The next week he came to the lesson with four pages of music flowing elegantly without the use of the score. I said, "I thought you told me that you have never memorised before except by playing a piece of music a zillion times." He said, "Yes, that is right but I have not been told to look for the patterns before."

Not everything has to be memorised but the process should be understood and part of the student's repertoire known this way. There is much to be discovered through knowing a great repertoire piece inside out. It is also good for the student to be able to play anywhere and any time without relying on the score. It boosts confidence, even if the student ends up using the score for performance. If the music is thoroughly known but the performer is more confident with the score present then one should go for whatever produces the best musical result. Of course, unfortunately, some competitions and exams require no use of the score. (See also The Lesson – Learning to Practise on page 27)

## Understanding

This is usually under the heading of general knowledge but I like the word “understanding” because it means having a complete picture. It includes any knowledge which helps the student interpret the music better. Here are a few examples:

- The life and times of the composer
- Corresponding art and literature movements
- All signs and terms on the page of music
- Analysis of harmony, tonal system, rhythmic design, etc.
- Other music composed contemporaneously

It is most useful if this information goes hand in hand with learning the music so it is best not studied just before an exam.

Resources include:

- Books
- Internet sites
- Videos
- CDs
- Concerts
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Exhibitions

One of the resources that my students enjoy is the British magazine *Pianist* (Studio Press, UK). It has articles on piano education, present and past great pianists, concert information, instrument care and purchase information, expert advice and answers to common questions by students, pages of good-quality music of all levels that can be used for sight reading, CD reviews and much more. Circulating these among my students is easy and they result in stimulating much interest.

There are many web sites involved with piano and piano music and many are specially designed for the child. Check out *Meet the Composer on Just for Kids* at [www.pianoeducation.org/pnokids.html](http://www.pianoeducation.org/pnokids.html)

In the corner of my studio is a handmade wooden music stand. From time to time I change the material on it. Here are some examples of the type of material I have displayed as a talking point with those who choose to look:

- A program of a recent concert
- Some Hungarian stamps that feature Kodály and Bartók
- Pictures of instruments
- Christmas cards from Paulo Fazioli (always interesting and beautiful)

We need to use every means possible to arouse our students' curiosity and develop their knowledge. Curiosity is one of the most useful characteristics for students to possess. It promotes musical growth. With a five-year-old I illustrated a diminuendo by imitating the call of a Balinese gecko. I had only just returned from holidaying on the island and had in the studio a metal gecko hidden under the piano. Great delight resulted when I sent the student down to find it. When teaching a song about a mossy log to a five-year-old, I was reminded of the need to check that all the words are clearly understood. He thought I was talking about a mosquito and had no idea what "mossy" meant.

### **Sight Reading**

This is one of the most useful skills for a musician. Besides its practical value, it enables music to flow from the fingers. Observing the level of skill in this area with keyboard majors on entrance to university, I am often shocked how far behind sight reading is in comparison to repertoire and technique. I believe that, with knowledge, discipline and focus, a musician can match technical ability with reading ability. Whatever recital piece is being worked on, students should be able to read through an unlimited number of similar scores in a satisfactory manner – evenly, accurately and expressively – albeit slower than the suggested tempo. This can happen only if sight reading is an integral part of lessons from the outset.

When I was asked to teach sight reading at university I thought it would be easy. However, being confident in a skill does not necessarily provide an understanding why others have such a hard time acquiring it. It took much reading, thinking and experimentation for me to see significant improvements in the students' efforts. An approach that worked well combined these three areas:

- Reading the Signs – the rapid recognition of the material in the score
- Keyboard Orientation – feeling free at the keyboard so that the eyes do not have to look down continually but can remain trained on the music
- Guided Reading – playing along with the student to help rhythm and expression

The manual I compiled, *Sight Reading Skills: A Guide for Sight Reading Piano Music Accurately and Expressively* (Revised Edition, New Arts Press, 2006), outlines how to develop these three areas. Dino P. Ascari in *The Art of Effective Teaching* (Authorhouse, 2003) has some detailed recommendations for note learning and the use of flash cards in the earliest stages.

### **Improvisation/Composition**

The ability to create music on the spot at the keyboard – something as simple as supplying an accompaniment for a folk tune to making up your own piece or cadenza – is an essential part of learning. There are two reasons. Firstly, it helps the student to understand the nature of sound so that the imagination can be extended. There are then many more possibilities from which to decide when planning how to play repertoire. Secondly, it releases a creative spark in the student and the final composition can be surprisingly wonderful.

Be specific with project suggestions. It can be helpful for the student to work within a boundary – for example a set number of measures, a rhythmic figure to work with, a key or a title. Make the project tie in with what is being studied in the main repertoire pieces to help reinforce learning.

Two adult students in the same week improvised and then wrote down their composition which was built on the harmonies of a Schubert waltz. The compositions (Figure 1 and 2) were quite different in character. A sense of wonder and excitement was expressed by both students on the completion of the project, along with an appreciation of how great the masters are.

**Reflective**  $\text{♩} = 60$

5 *più mosso*

10

14

Figure 1. Waltz based on Schubert harmonies

**Lento**

23

Figure 2. Waltz based on Schubert harmonies



## Chords/Harmony

Because of the nature of the instrument, understanding harmony is essential. In the first few lessons I teach a simple folk tune by rote with the left hand playing the bass and fifth note of the tonic chord. This material is extended each week with the tunes transposed into all keys and new chords gradually introduced. It is good to start a list of your favourite tunes and the chords required so that you have a sequential resource to draw upon. Here is a sample:

*Hot Cross Buns* – tonic chord

*Oranges and Lemons* – tonic chord and dominant

*Lavender's Blue* – tonic, subdominant and dominant

Chords in the left hand are taught by connecting the sound. We mostly play this way on the piano and when we do, the sound is far more satisfying. For instance, if the hand is moving from a tonic chord to the closest subdominant position, the lowest note of the tonic chord remains the same and the upper two notes move up one degree in the scale. The sound in this case is connected by keeping the middle finger down until the new notes are sounded. This is a fundamental technique of piano playing and one which gives the illusion of complete legato. How can you explain the subdominant chord to a beginner? Working in the key of C, any child can form the triads on each degree of the scale. When they reach chord IV, have them name the notes and then rearrange the notes so that the C is on the bottom of the chord. The full explanation and naming of inverted triads is not necessary until children are ready for it. Most students are really appreciative of just having an understanding of what it is they are playing.

Combined with some improvisation work, students could use different accompaniment figures for the tunes. Here are some suggestions:

- Walking bass
- Oom pah pah
- Broken chords
- Alberti bass

Sometimes only the accompaniment is played and the tune sung by the student.

All the cadences can be taught if the chords are transferred to the right hand and a single note added to the base and of course this must be done in all keys. After this I teach “telephone” numbers where the students play a series of chords (eg.1, 6, 4, 2, 5, 1), making sure that they keep the right hand moving to the closest position. If the bass moves stepwise, the top of the right-hand chord must move in contrary motion to the bass to avoid consecutive fifths and octaves.

A good book on figured bass written by Handel for one of his students, *Continuo Playing According To Handel* ( Clarendon, 1990), is the next step. This sets up the student for realising baroque chamber music, which also helps in the understanding of classical harmony.

For a full and comprehensive harmony reference for the teacher, see *Music in Theory and Practice* Vols. 1 and 2 and the two accompanying workbooks (McGraw Hill, 2003) by Bruce Benwood and Marilyn Saker.

In summing up the essentials for the lesson we have the mnemonic checklist:

**A**ural

**R**epertoire

**T**echnique

**M**emory

**U**nderstanding

**S**ight Reading

**I**mprovisation

**C**hords

I can hear your question – “How can this be done in one lesson?”

Let’s set up a hypothetical situation. Supposing you are introducing a new piece to a student and having just played it through so he can experience the sound and essence of it, you spend the next portion of the lesson examining the first two-measure phrase. These activities could be included:

- Tap the rhythm on the fallboard, right hand taking the treble line and left hand the bass simultaneously. (If this cannot be managed then one hand at a time.)
- Sight sing the melody – maybe at first sounding the notes involved.
- Mark the fingering where appropriate. The fastest way to do this is often not even sounding the notes but just feeling the distances between them and marking the fingering with a pencil in the other hand. This helps any fingering issues to be isolated and dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- Look up the definition of any Italian words within these measures unknown to the student and have him write the definition in his sight-reading diary page for new terms.
- Analyse the first two chords and sing them up and down.
- Improvise a melody as the student plays chords.
- Have the student sight read the right hand and then the left and then slowly together.
- Adjust the balance of the hands so that the texture works well.

With such activities, covering all areas of ART MUSIC would set the student up well to learn the remainder of the piece at home. All of the activities may add up to a few moments or a whole lesson. There are many factors involved and it is up to the teacher to determine how fast students can work, how long they can remain focused on one area, etc. I favour the type of teaching where everything comes from the music and the lesson is not compartmentalised too much. Many students may dislike aural work, sight reading and theory because the lessons have not been directly related to real music.

There will be lessons when it is appropriate to spend a long time on one facet. There is no prescriptive way of doing things because of the uniqueness of both the teacher and the students and their various strengths and weaknesses. What a good thing too. It would be boring if we all did it the same way.

Can you see the specialised nature of piano teaching and how the teacher's diagnosis happens on the run? I'm uncomfortable with the thought of music teaching being nothing more than a list of activities to be achieved in a lesson. At the same time we need guidelines to help ensure that all the essentials are being covered and that each student is making good progress. Experienced teachers are able to say that a student will have reached a certain stage by this time next year. However it is easy to get musical growth out of balance. It is a brave teacher who tackles ART MUSIC but the one who does can be assured of exciting and rewarding experiences.

Just a word of warning: It is tempting to avoid the weak areas and favour the strengths. Of course this is less work and stress but in the long run we won't achieve the best results. There are many books and courses to help us and it is worthwhile availing ourselves of them. This is important even for teachers who have been teaching for years as there is always something new to be learnt. Once I was sharing the details of one of my summer-time projects with a highly experienced piano teacher. I had watched ten long videos on piano technique because one of my pedagogy students had expressed interest in this particular piano method. I wanted to know more about it in order to give this student an informed opinion. The response from the teacher was, "Why is the student interested in this method? There is nothing new in piano playing for the last two hundred years." We miss out on much if we take this position. Whilst I chose not to follow the approach to pianism illustrated on the videos, I still learnt new ways of thinking about music.

I have been teaching for many decades but our teaching area is such a large and intriguing one that I know it is a lifelong journey. Moreover, it is this challenge to which I am attracted. We need never be bored and there is no limit to learning. Constantly we can check that every student is receiving a healthy musical diet and find new and better ways of providing it.

I hope this chapter has not been discouraging. The tertiary piano teacher probably has more support with the students receiving help from experts in aural, harmony, choral and history and, if you are lucky, sight reading. Teaching needs to be particularly thorough and well rounded from the first lessons through to these years.

Although I aim for what I have just outlined above, I know I often fall short of the mark for various reasons. It may be that I get too busy or distracted, or tiredness sets in or I feel the pressure of preparing a student for an imminent exam. If a survey of piano teachers asked "What is it that makes you the most motivated?", I am fairly confident most would say, "To see musical growth in my students." To enjoy results we have to be able to maintain the momentum for learning.

Here are a few suggestions that help me get closer to my goals:

- Keeping fit by exercising thoroughly on a regular basis. Teaching can be an exhausting business and to be fit is of great benefit. I used to think that running around after five children was enough to maintain good form. It was not until I started some serious exercising that I realised I had been kidding myself. Along with eating, drinking and sleeping well, exercise is essential if we are to give our all in the studio.
- Recording in a journal what puzzles me and also the delightful moments. This helps the mind to keep mulling over problems until a solution is found (see figure 4 page 21) and it is also a record of the successes and the funnier moments. It still makes me grin when I read such entries as when a 16-year-old student came to lesson and was playing Mozart dressed in *emo-punk* as she was attending a fancy dress party afterwards – an incongruous experience – and when a 17-year-old male student arrived at my studio door with a fake lip piercing just to see my reaction. Barely a day goes by without some special happening which is worth recording. Of course lack of time and energy does not make this type of activity possible on a daily basis. However, I am appreciative of these jottings as they jog my memory and provide information useful in all sorts of situations.
- Continuing to perform so that confidence is not lost. I often hear teachers say “I’m only a piano teacher.” The studio sets up an audience of at least one in an intimate environment. These situations can have a profound effect on students and their thoughts on music. All teachers are performers.

Dear Faith, thank you so  
 much for the beautiful music  
 you played for me I loved  
 it so much it is still in my  
 head and it is still playing.

Figure 3. A young pupil’s response to a Chopin waltz

- Meeting with other teachers in a relaxed atmosphere to talk over feelings and thoughts on our career. To hear that others are facing the same difficulties can be reassuring. We can learn much from one another.



Feb 2004

What do you do when a 5-year-old arrives for his first lesson on his mother's shoulder asleep?

What do you do when a transfer student of 8th grade standard hates Bach?

What do you do when a new student wants to learn 'Clair de Lune' but is not really ready for such a piece.

March 2004

14 yr. old - Use the Moment -  
 came into lesson from school and had something irritating his eye. After trying to swish it out with water the problem remained. We had no choice but to continue the lesson. He is a very busy boy and making another lesson time "very difficult". He wants to be a famous singer. I wish I had used this as an example of "mind over matter". In performance we rarely have ideal circumstances. Sometimes we are even battling pain. As professionals we need to surmount it, 10 minutes later the "thing in his eye" washed away naturally.

April 2004 A transcription for harp!

5 yr old learnt 'Hot Cross Buns' on the 3 black keys at his second lesson. While talking to his mother at the end of the lesson he walked across to the small harp and played 'Hot Cross Buns'. This told me a lot about his curiosity, memory and adaptability.

Figure 4. Journal Entries

## STUDENT MOTIVATION

When have you been the most motivated and why?

When have you been the least motivated and why?

The best type of motivation is intrinsic. Students are achieving because of the sheer enjoyment of discovering the worth of what they are doing. There are no external factors such as exams, rewards, parent/teacher response or ego enhancement needed to drive them along.

Intrinsic motivation is more valuable than the kind that depends on outside factors (extrinsic motivation). However it is more difficult to nurture. Students are often more interested in the goal and need to be taught that the journey is just as important.

Experts say that rewards build intrinsic motivation when they are unexpected and used subtly. Students should not have a feeling they are being bribed. For instance, a colourful sticker with a comment could be used as a special surprise so that there is some educational value in the praise. Next to a picture of a turtle could go a comment, “Slow and steady wins the race.” This could be in praise for the student preparing a segment meticulously and carefully and not succumbing to the desire to race ahead.

At an adult recital night in my studio I decided to do a fun thing for these students. At the end of the night I presented a certificate to each of them for one outstanding feature of their work. Here are some of the awards:

- Explorer – for delving into the back stacks of the Central Music Library each weekend searching for little-known piano gems.
- Meticulous Attention – for care taken in examining all detail in the score.
- Ensemble – for the independent preparation of piano duets.
- Memory – for preparing for the first time a piece by memory (this student being in her sixties).

They were a huge success as the participants were congratulated for their work. One cheeky student presented me with a certificate on my teaching merits at our next lesson. This I treasure – we all love rewards...

Perhaps the primary motivation for students is their sense of musical achievement. Most of us would acknowledge we feel the most motivated when we feel the most in control. To have control there must be choice so students should be encouraged to take part in the decision-making process. Lessons need to be about discovering together and not about one person telling the other. What type of teaching allows this type of atmosphere? This is teaching that uses intelligent questions, not the yes/no type but the ones which lead on to problem solving and creative thinking.

One way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing. Students need to understand the concept they are dealing with is highly relevant and can be applied to many other situations. For instance, if a student is learning to balance a chord so that the melodic note has the loudest dynamic level, followed by the base of the chord and then the fill-in notes, then the student also needs to understand that this is an important piano technique that once mastered can be used in varying ways in every piece of music. Knowledge that is not recognised as relevant is likely to be forgotten.

Teachers need to know their subject intimately in order to give material to students in terms that they understand. Trivial questions are pointless as are impossibly difficult ones. Through the use of curiosity, the teacher will lure the student ever onwards. Questions and individual programs must be developed for each student. Students can become heavily dependent on a teacher for guidance and approval but the healthiest learning situation is when students, faced with a problem, can figure out the solution by using what they already know.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What type of learning situations involving a teacher have I experienced lately?
- Was the appearance of the teacher important?
- What did I learn about eye contact, body language and speech patterns?
- What methods of delivery did I observe and which ones kept my attention the longest?

Most piano pedagogy students agree the most helpful and memorable learning sessions are those that involve them in discussion and questions and answers.

For further reading on motivation, see John Biggs's *The Process of Learning* (Prentice Hall, 1987)

## A GOOD QUESTION

A good question is generally:

- Not too long
- Not too complicated
- Not too simple (the discussion comes to an abrupt end after the information is supplied)
- Not too limiting (allows for different points of view)

Ask questions that stimulate students to attain higher levels of thinking. Questions are good if they help students apply knowledge, analyse, synthesise and evaluate. Allow time for students to respond. Probe and pursue ideas. How did a student arrive at his conclusion? Good openers may begin with:

- Where....?
- Why....?
- Which....?
- How.....?
- What if...?

In a group, ask the question first so the whole class can mentally prepare the answer (it is hoped) and *then* name the respondent. Try not to rely on the students who always provide a good answer or ignore the one who is inarticulate or unimaginative.

Prepare three questions on the following repertoire piece (Figure 5) that would provoke interest, require concentration or help the student to understand the important elements of the music.

## Song of the Reaper

Robert Schumann

Nicht sehr schnell

The musical score for "Song of the Reaper" is presented in seven systems. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The piece is in 6/8 time. The first system is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the tempo instruction "Nicht sehr schnell". The second system is also marked *p*. The third system is marked *f*. The fourth system is marked *p*. The fifth system is marked *p*. The sixth system is marked *p*. The seventh system is marked *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 5. Song of the Reaper from Schumann's Album for the Young, Op. 68

Possible questions:

- How do we know that the piece is in rondo form?
- What features in the music help create a picture of country life and bringing in the harvest?
- Why would a change of finger numbers on the repeated Cs at the end of measure one and beginning of measure two be needed?



## FORMS OF DELIVERY

### Appraisal

The student prepares an entire piece or section and after performing it you give detailed criticism. Beware of using vague comments such as “very nice” or “practise some more”. Use questions to help the student find solutions. Avoid breaking in with remarks too often unless the student’s performance is completely awry. In this case return to pre-emptive, careful, examining work with the student. For most of the time, however, a student is performing at his or her best for that stage of development. I honour this by listening quietly all the way through the prepared section and then comment.

### Demonstration

This sets up a model for the student to follow. I know that the odd teacher refuses to use this strategy for learning, saying it takes away personal creativity. Maybe in the rare case of dealing with a genius, I would agree. However, the average student wants to discover fine musicianship and the easiest way is to explore it together. When the teacher insists on a single interpretation, the situation becomes unhealthy. Once again questions can be useful. What did you hear? What other choices are there? Why did this work?

### Analysis

This helps the student to understand all aspects of the work – melody/accompaniment, rhythm, key, modulation, form, harmony, composer and style, fingering and other physical actions needed to produce the sound. It should be done with the least amount of talking and careful use of questions. The atmosphere can be exciting as you discover together the intricacies of the music. To clap the rhythm, to sing the melody, to mark the sections with a highlighter are just some ways of communicating the answers without words.

The manner of delivery needs to be wrapped with inspiration. Every means of variety and interest needs to be employed to help capture the student’s imagination and curiosity.



## THE WHOLE PERSON

One of my students made an exclamation of pleasure after I reached over and illustrated a sound on the keyboard. Her reaction told me that this had helped greatly whereas the verbal description I had previously given was harder to grasp. We all have differing strengths and weaknesses and need to be aware of those of our students. Thomas Armstrong's *In Their Own Way* (Penguin, 2000) is an in-depth look at this subject. Below is a list of the "intelligences" Armstrong has classified and music teaching techniques that could be used when students display strengths in these areas:

- Linguistic Smart    stories, dialogue, poetry, word descriptions, books, writing, speaking
- Number Smart     deductive logic, codify, use of patterns and categories
- Spatial Smart     mind maps, pictures/photos/videos, colours, metaphors
- Body Smart        dance/movement, conducting, acting
- People Smart     discussion/debates, social events
- Self Smart        diary/journal keeping, scrapbooks, self-paced software, independent projects
- Nature Smart     references to and observation of nature (I remember reading in a biography on Debussy that he felt listening to the wind in the trees taught him more about orchestration than studying treatises)

I do not believe that teachers should concentrate on one method of learning to the exclusion of others, but using strengths can sometimes greatly speed up the learning process and thus boost motivation and enthusiasm.

Sometimes students show signs of discomfort when I use a particular type of learning process. For instance I can think of three of my students who are very quiet and become a little uncomfortable when I try to engage them in a discussion or ask a question. In such cases I do not avoid these methods of working but I choose carefully. If confidence is lacking, it is wise to build it steadily so that all skills can be developed.

Often my adult students' occupations are reflected in their approach to music study; the maths teacher fascinated with Messiaen's rhythms and quick at sight reading rhythm; the literature teacher describing superbly the moods and atmosphere in music; the accountant detailing music mind maps; the librarian examining music fastidiously.

## THE LESSON – LEARNING TO PRACTISE

The lesson is the place where the student learns to practise. It is unfair to treat music a particular way in the lessons and then expect students to be able to work by themselves in another. Let's examine how to deal with technical work and repertoire in the lesson and how this sets the student up for practising during the week.

Practice needs to be done carefully and speed built up slowly. Movements need to be mastered slowly so that the muscles gain complete control and the ear can hear all the detail. Often this requires the hands to be played one at a time to analyse the sound and movement of either.

For instance the movements needed in the extract below. (Figure 6)

- With the first three notes the hand rolls to the right. At the intervals of the fourth down and the third up, roll to the left then the right and for the last descending five-note scale, roll to the left. Of course, the action is minuscule and hardly detected by the observer but if only finger movement is used then, fingers quickly become tired and the tone may be thin.
- The repeated chords are played with a circular, patting action for each chord, the arm drawing towards the body.
- The separated chords are played with a pushing action without upsetting the smooth upward legato needed for the melody.

Robert Schumann

Nicht schnell, hübsch vorzutragen

Figure 6. Album for the Young, Op. 68, No. 26

One of the most helpful methods that analyses gesture and music is Seymour Fink's *Mastering Piano Technique: A Guide for Students, Teachers and Performers* (Amadeus Press, 1992).

Separate practice does not apply only to right hand/left hand. It is sometimes necessary to separate rhythm from melody, melody from accompaniment, etc. The fastest way to absorb new work is to do short bursts on sections and not play the whole piece through over and over from beginning to end. Graham Fitch gave a memorable talk at the Western Australian Piano Pedagogy Convention in 2002, describing these three important essentials of practice—SLOW, SEPARATE, SECTION. He called his talk “THE THREE R’S OF PRACTISING” – many of us being brought up in a school education system where reading, writing and arithmetic dominated.

Initially most students do not understand the concept of “slow”. I often help by indicating the tempo I want a scale or piece to be played. Skills that have been mastered often go out the window when speed takes precedence. This means that the tempo is too fast for the mind to

absorb all that is going on. A tempo must be found so the student has complete control over the messages that the brain is sending out to the fingers. It is multi-tasking of the first order. If sounds cannot be properly heard and described by the student, I suggest a slower tempo using such tactics as taking out the pedal or listening to what is happening in one hand. By making elements simpler, students can start to take control. This method of working together and examining in great detail just one or two measures establishes in the student the valuable habit of taking small chunks and not pages at a time.

Maxim to help student understand “slow:” Think “slow” then halve the speed.

Another aspect of practice that students have great difficulty grasping is that the most balanced piano development will take place if there are continually different stages of preparation on the go. In preparing a repertoire piece, the following stages are possible:

### **Hearing**

The score must be heard and the question asked: “What is this music about?” This does not mean being able to describe a scene or picture – although that might help – but to understand the atmosphere, mood or character of the music. I have occasionally asked piano pedagogy students this question when they have performed a repertoire piece, and despite being able to play it in a polished manner they are often lost for words when asked about the meaning of the music.

Reading well-written articles and books on music will help. Alfred Brendel has a marvellous article on the characterisation of the Beethoven piano sonatas in *On Music* (A Capella, 2001). Within a few pages is a wealth of words describing the music: gracious, impetuous, solemn, humorous, masculine and so forth. The students need to be taught to look for details that can give clues as to the message or character of the music. For instance a development section which constantly repeats a motive moving sequentially upwards against a tremolando-style accompaniment could be described as insistent or uncompromising. Students are often so absorbed with playing the notes that the message of the notes becomes secondary.

I have experimented with my piano pedagogy student classes by introducing the use of art to help identify the character of the music. Whilst the music was performed I asked the students to do a quick drawing of whatever came to mind. I then asked the class to describe the picture by using one word each. They had no trouble finding words to describe one another’s drawings. We wrote a list on the board and then I played the piece again having told them the title of the work this time. Again and again the words described the music beautifully. When I had asked the class to do this before their artwork, they struggled to come up with even one word. This sort of inclusion of other artistic fields could be useful and lead to a deeper understanding of music. Teachers need to find creative and varied ways to help make a direct connection to life. Music is about some aspect of life and unless this is understood the message from the performer will be fuzzy.

An understanding of form (the structure of the work) is helpful at the early stage of learning new repertoire. To be able to break up the work into various components, the overview must be clear. Sometimes before the age of twelve, children have some difficulty in grasping form. They quickly get the idea if corresponding colours match sections within photocopied music – this way the score is not permanently marked.

## **Fingering**

Consistency of fingering is a most important element. If students constantly change the fingering, they are in effect practising the work in many different ways. This is the long way to achieve results. I have already spoken about isolating fingering as an element by feeling the positions and stretches with one hand while the other writes the numbers. The student may choose to do this for the whole piece or when working on a unit. I prefer the second way when practising but the first way when working with students, as a whole lesson could be taken up with just fingering and it is difficult for younger students to focus on one thing for such a long time. Good fingering facilitates good piano playing. It is an integral part of understanding the nature of the instrument and hands-on keyboard should not be taking place until a workable fingering is found. A few times played through inaccurately could establish a bad habit and take a long time to unlearn.

Fingerings are best marked neatly and as close to the note head or the end of the stem on the outside of the treble and bass staves. Only the essential fingers need be marked. If the fingering is obvious no number is required. Students need to have a good-quality pencil and rubber permanently at the keyboard. With beginner pieces especially, it is helpful to have editions with the fingering already in the music although there must come a time when the student needs to understand the principles of fingering and learn to work them out. This is essential if the student is to develop independence.

## **Working units**

Divide the piece into working units. In the beginning keep them as short as possible, marking them with a sign at the end of each section. Try not to break up phrases. Work on one unit achieving the goal before moving on to the next.

## **Rhythm**

If the rhythm cannot be accurately played, it is essential to do separate work until it is internalised and fully understood. The most helpful way is to drum the rhythm out on the fallboard, counting aloud the main beats and, if the music is really complex, the subdivisions as well. Sometimes the hands need to work separately at first. Most of my young students enjoy this part of preparation, especially when they play on my Cook Island split drum. Hands-on the keyboard should not happen until the rhythm is secure. Playing it incorrectly once or twice makes for a bad habit. Sometimes the rhythm still cannot be negotiated when the music is played on the keyboard and it is important to have the student work slowly and count aloud while playing, counting as many subdivisions of the beat as necessary and slowly building to the main beats until the rhythm is secure. I find the best way to vocalise the beats/subdivisions is to sing the music while counting. In this way the shape of the phrases is also felt. If the student accents the beats strongly when reciting the counts while playing, the music easily becomes broken up and the overall sound is unmusical and boring.

## **Analysis**

Here are questions to ask:

- What is the key?
- What are the chords?
- Are there any patterns in the music?
- How can I describe the design of the music in simple language?

Understanding how the music is constructed helps the student commit it to memory. Memorisation needs to begin as early as possible so that the student does not rely upon muscle memory alone. An interesting book by Rebecca Shockley, *Mapping Music: for Faster Learning and Secure Memory* (A-R Editions, 2001), details how to draw in shorthand the structure of the music so that the memory is aided by signposts. There is no right and wrong in the symbols used as long as they prompt the student (see example on pages 32-33). Since using this method – students recording some of the intricacies of construction – I have noticed their excitement towards musical design grow.

### **Hands-on keyboard**

It is now time to do some playing. All the details need to be assimilated from the start because if accents, for instance, are ignored, the piece has to be relearnt when you decide to put them in. Learning everything correctly from the onset may be slow to begin with but in the long run is the fastest and most thorough method. Bad habits can take a long time to eliminate and may reappear in the heat of performance.

### **Building blocks**

Once the initial unit is secure, it is time to move on to the next. When the piece has been developed through in this manner, work through the piece again, this time joining unit one with unit two, unit three with unit four and so on. The next time the working unit will be one to four. As the units become longer so the tempo will need to be closer to the intended speed.

### **Memorisation**

“As you go” should be the message – at various stages not only when the whole piece can be performed. Memorisation can be tested in any of the following ways:

- Play separate hands
- Play any tempo
- Start at the beginning of any unit
- Record the playing
- Play the work in the dark or with eyes shut
- Write out any tricky passage
- Play the piece in one’s head away from the piano
- Play the piece in front of someone one feels comfortable with.

There are many approaches to memorisation due to each person's strengths and weaknesses. With the teacher's help, students should work out their own approach. However make sure the four types of memory are being used:

- Aural  
Can the student sing the melody without music?
- Visual  
Have one main score to work from. Though few have photographic memory, most of us do retain some of the page.
- Analysis  
Can the student describe the structure of the music?
- Muscular  
Muscle memory is the type most students rely heavily upon. It could be strengthened by making sure all gestures are economically employed and the music played slowly as well as up to and slightly above speed.

### **Rest**

Amazing improvements can occur with the internalisation of the music when we give it time; putting the music aside for a short while. In published interviews with the great pianists, over and over they state that to prepare a program, they need to start working on the music at least a year ahead. Yes, an occasional genius can read a score and then perform. However, for most, coming to terms with great music needs time and a deep understanding to be able to communicate successfully to others. It is not practical or wise to expect students to master great music in only a few months. I see this type of planning in the university scene often and it is distressing when students are expected to work in a way that even most professionals do not.

### **Restart**

The process will be much quicker the second time round and after another rest and work through, may even feel like an old friend.

### **Tryout**

Play the work in front of a small group of friends or family. Later try in front of a slightly larger group. This sort of preparation is needed to get used to playing on different pianos in different places. Acoustics can vary enormously as can lighting, piano touch and tone and it is these factors that can be off-putting when performing. I remember accompanying a harmonica player in the concert hall in an arrangement of Debussy's *Clair de Lune*. The lighting technician, trying to set up the appropriate atmosphere, cast the harmonica player in a misty spotlight that left the accompanist to deal with what light was left over. The spotlight created complete blackness in the middle of the keyboard and brilliant whiteness at the ends because of the shadow cast by my body. I got through by rocking wildly from side to side, allowing me to see the score.

If page turners are needed, it is best to have rehearsals with them. Catastrophes can happen. I have ended up with pages in my lap and having to keep playing as the turner sorted out where he was up to. The greater the number of preliminary performances, the more helpful it will be for the final recital or exam.

## Ernteliedchen - Harvest Song

Robert Schumann

Mit fröhlichem Ausdruck

5

9

13

17

22

*p*

*fp*

Lansamer  $\text{♩}$  Im Tempo



**Joyfully**

arpeggio

L.H. W

A Major: R.H. V<sup>7</sup>

5 / bars 1-4 with minor changes

I V/V V<sup>7</sup> I

9

13 / bars 9-12 with minor changes

D<sub>C</sub>

17 E pedal / 1-8 with minor changes

E pedal

6th arpeggio

22 6th 5th

I V<sub>3</sub><sup>4</sup> I

Figure 7. Mind map of Schumann's Harvest Song from Op. 68

Remember to teach the student that the “final” moment is not really the final moment. It is just a step in the journey. One feature of great music is that it can be revisited many times throughout life, each time with a new light cast on the work because of the changes within the performer. Learning and enjoying the journey is just as important as the destination. Repertoire should be at various stages of development. This continual momentum is more encouraging and helps the student to maintain interest. When working twelve months or more on the same pieces, the student can even forget the early stages of practice process.

## **PUBLIC PERFORMANCE**

Is it necessary for students to play their work in a recital, eisteddfod, festival or an exam to make the lessons worthwhile? Most students are pleased to play for such events but there are always a few who feel extremely uncomfortable performing in front of others and I do not believe they should be made to do so. To be able to play the piano can provide enormous pleasure for oneself. If this helps the pupil to move through life with better survival skills then piano lessons are still worthwhile. There is a colourful chapter in *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank* (Vintage, 2000) where Thomas Carhart describes his forced participation in Miss Pemberton’s recital nights. It is worth reading.

I attended a cocktail party where two of my adult students performed piano duets as part of the night’s entertainment. They were extremely nervous and said that they would not perform in public again. What to the audience was a lovely, relaxing and refreshing Sunday evening was a huge challenge for them. However once they had recovered from the adrenalin rush, the excitement of music took over and they wanted to play for others again.

I had a phone call from a mature-aged student who was about to sit her Australian Music Examination Board 7<sup>th</sup> grade piano exam. She wished to withdraw because pre-exam nerves were making her feel sick. This outcry was from a woman who had played her programme successfully in front of peers in my studio, who plays at school and in church weekly and who has her own private studio, often playing for her students. The human mind and the emotions are complex and even though she was successful as a performer, this student was extremely fearful of examinations. How would you have responded to that phone call? I told her the journey of discovery for me was just as, or if not more, important than an exam certificate. To have forced the issue would only have made her feel guilty, adding to the already difficult situation. This student knew she had mastered her pieces. I knew it and her peers knew it. The expertise she had gained would be passed on in her own teaching. Teachers need to be careful and respectful when dealing with students’ wishes not to play. The loss of music in a person’s life is a far more devastating blow than a missed exam.

I sometimes organise music evenings for students of similar ages and stages to play for one another. Occasionally, students may say they do not feel up to playing and I never insist. They still come and enjoy the music. So far all of these students have been willing to play at the next music night. Occasionally because of nerves, students do not do as well as I know they can. At other times I am astounded by some brilliant playing. In any event it is an encouraging activity and the night always ends in animated discussion with students forming contacts that lead to swapping musical stories, books, sheet music and so on.

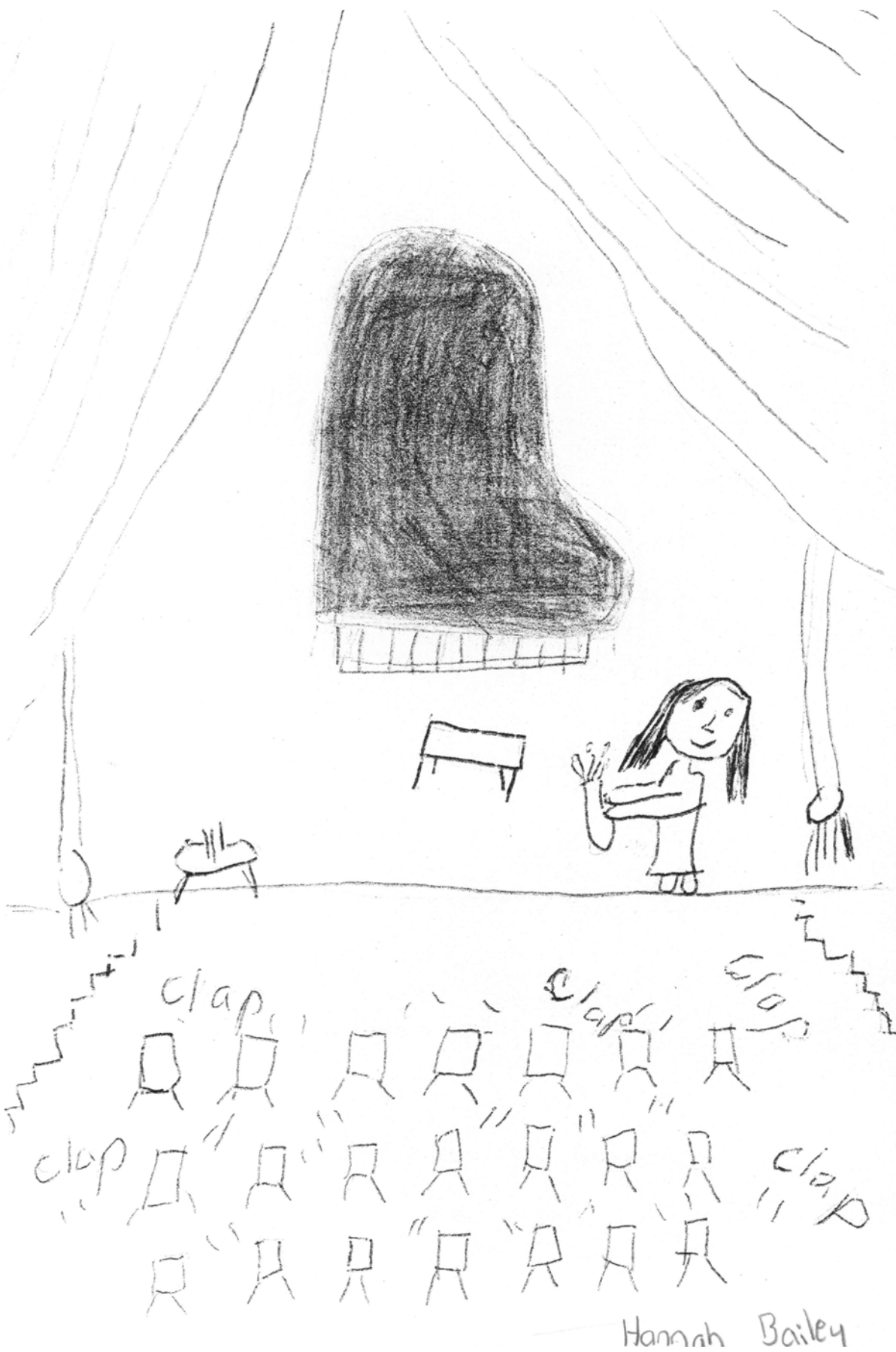


Figure 8. Cover of nine-year-old pupil's music book

## PRACTICE JOURNAL

It may be useful to have students maintain a practice journal for a short time in order to learn how to set short-term goals and assess results. This helps them to organise their practice, check that they have pieces at different stages and become aware of their own work habits. This last point may sound a little surprising but I have observed many students practise without questioning what they are really trying to achieve. Here is a sample of what could be addressed:

- What proportion of the practice kept concentration levels high?
- What scales and arpeggios were not at an acceptable standard and why?
- Were all areas of ART MUSIC covered?
- What were your feelings before, during and after the practice?
- Were there any negative feelings? If so what were the causes?
- What were the goals for the day and were they achieved?

Some students find that recording their work habits in fairly precise detail is tremendously revealing, while a small proportion find it confining. Either way, it is a useful project as much can be discovered if the work is considered carefully. The journal could be discontinued when the lessons have been learnt.

Practice is not about an amount of time sitting at the keyboard. It is about how the time is used. Much practice can be done away from the keyboard.

Here are some examples:

- Feeling a tempo consistently throughout a movement by hearing the music internally.
- Checking memorisation in the same manner.
- Rhythm work at a table or drum.
- Singing the melody, harmony (up and down the chords) or bass line.
- Calling out fingerings or notes of scales and arpeggios.
- Identifying keys and chords.
- Writing a mind map of the music to aid memory.
- Vocalising the articulation.

Many famous pianists suggest that probably more than fifty percent of practice can be done away from the instrument. This may come as a surprise to parents and students but demonstrations clearly show how effective this approach can be. The music is studied from every angle so that it is known securely.

## PRE-EMPTYING

Four stages are important in the learning process. Let's assume that a perfect cadence is to be taught. (It's best if the new concept is part of the student's repertoire.)

Firstly, students need to have some experience of the new concept. A hands-on approach will allow them to make a direct connection and immediately arouse their curiosity (for instance, in hearing the sound or singing the base line). Secondly, a clear definition needs to be found so that the students can recreate a perfect cadence without the aid of the teacher. It is not always necessary to use complicated musical terms if a student is not ready for them. It is more important that students understand and can explain the concept in their own words. Thirdly, the student demonstrates the concept (create a perfect cadence at the keyboard). The final stage is to set projects that reinforce the idea so that the concept is internalised.

Problems arise when it is assumed students can perform all these tasks without guidance. Fixing errors is time consuming and demoralising for both teacher and student. Perhaps some teachers have not thought of working any other way. Students in these cases are often heavily dependent on the teacher for providing the answers. It is better to help the student understand the new concept comprehensively.

The process of experiencing, defining, internalising and reinforcing material is needed before the student has a chance to reinforce bad habits through a week's practice. If care is taken by the teacher and student to play accurately from the beginning, more time can be spent on the "bigger" musical issues such as structure, mood, atmosphere, shape and continuity. When students see how exciting it is to work this way, they will want to take responsibility and care for the reward of exploring more music.

This method requires the teacher and student to look at a piece of music and be able to pre-empt the problems. Remembering what material the student has covered is also imperative so that only the relevant areas are dealt with in the lesson. As an example take a look at *Little Piece* from *Album for the Young*, Op 68, Robert Schumann (Figure 9). List all the musical issues that need to be addressed in playing this piece well, discussing and working on any that are unfamiliar before the student leaves the studio. Of course concepts often need to be addressed more than once and sometimes even many times. However, if an idea is learnt thoroughly in the first place, then there will be less chance of needing to revisit it.

There need to be times when students are given the opportunity to discover answers by themselves, but even here the stage needs to be set carefully so that the task can be achieved (for example building a scale on a new key, a possibility for the student because the relationship between each note is understood and because of previous scales learnt). In setting challenges it is important for the teacher not to place guilt on the student if the project cannot be achieved. It is a case of going back over old material, maybe in a different way, until the old concepts are more solid and the student can confidently deduce the next step. When students achieve new steps by themselves, overall confidence and motivation improves. This in turn helps them to tackle the next project.

**Little Piece** Robert Schumann

**Nicht schnell**

**Figure 9. Robert Schumann, Album for the Young, Op.68**

How many of these points did you list?

- Definition of “Nicht schnell”
- Use of two treble clefs
- Use of F sharp in measures 3 and 13 – secondary dominant?
- Use of perfect cadence and suspension at the end of each half
- Definition of C time signature
- Understanding binary form
- Understanding the three dynamic markings
- Anacrusis of half a measure
- Shaping of each phrase
- Changed fingering on repeated notes in right hand of measures 3, 7 and 15 to aid a legato touch
- Balance of texture so that right-hand melody sings out and the repeated left-hand note does not
- Fingering throughout to produce legato
- Minim in measure 8 and measure 16 to be given its full value

Set up a checklist for the student to use during the week to ensure that all details are observed. Once an area is correct, allow students to tick off that point. This helps promote a sense of achievement. Whilst I do not promote a manner of teaching that adds the dynamics three weeks down the track and then the articulation the next week, the various elements that make up the music need to be recognised. Even when we are trying to observe all the detail from the beginning, a list is helpful to ensure accuracy. The list could include:

### Signs and Terms

Rhythms

Note Names

Fingering

Articulation

Phrasing

Dynamics

Teacher and pupil need to put music under the microscope. The sooner students can do this for themselves and come up with the answers to interpretation, the sooner they become independent.

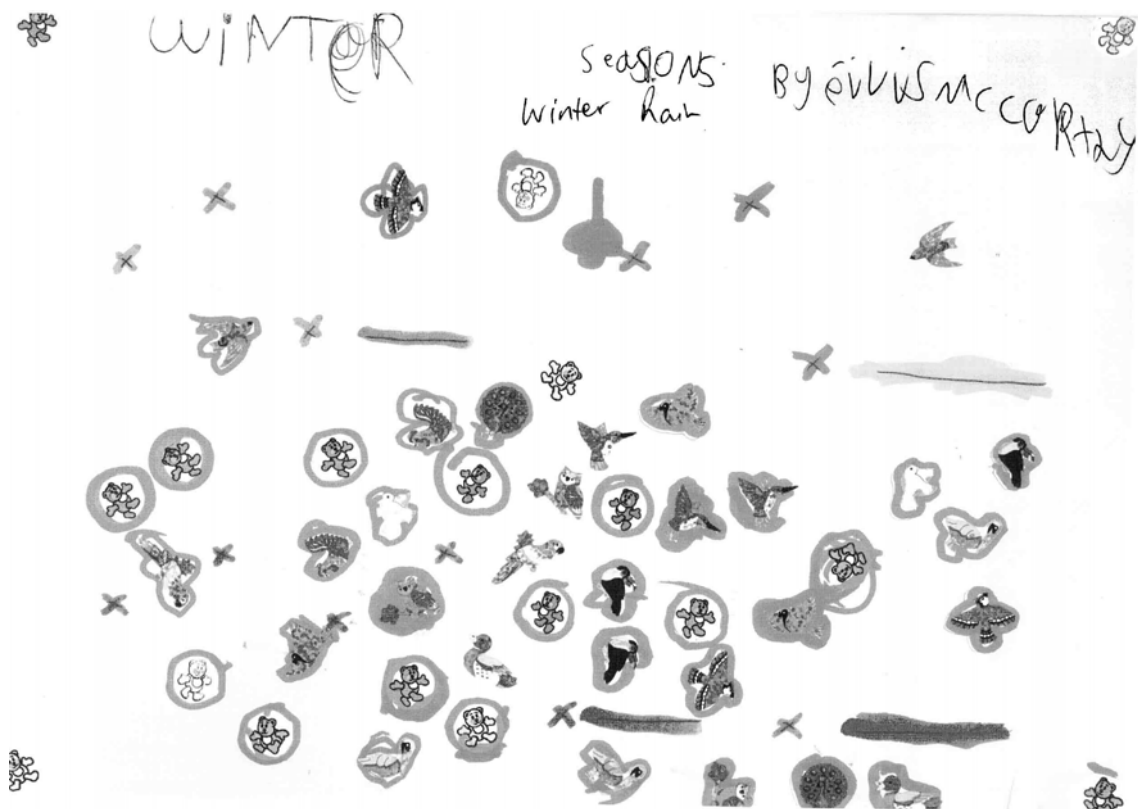


Figure 10. *Details of a different kind: Six-year-old's composition after a few lessons*

## DEVELOPING TECHNIQUE

As a technical problem arises in the repertoire, create a memorable exercise to deal with it. Eventually students will be able to create their own exercises on the spot.

Good scale and arpeggio playing goes a long way in establishing a firm foundation for technique. I am often amazed at how new students play scales fast, out of control and without any sense of musicality. Technical work must produce musical sounds or else there is little point in doing it.

### *Checklist for Scales and Arpeggios*

- Is the sound even?
- Is the sound muddy because fingers are not releasing notes cleanly?
- Is the sound well balanced? The right hand slightly firmer than the left will give a clearer texture in unison octave playing (also with thirds, sixths and octaves within pieces).
- Are the first and the top note accented? Why students choose to do this I do not understand. Generally, we don't play phrases this way – or maybe *they* do!
- Is the arpeggio felt in fours rather than threes? This produces greater evenness and also helps to prevent accenting by the thumbs.
- Are the hands synchronised?
- Is the tone cantabile?
- Are there any fingers collapsing at the first joint?
- Is the hand/arm moving in and out of the black notes area with the minimum amount of movement?
- Is the hand over the keyboard or is it sloped up from the front of the keyboard at an angle, thus producing unnecessary tension?

When students master scales and arpeggios they are well on the way to a solid technique. With older students I write a comment against each scale so they have a list to read through during the week and a reminder of what to work on. They love to get a list with ticks and no comments but this can take some time to achieve. I suggest practising one key centre per week and working through every key so that all receive attention. To know and concentrate on only what is required for an examination is limiting. Repertoire pieces often need other hand positions and keys. Students can learn any scale by knowing how it is constructed, e.g. major scale (tone, tone, semi-tone, tone, tone, tone and semi-tone). Subsequently, I get them to name the notes, an easy process once they realise that after A there must be a B something and then a C something, etc. Being able to call out the notes of the scale is helpful as is calling out the fingering. Finally, I have students learn the key signature connected to each. These steps of learning may take a number of times cycling through the keys, beginning with hands separate and building to two hands together for one octave, then two and then four.



Piano pedagogy students often ask when it is best to introduce scale and arpeggio playing. There are several benefits for beginners if carefully selected folk tunes and nursery rhymes that mostly use the five-finger hand position are taught by rote. Students are dealing with technical issues such as legato scale playing without needing the hand to turn over or the thumb under or to be reading music at the same time. Improvisation, harmony and memory work is also covered. With the eyes not fixed on the music, students are freer to deal with the use of the fingers, hands and arms. As soon as there is a sense of control I am happy to introduce scales and a little later, arpeggios. Below is a chart that enables a quick check for all major and harmonic minor scales and major and minor arpeggios in root position.

Scales																			
White Keys	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">RH</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">123 12345</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Except: FM &amp; m</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">1234 1234</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">BM &amp; m</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">LH</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">54321 321</td> <td colspan="2"></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">4321 4321</td> </tr> </table>	RH	123 12345	Except: FM & m	1234 1234	BM & m	LH	54321 321			4321 4321								
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RH	2124	Except: F <sup>#</sup> M	1235	E <sup>b</sup> m	1235	B <sup>b</sup> M	B <sup>b</sup> m	2312											
LH	2142			5321	5421	3213													

**Figure 11: Scale and arpeggio fingering chart**

For advanced students with particular technical problems I carefully choose examples to supplement their practice from Johannes Brahms' *Fifty-One Exercises*, Ernő Dohnányi's *Essential Finger Exercises* and Charles-Louis Hanon's *The Virtuoso Pianist*.

## STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

How we approach the lesson material depends on many factors. One of the most important is the age of the student. Teaching a five-year-old is quite different from teaching a ten-year-old or a 15-year-old. The same matters need to be dealt with but on different levels. Dissecting and knowing the music is essential whether it is an easy work or concert repertoire. What is this piece about, what keys are used, how is the main theme constructed, etc.?

Definitions or explanations for some concepts should wait until a certain stage of development has been reached. A student's rate of development can differ markedly from others. Snowman and Beihler's *Psychology Applied to Teaching* (Houghton/Mifflin, 2006) explains this well. Creating a table in point form detailing the social, physical, cognitive, emotional and musical development of each year group would help. Leave room to add information as it comes to hand. It is easy to forget the stages of growth with children if you are not working with them constantly and it is rare that we have students of all ages at one time. A few of the most important characteristics are:

- Pre-schoolers are better at using their large muscle groups rather than the ones used for subtle and fine movements. Their eyes have trouble focusing on small print. Emotions are expressed freely and openly.
- Six-year-olds are high-energy people who focus well in short bursts interspersed with rest or a change of pace.
- Seven-year-olds are easily embarrassed and seek positive reinforcement.
- Eight-year-olds want to participate in adult decisions and values. Criticism and judgement can have a profound effect.
- Nine and ten year-olds are interested in the world and classifying things. Signs of self-esteem problems can emerge. Abstract concepts such as form can be grasped.
- Eleven-year-olds are very interested in the "how" and "why" and are eager to learn. They appreciate the warmth and humour of adults.

## THE VERY YOUNG STUDENT

I continue to include young children in my teaching program because I believe if I keep my hand in working at this level I can be of more help when teaching piano pedagogy students. Teaching the young forces you to preach what you practise. It is really exciting working with children as most are like little sponges and have a tremendous desire to please and to learn. They can produce great results in a short time.

What is the right age to commence piano lessons? I have changed my view on this considerably since beginning to teach thirty years ago. Once I would have said around the age of six or seven but now I say "as early as possible". The youngest I have worked with are four-year-olds and I have taught many five-year-olds. If the parents are willing for the child to have lessons and the child can focus for a short amount of time, then the earlier the better. Many studies and methods dealing with music education and the young child have been presented. Reading of the Kodály concept, Dalcroze, Orff, Suzuki and Yamaha systems will

reveal helpful information. All of these methods/approaches stress that for music education to be most effective, it must begin with the very young child.

Kodály developed a system based on singing and the use of folk songs from the child's own linguistic heritage to be taught from pre-school stages. He believed singing was the best foundation of musicianship and natural for the young child. Singing can tie in beautifully with learning the piano. One without the other could have a negative effect. It is through singing that we naturally feel the shape of the music and it teaches us about the light and shade of the phrase. Many students have arrived at my studio and when asked to sing phrases have declared, "Oh, I don't sing!" However, singing should be an integral part of the piano lesson from the beginning. Partnered with another essential of the Kodály approach is rhythm, making use of movements such as walking, swaying, skipping and bouncing balls to establish a firm musical foundation.

The Dalcroze method develops the ear through carefully structured games to awaken creativity through improvisation. This helps to develop concentration, memory, coordination and body awareness.

Orff Schulwerk prepares pre-schoolers for instrumental study through clapping and stamping rhythms, dancing, reciting rhymes and canons, singing melodies and some improvisation on Orff instruments such as keyboard percussion, percussion and recorders. Exploration, imitation and improvisation are important.

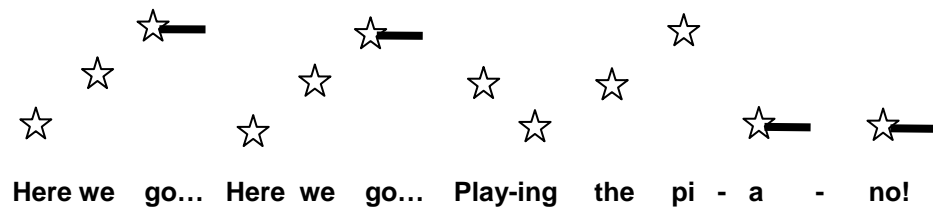
The Suzuki method is based on early exposure to music for children, imitation, rote learning, repetition and a strong emphasis on parental involvement. Shinichi Suzuki's *Nurtured by Love* (Centre, 1978) is a good starting point for reading on this subject.

Other books on the teaching of young children include Doreen Bridge's *Music, Young Children and You* (Hale & Iremonger, 1994) and Rhoda Rabin's *At the Beginning – Teaching Piano to the Young Beginner* (Schirmer, 1996). Why wait years when their aural and technical skills could be forging ahead? So long as the teaching approach is appropriate, young children can achieve remarkable results.

Qualities of music making that young children can understand include:

- High/Low
- Soft/Loud
- Short/Long
- Fast /Slow
- Playing a melody when the notes are divided between the thumbs or one finger of both hands, requiring a degree of musical coordination.
- Maintaining a steady beat.
- Musical direction – up, down, same, skip.

You cannot expect a child of four or five to learn in much the same manner as a six or seven year-old. Reading music is the main difficulty because young children find it hard to concentrate on and identify small symbols. Music reading can still take place but progress appears to be more successful when simplified graph notation is used first, e.g. a symbol to indicate high and low pitch using a group of three black keys.



My choice is to begin with rote learning combined with lots of singing and rhythm work. The naming of notes is not even necessary to begin with as the group of two and three black notes on the keyboard can be used for orientation. Children love nursery rhymes, folk tunes and snappy little tunes with easy-to-remember words. On the following page are the songs I use to teach young ones by rote all the letters of the keyboard. Make up your own list remembering to add only one new note for each step. (Rote learning needs to be followed up quickly with the early stages of music reading.)

Remember when working with young ones that they need praise and activities need to be in short bursts because their concentration span is usually not long. Most learning needs to be done through imitation, much repetition and little explanation. So long as there is plenty of variety, with moments of concentration and moments of relaxation, then even the young child can build up concentration and focus. It is best to put highly concentrated material at the beginning of the lesson when the student is freshest.

Many children love to play duets with the teacher. Collect a series of pieces where the student can play a simple ostinato pattern against a more interesting part played by the teacher. Participation in this sort of music making develops ensemble (listening) skills and the student is also experiencing more challenging music first hand.

Children also love to compose music and verse. Give some guidelines such as:

- A short rhyme
- A repetitive rhythm
- A set of notes
- A title or a mood

Most students can compose music on the spot that would put many an adult to shame. The beginner books in Pauline Hall's Oxford University Press series have some wonderful suggestions in this area.

Dog - gy D is next to C D C D.

Mis - ter C goes up to D. Dog - gy D goes up to E. E D C.

Bum - ble B and Mis - ter C, vi - sit Dog - gy D.

Mis - ter C and Bum - ble B then go home for tea.

Up the steps. C D E. Down a - gain. E D C.

F's a fat and fun - ny fel - low Two are sit - ting on a 'cel - lo.

Ge - cko, ge - cko run - ning down the wall. Ge - cko, ge - cko can - not fall.

Gent - ly rock - ing, tick - ing tock - ing A C E.

Figure 12. Songs for beginners

## METHOD BOOKS FOR BEGINNERS

While I do sometimes use beginner method books I prefer to create for each student a book which addresses individual needs. One method cannot do this. Also with the emphasis on ART MUSIC (see page 12), few methods will deal with all areas adequately.

It does not take long to jot down a new tune or better still to teach students to do it, possibly using their own notation. With a big scrapbook, lots of interesting projects can be tackled. The choice is vast. It is easy to supplement repertoire pieces with the corresponding technical exercises and scales, transposition, improvisation/composing, harmony, background knowledge, sight reading and memory work. Some students may struggle with a particular area. More examples can be given until mastery is achieved. Other students may pass over particular areas because they are already fully understood. Creating an individual course, the teacher is free to match the material to the student. Many teachers may not be interested in working this way saying it takes too much time. However, the preparation and the results of doing so are worth the extra effort. Students see much more clearly how different elements relate, thus generating enthusiasm. Time is not wasted ploughing through boring second-rate music. The rate of progress is really exciting as students learn to give 100 percent to the musical essentials. Both teacher and student know that the material is being covered thoroughly and this gives a feeling of security to the student and satisfaction to the teacher.

Here are factors to consider when examining a beginner method:

- Age suitability
- Approach to reading
- Clarity and depth of explanations
- Rate of progress
- Extra material – how many extra books would be needed?
- Quality and range of music
- The cost
- Philosophical approach
- Establishment of the five-finger pattern
- Length of book
- Availability
- Use of humour
- Presence of aural, improvisation, composition, harmony, memory, sight reading, transposition and technical work, etc.
- Format
- Use of colour (appealing to children)
- Duets to play with teacher or others

Collating information when studying half a dozen beginner methods is easiest done in table form. Leave room to add details of other methods that you may come across. It is helpful to create a star rating system so it will be clear which method seems the most favourable for your use.

Using a method book allows continuity in the approach and generally sequential learning. Students can receive a sense of achievement working through a book and certainly when they arrive at the end. Some methods also have teachers' manuals.

The disadvantage of using only one method, however, is that teachers can easily slip into a manner of teaching that requires little thinking. Accepting what is on the next page as the next necessary step is just nonsense. The student may have prepared the previous page brilliantly and does not need to do a similar piece yet again. Working on the same pieces with each student may inhibit creativity and it is difficult when the teacher disagrees with the method on editorial policies, e.g., fingering or phrasing. It is harder to individualise the curriculum to meet the special needs of a student. Many methods use banal pieces and delay the introduction of standard repertoire by great keyboard composers. Some methods present negative social images with racist and sexist titles or titles which could preclude one gender, e.g. *The Boys' Merry-go-round*.

Methods that require the student to use the entire keyboard from the earliest stages are the best, e.g., high and low, white and black notes. It is limiting to have the student work only around middle C for the first year of their pianistic life. It is much more educationally significant and fun to learn to use the whole keyboard. Methods which use graphic notation are a gentle and appropriate approach for children under the age of ten. When staff notation is introduced the staff should be larger and therefore clearer than conventionally sized music for younger children.

The stage between beginner methods and preliminary material is the trickiest. It is worth creating a file of suitable repertoire by great composers to fall back on. At this level students can quickly become discouraged if they do not feel a sense of achievement.

## **ADULT TUITION**

I have always had a big percentage of adult students. They are often music lovers who have had negative childhood piano lesson experiences but their love for music has won through. The longest time between adolescent lessons and resuming lessons for one of my students was fifty-six years. I always say it is never too late to rediscover this life-enhancing hobby.

The hardest thing about teaching adults who have learnt before is dealing with bad habits. With patience, techniques can be rebuilt and it is wonderful to witness such students tackle great repertoire and improve when they have the proper resources. The changes can be remarkable and this can sometimes give me more of a thrill than putting a student through the next exam.

There must be a degree of flexibility with lesson times and availability. Adults have many demands on their time and the last thing they need is to feel guilty about something that should be a joy in their life. So long as students give reasonable notice, I am happy to accommodate changes to lessons.

Often I have heard from teachers that taking on adults is too frustrating and achieving good results is rare. However, great results can be achieved with careful tackling of problems and perseverance.

Lessons with adults can be tremendously stimulating as they share with you various life experiences. I remember three students telling me about the week's events – one participating in a Japanese tea ceremony, one teaching maths in the middle of China, one taking German language classes.

as natural as breathing

sturdy like a good little welsh pony of moderate nature



my God, the piano is on fire

ice droplets from a silver birch

luscious sounds

sardonic humour

swirling, whizzing

they tend to choose the same sort of repertoire

squeezed sounds

where is Iberia?

tears!

she fails to ignite

a bit academic in her approach

marching soldiers, trooping the colour?

plays as though the piano is an extension of the body

I want some fresh air. Burn out.

she woos the piano

serene, calm, measured playing

delicate, lacy playing

enough to give you wind

a magical moment

coaxes his finger over the key.

niggling, dizzying, explosive

crying, lyrical line

cold, bleak sounds

shakes head and neck at the end of each piece.

leaping and running

all things young and boisterous

feverish, manic

sometimes spiky, sometimes scintillating, sometimes drifting

mobile phone in the dying moments. Exterminate the beasts

the style elegant, restrained never histrionic or indulgent sometimes drifting

**Figure 13: Extracts from an adult student's reflections on the 2004 Sydney Piano Competition**



## GROUP LESSONS

While I am yet to be convinced that it is the way to teach piano for most of time, group piano teaching, with careful use, can be of great benefit. I have taught piano to groups of an average of eight in a specialist music school and ten at university. Both groups were mostly beginners. I could have had the use of an electronic keyboard laboratory, but I chose to teach using a “real” piano because it was easier to deal with such matters as tone, touch and pedal. It meant students had to take turns at the keyboard.

It is important to address the class as a whole and make the lesson relevant to everybody. Finding confidence in this environment may take time. With my experiences of group teaching, I was pleasantly surprised at how much could be achieved and how enjoyable the group dynamics could be.

Group teaching is most useful in my studio when students of similar stages and ages meet to play for one another. Listening to other musicians greatly aids learning and it is often motivating. I am impressed by the way music acts as a catalyst for conversation and this alone is a helpful experience as the piano journey can be long and solitary. Advantages and disadvantages of the group situation include:

### Advantages

- Many students can be taught in a small amount of time.
- The same resources can be used as in the private lesson.
- Students can listen to one another and provide critical feedback.
- A broad curriculum is needed to maintain the students’ interest, thus extending the teacher’s skills. (Material has to be sequenced and organised well.)
- The teacher needs to be trained to understand group techniques and the use of competition, co-operation, thoughtful criticism and peer interaction. Greater understanding in these areas will benefit other teaching situations.
- The teacher needs to be facilitator rather than autocrat – a much healthier educational environment.
- Ensemble playing is possible.
- Potentially a greater source of income.
- Can be great fun.
- Students enjoy playing for an audience of peers.
- Students learn from one another.
- Students learn to accept criticism.

- It is a great motivator for practice as students do not wish to look under-prepared in front of others.
- It cuts down on need for teacher to repeat information.
- Make-up lessons are not possible so attendance rates are high.
- The teacher needs to have a reliable memory for the lesson to flow. Students would quickly lose attention if the teacher had to refer to notes extensively. (Memory is a useful skill to develop, aiding music making in many ways.)

### **Disadvantages**

- Harder to foster a close relationship with each student.
- Harder to address individual musical problems.
- Does not cater for outstanding or struggling students.
- The mental and emotional maturity of members of the group needs to be matched.
- A larger room and more chairs may be needed.
- A quiet student can easily be overlooked.
- One disruptive student can adversely influence the whole class.
- The slightest interruption with fumbling, loss of concentration or searching for materials can trigger disorder.
- A quiet street may be disturbed by an increase in traffic (an issue which may need addressing through the local council).

The group has much to offer and should not be discounted. In the early history of music education, the apprenticeship system was favoured for the great majority of the time. While one teacher with one student works on the whole very well for the piano studio, students watching one another, reflecting on their own and one another's performance is also a great learning experience. Even if this happens only rarely and is not formally part of the weekly proceedings, it could contribute much to a student's development.

Other ways of organising a teaching routine involve alternating solo and group lessons or having students of similar stages meeting at regular intervals such as once a month. It is with group teaching that some of my teaching skills have been the most extended. If you are one for a challenge, then to deepen and broaden your understanding of music teaching I would strongly recommend utilising group teaching.

## **PREPARING FOR TEACHING EXAMS (PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATIONS)**

Three main areas need to be addressed:

### **Material**

When planning a lesson the essentials can be covered by running through an ART MUSIC checklist (see page 12).

### **Identification**

It is important to show you are aware of any problems that arise in the lesson. It might be a matter of posture or incorrect pitches or rhythm or an inappropriate way of interpreting the music or a multitude of other possible faults. One should at least acknowledge the major problems. New students may have many pianistic problems. To identify them all at once could be too overwhelming. It is also important to identify issues that could become problems. Working this way teaches pre-empting problems and helps the student to establish good work habits. This need not be a lecture but a discovery together about what will need special care. The alternative is to unravel work, wasting much time in the process.

### **Strategies**

How do I go about teaching? There are many options – demonstration, explanation, questioning and prompting to name just a few. Using a wide variety is essential. Listen to the language you use. Do not use expressions repetitively, e.g. yep or okay. Allow the students to discover the answers as much as possible rather than telling them. This challenging area requires much creativity.

When explaining some aspect, be concise. Write down the words you would use to teach a chromatic scale (assume that the student has already learnt the major and minor scales). Count the number of words used and see if there is any way to reduce them.

Write down assignments for the student so that it is clear what is expected. As the students mature they can take more responsibility for the writing.

Use a second piano if available. I have seen studio lessons where there are two instruments and the second has not been used once. Practical illustrations often reduce the need to talk.

Avoid saying, “This is what you should do.” It sounds rather authoritarian and does not allow the student to be part of the process in discovering an answer to a problem.

Evaluate the general mood of the lesson and try to determine the flow.

What was the manner in which you talked and how much encouragement took place?

How well prepared were you and did you achieve your goal? There are times when one is tempted to drop everything and just concentrate on one aspect but during a demonstration exam is probably not the right time.

How would you describe the student/teacher relationship? Sometimes this is a difficult area to judge. Some students are quiet and reticent. It can take a long time for students to relax. The success of the lesson should not be judged only on the openness and enthusiasm of the student. The student’s respect is a better measure.

22 July ~ Seven yr old arrived and said he didn't feel like a lesson. He is a little boy used to making his own decisions. I said I would like to have the lesson and help him push past those feelings. I also explained that

1. Nanna had driven him along way to have the lesson

2. Mums & Dad had paid lesson fees

3. I had set this time apart in the week especially for him.

After checking that he was not ill I said "It's give it a go." We started gently with a few games at the keyboard then eased our way into exploring and learning a little Kabalevsky piece together. At the end of the time I said "I'm glad we had that lesson. We achieved a lot." He immediately responded "I'm glad we had the lesson too. I feel much better."

Figure 14. Journal entry

How did the lesson begin and how did it end? The student needs to know clearly when the lesson has ended. Some students have no qualms about prolonging it.

How were any behavioural problems solved? Threats and punishment are not part of the equation. Ingenuity must be used to deal with certain situations.

How were individual differences accommodated? I have had students who struggled with health problems where certain limbs were not so flexible and mobile. Care must be taken to ensure that the correct adjustments are made and that the teacher is not asking students to do something they cannot do.

In your teaching diary/journal, write down problems that arose during the lesson. Keep reflecting on these matters until you think you have a solution and then jot these down. Keep a list of the good answers, metaphors, stories, etc. that came from either yourself or the student on the spur of the moment. Keep a record of the delightful moments too. This helps us maintain a balanced view. Teaching is not all about solving problems.

## POSTURE – USE AND ABUSE OF THE BODY

It is useful for students to have a warm-up routine as preparation for the hard work that is to take place in the practice session. During winter the hands can be rather stiff and uncomfortable without a warm-up. Joseph Gát in *The Technique of Piano Playing* (Covina, 1965) outlines a series of arm, hand and finger exercises which are extensive but it may be enough to know half a dozen of these. The use of gymnastic exercises goes back as far as Couperin in *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord* where he recommends pulling the fingers in all directions to help the hands to be flexible. The 19th century saw the emergence of all sorts of dangerous contraptions promoted in the name of making the fingers and hands stronger. Find out about these:

- Chiroplast
- Digitorium
- Dactylion
- Hand Guide

General wake-up, energising, lengthening and crossover exercises that can be done with children are outlined in Christina Ward and Jan Daley's *Learning to Learn* (Switched-On Publications, 1993). Know a few of these, a useful off-the-cuff tool for the appropriate moment. Some reading and first-hand experience with the Alexander Technique enables us to understand how we are using our bodies. When observing a few classes, I was mostly taken with how important the use of the back is with its role as the powerhouse. Since then I have been aware of how often pianists collapse the top half their backs and misuse the shoulders and arms. Read Pedro de Alcantara's *Indirect Procedures: a Musician's Guide to the Alexander Technique* (Clarendon Press, 1997) for further information. Excellent and detailed information on use of the body is given in Thomas Mark's *What Every Pianist Needs to Know about the Body* (GIA Publications, 2003). Finding a healthy approach to piano technique is extensively covered in *A Symposium for Pianists and Teachers: Strategies to Develop the Mind and Body for Optimal Performance* (Editor, Kris Kropff, Heritage Music Press, 2002).

Playing the piano should not produce pain. If all parts of the body are functioning properly, one could play for hours without feeling any strain or tension. If a student is complaining of pain, I would not push practising until the cause is found. The time it takes to recover muscle or tendon damage can be considerable and it is not worth the risk of long-term injury. It is more than likely that misuse of the body is occurring and specialised professional help needs to be sought.

Both teachers and students may exhibit posture faults.

### Teachers

My observations of how teachers use their body come from marking many demonstration lessons and seeing that the body is often not used to full advantage. When it was brought to their attention, piano pedagogy students were often surprised at how they had used their bodies. Much time is spent sitting on the teacher's seat so check that the back is not continually stretched forward at an awkward angle when leaning across the keyboard or towards the student. If the back is slumped forward, it makes deep breaths difficult. Occasionally, position yourself where you can see the face of the students so that you are not always talking in their ear off to the side. Make eye contact when you have something important to communicate. Every now and then take a position in the room where you can observe from afar. This often brings to notice details which are not so obvious when sitting

beside the student such as the position of the feet, the angle of the back, the student's overall approach to the instrument (claiming their space and having a body movement that matches the music).

Try not to lean on the piano as this sends out a body-language message of tiredness and is not the way to treat any instrument.

Keep the legs uncrossed to achieve maximum circulation which helps maintain alertness and energy. Use different positions around the piano or the room to keep students on their toes. Be a little unpredictable. This helps keep you alert as well. At appropriate times, use physical action to energise the music or to infuse meaning – conducting, waving arms, stamping feet, clicking fingers, dancing, walking, leaping, etc.

With little ones I sometimes briefly kneel for short periods beside the keyboard so that I am at their level when talking and working with them.

### **Students**

Many students sit too far back on the stool. If the first third of the stool is used then the feet are forced to be planted firmly on the ground (or a stool for little people). This is energising and the body is able to move freely. There is also more stability and mobility when playing at the extremes of the keyboard as the body is able to lean to the right or left.

In an effort to be expressive and sometimes because of poor posture and laziness, students often collapse the top half of their backs or extensively move their shoulders up and down while playing. The back needs to be firm and extended so aches and pains do not set in. Moving the shoulders up and down in an exaggerated fashion upsets the playing apparatus and major adjustments of the arm and fingers need to take place. There must be freedom in the shoulder joint though.

Sometimes, elbows are also misused in the name of expressiveness. While the elbows should not be held rigidly against the body, if this joint does inappropriately large movements then the wrist and fingers have to make allowances. Playing becomes more complicated than it needs to be. Let the elbows fall almost in line with the body so that the arm can keep re-energising and not become stiff from being held outwards.

Inappropriate dips and humps in the wrist and hand reveals tension or too much flexibility. The power of the arm is broken at the wrist joint if a disproportionate dip or hump is continually present. The dip on the top of the hand is caused from fingers being too curved and pulled back. This extra tension is restricting. Alternatively, a floppy hand means that the most economical movements are not being made and the tone struggles to be full and warm.

Stand and let the arm fall naturally beside the body. The closer one can maintain this natural arch-shaped hand at the keyboard, the greater the chance for facility because there will be less tension in the hand.

The tone made by playing on the pads of the fingers and not the tips/nails, is fuller and more cantabile. This is an observation made from the Romantic pianists onwards. The hand needs to be positioned neither too high nor too low so that the natural arch hand shape is not interfered with. The hand is used in many ways – sometimes from a high position and sometimes close to the keyboard but in teaching a position to beginners, they need to understand what is normal and the most helpful shape from which to start.

The most common finger to collapse at the first joint is the index finger but in some cases I have seen all five fingers lose the arch shape. This leads to a lack of control with tone and imprecise coordination. The remedy is not to play high on the tip of the finger but to maintain a firmly extended arch-shaped finger. This forces the appropriate muscles to come into play. Otto Ortmann in *The Physiological Mechanics of Piano Technique* (reprint Dutton and Co., 1962) recommends this remedy after extensive scientific research.

With little hands it is useful to use the side of the fifth finger still in a curved position but with the other fingers and the hand gently supporting this weak finger. Gradually it will gain in strength and facility and be able to move like the other fingers. This way the last joint does not become permanently collapsed. Trying to fix this problem is particularly difficult in an adult.

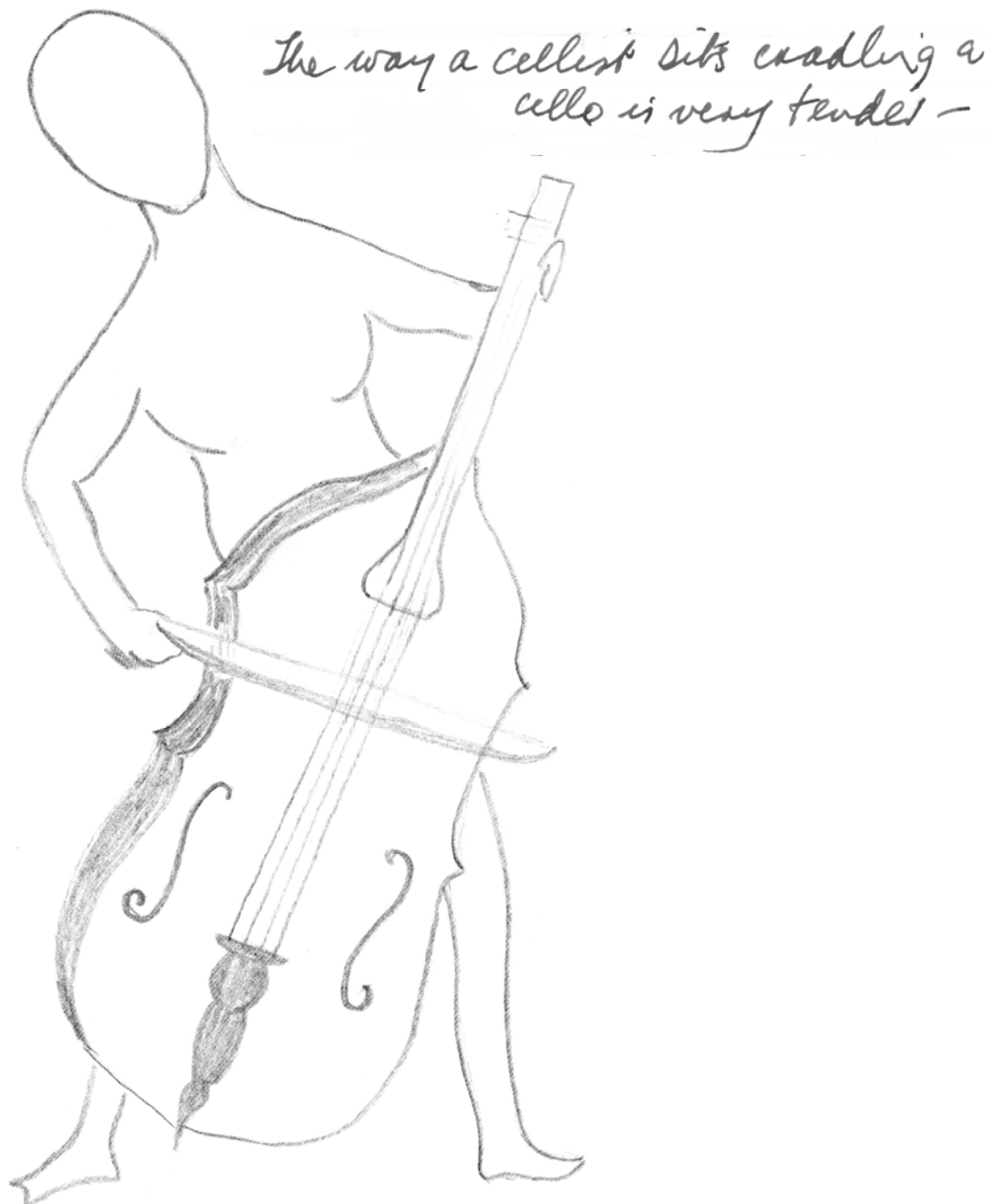


Figure 15. A written and pictorial reflection on posture by two piano students

## INTERPRETATION

Reading on matters such as pedalling and articulation is especially helpful when academic and practical in design (such as Boris Berman's *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*, Schirmer, 1981 and Joseph Banowetz's *The Pianist's Guide to Pedalling*, Indiana University Press, 1992). However, you can't learn interpretation from a book alone. It needs the guidance of an experienced and well-qualified teacher. I realised the importance of this in my own studio. I took some students for piano pedagogy studies for three years but did not have them for private lessons until later. We had covered interpretation in pedagogy classes but concepts were not thoroughly learnt until students had to deal with various issues within their own performance programmes. This was a huge lesson for me. It is one thing to talk about, demonstrate, discuss and try out ideas but it is another level of learning when you have to start producing the sounds in a polished performance. Nevertheless I have outlined some areas of interpretation that need considerable thought by the teacher so that expertise can be shared with the student.

### Pedalling

Students are surprised that there are many types of pedalling. It is an area of music making that requires intense listening and subtlety. Below are some of the ways the damper pedal can be applied. If some of these techniques have not been used before, it could be a good idea to work your way through them with a teacher.

- release pedal early to articulate between sonorities
- late-release to merge sounds
- half-release to extinguish only part of the old sonority
- pedal some sonorities and not others
- depress before activating keys to augment sympathetic vibrations
- depress only partly to ration the amount of sonority and resonance
- release abruptly to help accent sound
- keep down while the sound fades away
- use a touch of pedal on *sf* to help augment sound
- flutter pedal to blend – a passage requiring a cleaner sound than keeping the pedal down
- connect two notes that cannot be joined by fingers – requiring careful use so that the texture is not inconsistent
- gradual release of pedal so that the ear cannot tell when release occurs



## **Ornamentation**

A book that gives a clear and precise outline of ornamentation from the baroque era onwards, is the question-and-answer manual, *Ornamentation* by Valery Lloyd-Watts and Carole L. Bigler (Alfred, 1995). This is a broad sweep of the topic but could help to consolidate a foundation if there is confusion. This would need to be supplemented with texts such as C.P.E. Bach's *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1949) to gain a fuller picture and to understand how to interpret lesser-known ornaments, e.g., the half or short trill which appears over slurred notes. A book such as Sandra Rosenblum's *Performance Practice in Classic Piano Music* (Indiana University Press, 1988) deals with an era but others such as Bernard Harrison's *Haydn's Keyboard Music* (Clarendon Press, 1997) specialises even more. Obviously more specialised studies are a great resource to draw upon.

To gain information on such musical elements as articulation, pedal work, slurs, phrasing, fingering and other interpretive matters, I would recommend a selection from the list of favourites below. The ideal for a piano teacher's library would be to include at least one interpretation book per famous composer. The choice is enormous. Rosenblum's book is essential for understanding the interpretation of Clementi, Haydn, Mozart and other composers of the early classical era. This would be a good starting point.

## **EARLY KEYBOARD MUSIC**

- Howard Ferguson, *Style and Interpretation*, prefaces to Volume I and II (Oxford University Press, 1975)
- Mark Lindley and Maria Boxall, *Early Keyboard Fingerings – A Comprehensive Guide* (Schott, 1992)

## **FRENCH BAROQUE**

- François Couperin, *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord* (Alfred, 1974) edited by Marjory Halford

## **J.S. BACH and EARLY CLASSICAL**

- C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, (W.W. Norton and Company, 1949) edited by William J. Mitchell
- Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard – a Practical Guide* (Amadeus Press, 2003)

## **EARLY CLASSICAL and CLASSICAL**

- Sandra Rosenblum, *Performance Practice in Classic Piano Music* (Indiana University Press, 1988)
- Daniel Türk, *Clavierschule* (1789), translated by Raymond H. Haggel (University of Nebraska Press, 1982)
- Michael Davidson, *Mozart and the Pianist – a Guide for Performers and Teachers to Mozart's Major Works for Solo Piano* (Kahn & Averill, 2001)

## **BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS**

- Charles Rosen, *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas* (Yale, 2002)
- Richard Taub, *Playing the Beethoven Piano Sonatas* (Amadeus, 2002)

## NINETEENTH CENTURY

- Edited by R. Larry Todd, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music* (Routledge, 2004) – Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn, Brahms and Liszt

## SCHUBERT

- Ernest G. Porter, *Schubert's Piano Works* (Dobson Books, 1980)

## CHOPIN

- Eleanor Bailie, *Chopin: A Graded Practical Guide* (Kahn & Averill 1998). This includes a graded list from 4<sup>th</sup> grade to advanced – with detailed chapters on such matters as ornamentation, pedalling and phrasing, and commentary on all the less-advanced music. While much of the commentary is detail from the score that any musician taking care should see and internalise, there are many personal suggestions for interpretation. While it could be as foolish as listening to a recording of a work and trying to emulate the style, if it is remembered that it is only one interpretation and point of view, then this book could be helpful.
- Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher: as Seen by his Pupils* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially the chapter on Technique and Style
- Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985)

## LISZT

- Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt – the Man and His Music* (Barrie & Jenkins, 1970)

## TWENTIETH CENTURY

- David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* (Schirmer, 1990). An accessible tour of some of the best and most innovative piano works of this century.

## RAVEL

- Vlado Perlemuter and Helene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel* (Kahn & Averill, 1988). Perlemuter studied all of Ravel's solo piano music with the composer.

## DEBUSSY

- Paul Roberts, *Images – The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Amadeus Press, 1996)

## BARTOK

- Barbara Nissman, *Bartók and the Piano: A Performer's View* (Scarecrow Press, 2002). The American pianist Barbara Nissman wrote this book after recording Bartók's works.

## PROKOFIEV

- Stephen C.E. Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev* (Scarecrow Press, 1994). Works are categorised according to difficulty.

## SHOSTAKOVICH

- Sofia Moshevich, *Dmitri Shostakovich, Pianist* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004). Biographical material is interwoven with analysis of Shostakovich's piano and chamber works.

## THE STUDIO

The work environment needs to be well lit, well ventilated and without distractions. After a lesson with two new students who were sisters I rang their mother to see how they were going and to ask their impression of the first lesson. After asking her if everything was okay she said “Yes, the girls felt comfortable, are happy with your help and set work but there is one problem.” I braced myself for the worst. “They want your music room.” It was wonderful to know these new students were attracted to what would enrich their lives. My family house is set in a quiet garden with the piano looking out on to a Peruvian pepper tree more than 100 years old. The piano is of outstanding quality. (See *The Instrument*, page 74) Nearby is a harpsichord and clavichord, so students can try out the early music works. The room also contains wall-to-wall books, music and personal musical artworks collected from my travels. It is wonderful that these new students should be attracted to what will enrich their lives.

*Practical Piano Pedagogy* by Martha Baker-Jordan (Warner Bros., 2004) provides dozens of downloadable and modifiable templates of teaching and business forms. These are a practical aid for matters such as setting up a studio, interviewing, setting assignments and maintaining student motivation.

### Establishing a studio

The best way to keep a studio full and healthy is to be a good teacher. However, to kick-start the process, these ideas may be helpful:

- Have a business card.
- Organise a small recital to an invited audience so others can hear you play.
- A letter-drop in the local area.
- Give flyers on the studio to local schools, private music teachers and shops.
- Tell of your plans to friends, family and fellow musicians. Most people are happy to refer someone they know. Personal recommendation has been the way most students have joined my studio. Once you have a few students loving music and achieving worthwhile results, the process is self-perpetuating because they in turn are happy to recommend you.
- Inform your piano tuner as people often ask piano tuners for names of teachers.
- Advertise in the local newspaper.
- Make a connection with a group of piano teachers who meet regularly.
- Inform the local community groups you attend – church, clubs, etc
- Join a music teachers’ association.
- Create a web page.

Experienced teachers agree that word of mouth is the main means by which students arrive at their studio. Suggestions from recently graduated pedagogy students include hiring a music room at the local primary school as other students and teachers become interested when they hear the sounds, living and teaching opposite a primary school for the same reason, an advertisement put up at the local delicatessen and the phone directory. The first suggestion was so successful that the teacher could not take on all the students who wanted to learn. One teacher said that a small sign on her fence had produced the most results. Check with your municipal council for local laws on signage.

Dozens of suggestions for establishing a studio are in the *Practicespot Guide to Promoting Your Teaching Studio* by Philip A. Johnston (PracticeSpot Pty. Ltd., 2003).

## **TUITION AGREEMENT**

Formulate a written agreement that outlines your conditions so that parents and students understand how your studio operates. Points to be addressed include:

- Fees – How do you want to be paid? One term in advance or monthly?
- Policy on missed lessons – is there another time arranged if the student is sick and gives some warning?
- Lesson times – are lessons suspended in the school holidays and on public holidays? How much warning is required when the student goes on an extended family holiday that does not coincide with school holidays?
- Discontinuing lessons – how much notice needs to be given if a student intends to withdraw?
- Telephone numbers/email addresses and the times the teacher is available to discuss any issue
- Recital policies
- Parental involvement
- A brief outline of your professional background and professional affiliations
- A brief description of your philosophy of teaching, including your goals

## **RESUME**

For employment outside of the private studio, a résumé of your professional background and experience would be needed. Here are a few guidelines:

- Keep the facts brief, listing dates – with the most recent first
- Classify information using only the year, not the full dates

- Neatness is important so it is best typed
- Include only relevant information
- Include contact information – full name, address, phone numbers, email address
- Include history of your education
- Include professional experience
- Include professional affiliations
- Give at least two references that include name, address and phone number, having received permission to do so from the people concerned

Keep records of your professional activities, including concert details and press clippings, so that a quick update is easily achievable.

## **THE ACCOUNTING SIDE**

There are two important factors. Firstly, employ a good accountant to do your tax return and secondly, keep a consistent record of figures and attendances as they happen so that there is no hassle when the figures are added up and the receipts ordered. It can be quite tricky working out depreciation of studio materials so it worth every dollar to employ an expert to do it for you. Here are some costs that may be claimed when doing a tax return (as tax legislation differs from region to region, seek expert advice):

- If travel is involved, car mileage and car maintenance
- Purchase of new instruments
- Music, books, CDs, videos and magazines
- Concert tickets
- Studio equipment including lamps, mats, computer, sound system and filing system
- Accounting, electricity, mailing, prizes, advertising and recital expenses
- Professional development including transport, tuition and housing costs whilst attending conventions or similar events

Dino Ascari's *The Art of Effective Piano Teaching* (Authorhouse, 2003) gives comprehensive suggestions in regard to fee structure and payment.

## THE TRIANGLE – STUDENTS/PARENTS/TEACHERS

Before beginning to teach it is important to know what role you wish the parents to play in lessons and at home. My goal is to help students take responsibility as soon as possible. They then know what is required and how to be well prepared for the next lesson.

As pre-school students need parental help, a parent should be at the lesson. How long it takes for school-age students to be working independently differs with each individual. After a year at school, most can cope without the support of the parent. If parents wish to attend I am happy for them to do so provided there is no interruption in the lesson and the students are working during the week mostly on their own.

Parents can be of great help in setting up a healthy environment with a practice area that does not have distractions and is well lit. Support is also needed in many other areas – for instance a well-maintained instrument, encouraging children to attend concerts and music events, ensuring correct sleep patterns and nutritional requirements are met and that students are punctual for lessons.

For the very young student, the parent needs to observe closely all lesson activities and take down notes so that practice can be gently guided throughout the week. Obviously, this would require the parent to be able to perform all activities. Sometimes it may be necessary to check that this is happening. If the student does not have the correct role model then it is unrealistic to expect steady progress.

Even when students have the independence to work alone, parental support in maintaining a consistent practice routine is still important. Some students have no trouble at all working at their music on a daily basis but others are distracted by other activities such as computer games and TV. More and more these days it is a matter of students fitting the work into a busy schedule.

I encourage students to practise when commuting (name the notes/fingering of the scale and arpeggio of the week, analytical work of the repertoire pieces, sing the melody or the bass line, etc.). Rhythms could be tapped out at the kitchen table. Intervals and melodies could be sung under the shower. At the computer you could look up musical information. The possibilities are endless.

Some parents do not want to initiate practice. I would not refuse to teach a child because of a perceived lack of support from the parent, but I look for ways and means of overcoming the lack of practice that sometimes occurs. In the student's book I mark the practice sessions to be ticked off by the next lesson. If it is achieved I sometimes give a small reward such as a sticker, pencil or pen. While I do not agree with rewards as a basis for motivation, in the short term it may help to establish a healthy practising pattern.

At the other end of the spectrum I have seen the negative results of parents pushing their children into hours at the keyboard. In the worst cases it has led to students being totally turned off scales and arpeggios or some other aspect of good practice.

The students, with the help of the teacher, need to work out their own practice routine. Suggest a minimum time and number of sessions per week as a guide. The amount will differ from student to student depending on their age and ability to focus.

There are a few facts about practising that are relevant for all:

- A little every day is far more helpful than a big amount once or twice a week.
- Once the focus is lost or the mind/body is tired, it is probably unwise to stay at the keyboard.

A helpful book for understanding the nature of practice is Madeline Bruser's *The Art of Practicing: a Guide to Making Music from the Heart* (Bell Tower, 1997). She has devised an approach that is easy to understand and remember. Particularly insightful is the chapter that describes the "three styles of struggle" – exaggerated, mechanistic and aggressive music making.

For the advanced student I recommend Chaffin, Imreh, Crawford and Lawrence's *Practicing Perfection* (Erlbaun Assoc., 2002). Not only does this book give a detailed account of how a professional pianist prepares a recital but it also contains many quotes of great pianists and their attitudes and approaches to practice.

## THE RESOURCE FILE

Setting up a resource file should be part of establishing a studio practice. The material can be tabulated on a computer but have a hard copy on hand during a lesson. Most courses require such material if one is preparing for a teaching exam. I encourage my students to create a file that they love going to. Here are some suggestions to add to its appeal: Crisp white paper, a pen that flows elegantly, a scented satchel in the front pocket, a favourite sticker or picture on the cover. Do whatever it takes to create good feelings when using it. It can be an extremely useful tool and if used wisely may well last a lifetime.

It needs to be big so an arch-lever file is recommended – and be prepared to divide it into two or more files in the future. Set up a Contents page, working in pencil for a while as it may take some time to establish the order that works for you. This way you can rub out and rearrange. How you choose to organise your material is up to you. Often I do not even make these suggestions, letting the student teachers think about it and come up with their own suggestions. Part of being a good teacher is being organised. This skill needs to be developed because it can save hours of preparation. File dividers help to keep the material neat and accessible. Use of colours for headings can be effective. One subject per page also helps the material to be clearly presented. Date everything because after a few years you will probably not remember when work was done. Acknowledge all references used with full details of the book, author, publisher and year of publication. It is a lifelong reference so it is worth doing well.

Here is an outline of the contents of my resource file:

- Outlines
- Books and Magazines
- CDs, Other Recordings and Videos
- Community
- Competitions/Eisteddfods/Exams
- Education

- Enrichment of Life
- Great Pianists
- Great Teachers
- Instrument
- Internet
- Interpretation
- Music
- Practices and Projects
- Personal

At the front of the file I keep a big plastic packet where I slot pictures related to the piano or the arts.

### **OUTLINES**

The first section contains the unit outlines of the courses that my students are undertaking, e.g. requirements for secondary school music exams. This needs to be accessible in case you need to check on the requirements in the middle of a lesson, as can often happen when you have many students doing different courses and exams. I also have marking sheet templates and copies of my studio policy at hand.

### **BOOKS/ MAGAZINES**

My main reference list and publications I wish to read have these headings:

Education  
 Music Methods  
 Music  
 On Pianism  
 Pianists/Composers  
 Pianos  
 Teaching Skills  
 Magazines  
 Theory Books  
 Videos

I also have a copy of the bibliography of excellent reference books such as *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* by Marianne Uszler (Schirmer, 1991). To read the main literature on piano pedagogy is a huge study. It takes years to be well read in the subject. This section of the file also contains published reviews of music books.

### **CDs/ RECORDINGS/ VIDEOS**

Listed are favourite old recordings of great pianists. Examples are: Beethoven/Artur Schnabel, Chopin/Arthur Rubinstein and Debussy/Walter Gieseking. A helpful resource in this area is David Dubal's *The Art of the Piano* (Summit Books, 1989) where a list of famous recordings is entered after a short description of the work. The first half of the book details renowned pianists, giving a short biography of each. The second half is about the composers



and their works. As well as my favourite performers of great composers, I also have a list of some poor examples. While I generally try to teach so that the positive is emphasised, occasionally it helps to draw on the negative for illustrations. Otherwise how will students become truly discerning?

## **COMMUNITY**

This section contains advertising material of schools of music I respect, addresses of organisations that have relevance to piano teaching such as the Dalcroze Society, conference details and copies of talks that I have delivered, data on institutions so that I have at hand information when offering recommendations to a student, the relevant directory of accredited music teachers, etc.

## **COMPETITIONS/EISTEDDFODS/EXAMS**

This section contains a booklet listing all the major piano competitions in the world for the year, any information on local eisteddfods and competitions, exam reports of my students and report forms for eisteddfods at which I have adjudicated.

## **EDUCATION**

Here is information on methods such as Alexander Technique, Dalcroze, Orff Schulwerk, Kodály Concept and Suzuki, which could greatly aid a pianist's development. Here's how:

- Alexander Technique, Frederick Matthias (1869-1955) – with posture and movement at the keyboard, control of nerves, use of breath and establishing relevant tempos
- Dalcroze, Emile (1865-1950) – movement/music, mental responsiveness, aural perception
- Kodály, Zoltán (1882-1967) – aural development (inner hearing), improvisation, memory development, singing/expression, sight reading
- Orff, Carl (1895-1982) – timbres, improvisation, rhythm
- Suzuki, Shin'ichi (1898-1998) – use of imitation and repetition, aural perception, early-childhood music development

It is also interesting to look further back in history and see how music education has evolved. One of the best books I have read on the development of music education through the ages is Bernarr Rainbow's *Music in Educational Thought and Practice* (Boethius Press, 1989).

Check out these great contributors to the development of education:

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)
- Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827)
- Maria Montessori (1870-1952)
- Jean Piaget (1896-1980)

**ENRICHMENT OF LIFE**

This includes material such as concert programs, art exhibition catalogues and reviews on interesting books that might not be directly related to music but can help teaching in some way. In the mid-year break of the first-year piano pedagogy course, I send the students to an art gallery. For a few, this is sometimes their first time. I ask them to write down all the words shared by piano playing and fine arts. Here are just a few:

POINT DISSONANCE BALANCE HARMONY

FORM COLOUR ATMOSPHERE MOOD

DEPTH LINE TEXTURE LIGHT

FOREGROUND SHADE HUE

COMPOSITION DESIGN

BACKGROUND

This is where I place special stories, poems and words that can be used at the appropriate time. Goethe's *Apprenticeship* was perfect to include on the parting report for a final-year group of piano pedagogy students.

*One ought every  
day at least, to  
hear a song,  
read a good poem,  
see a fine picture,  
and, if it were  
possible, to speak  
a few reasonable  
words.*

**GREAT PIANISTS**

This section contains articles on famous pianists and reviews of their performance. It is important to be knowledgeable in this area. How can we grow musically if we are not listening to the greatest musical interpretations? In first-year university it is not uncommon for some students to struggle to name one great pianist. Certainly, by the end of the course, one would hope that many names would be known. We are training students to become the finest performers possible. We and they should know what this means. This section also lists the year's happenings in places such as Wigmore Hall in London in order to keep abreast of the top end of our profession in one of the most exciting music centres of the world.

Harold Schonberg's *The Great Pianists* (Simon & Schuster, 1963) is a good starting point for reading about pre-eminent masters. The DVD *The Art of the Piano* (WEA Corp, 2002) illustrates many of the great pianists of the twentieth century. From the DVD, *The Golden Age of the Piano*, with David Dubal (Universal Music & VI, 2003), how many of these names below do you recognise?

Vladimir Horowitz	Rudolph Serkin	Claudio Arrau	
Fryderyk Chopin	Sergei Rachmaninoff	Ignacy Jan Paderewski	
Franz Liszt	Felix Blumenfeld	Anton Rubenstein	
Clara Schumann	Johannes Brahms	Bartolomeo Cristofori	
Gottfried Silbermann	Frederick II (the Great)	Glenn Gould	
Wanda Landowska	Muzio Clementi	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	
Ludwig van Beethoven	Myra Hess	Jan Ladislav Dussek	Carl Weber
John Field	Percy Grainger	Alfred Cortot	Amy Beach
Van Cliburn	Ignaz Moscheles	Arthur Rubinstein	
Alexander Brailowsky	Robert Schumann	Teresa Carreño	
Carl Czerny	Sophie Menter	Cecile Chaminade	
Julie King	Arabella Goddard	Louis Gottschalk	
Hans von Bülow	Theodor Leschetizky	Moriz Rosenthal	
Arthur Friedheim	Leopold Godowsky	Joseph Hoffman	
Vladimir de Pachmann	Martin Krause	Rosina Lhevinne	

With enough practice we can sometimes even recognise who is playing on the radio. Our approach to the piano is like a fingerprint – unique for each person. Of course in a healthy performer the approach to pianism is constantly evolving – never standing still. There is always a new way of thinking, feeling, and regarding great music as we grow and mature. A project I have given to piano pedagogy students is to accumulate in their file a list of words and their meaning that describe pianists' approach to music making. If our business is sound, then we need to be able to describe it. A good starting point is to read CD reviews. Once a list is built, the opposite word could be found. Try yourself out on the list below:

THICK	.....	SPONTANEOUS	.....
GENEROUS	.....	INTIMATE	.....
RICH	.....	LUMINOUS	.....
ELEGANT	.....	WEIGHTED	.....
CEREBRAL	.....	COLOURFUL	.....
SPACIOUS	.....	CRYSTALLINE	.....
SENSITIVE	.....	LEAN	.....
ORCHESTRAL	.....	DYNAMIC	.....
IMAGINATIVE	.....	HEATED	.....
PLANGENT	.....	PROFOUND	.....
HISTRIONIC	.....	BOLD	.....
LYRICAL	.....	INTENSE	.....
WARM	.....	SUBTLE	.....
VIRTUOSIC	.....	FLUID	.....
PELLUCID	.....	SOPORIFIC	.....
IMPASSIONED	.....	POISED	.....
GLITTERING	.....	MECHANICAL	.....
DELICATE	.....	DANCING	.....
PRECISE	.....	INTROSPECTIVE	.....

### **GREAT TEACHERS**

A useful record is a genealogy chart of who taught whom. It helps to understand the various schools of piano playing through history. For example Hummel studied both with Mozart as a boy and later with Clementi. He was an important link between the Viennese and English schools of piano playing in the early nineteenth century, teaching such greats as Hiller, Henselt, Pauer, Pixis and Thalberg.

This section also lists any articles on great keyboard teachers throughout the ages and some interviews with famous teachers. This is an important area that often gets overlooked even in piano teaching degrees. Great musicians such as Bach, Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt can teach us much about keyboard if we examine how they approached teaching.

Here is some relevant information on just a few of them:

**Bach**, according to his first biographer, Johann Nicolaus Forkel, for months made his students practise nothing but isolated exercises for all the fingers of both hands in order to achieve a clear and clean touch. We have some of the finest teaching pieces in Bach's *Little Preludes* and *Two and Three Part Inventions*, pieces exquisite in their own right but also specifically designed to help the student.

The preface to the Hans Bischoff edition of J.S. Bach *Two and Three Part Inventions* (Edwin Kalmus) also reveals much about Bach's attitude to teaching:

A proper introduction, whereby lovers of the clavier and especially those with a thirst for true knowledge are shown a clear way not only of learning to play clearly in two voices, but also with further progress to proceed with three obligato parts correctly and well – at the same time not only receiving good ideas but also utilising them for the development of a cantabile style of playing and for the procurement of a thorough foretaste of composition.

From this passage we can assume that Bach valued:

- Curiosity
- Accuracy
- Clarity
- Working with good resources (music)
- A singing tone/sound
- Understanding of composition
- A clear learning process – logical and sequential

**Beethoven** expressed a wish to write a textbook for piano students but other than a few challenging exercises never got around to it. Music that was important to his teaching was Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and *Two and Three Part Inventions*, the sonatas of Clementi and the etudes of Cramer.

**Chopin** was admired and respected for his professionalism as a teacher. He was inspiring as well as disciplined in his approach. To be without stiffness was important to him as was having independent fingers. He would teach the B major scale first because he felt that this hand position was a far more natural one than the customary C major. The long fingers fall over the black notes and the thumb and little finger fit snugly over the white notes. He disliked thoughtless repetitive practice and promoted a balanced lifestyle. For him everything depended upon how to finger correctly. He was partial to Pleyel pianos because of their light touch and silvery and veiled sonority. In his teaching, he mainly used Clementi, Cramer, Moscheles, Bach, Hummel, Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Liszt and Mozart. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger's *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by his Pupils* (Cambridge University Press, 1986) is a wonderful book full of first-hand accounts of Chopin and his lessons.

**Liszt** as a twenty-year-old teacher and Liszt in the last decade of his life were two distinct teaching personalities. While he spent much time talking about posture and technique early in his life and even recommended using Kalkbrenner's Chiroplast, in master classes later in life he refused to talk about such matters. He did much

demonstrating in lessons, students admiring him for superb musicianship and sight reading skills. Here is a list of famous pianists who studied with Liszt:

Carl Tausig  
 Hans von Bülow  
 Moriz Rosenthal  
 Emil von Sauer  
 Alexander Siloti  
 Amy Fay  
 William Mason  
 Eugen d'Albert  
 Sophie Menter  
 Karl Klindworth  
 Martin Krause

Reginald Gerig's *Famous Pianists & Their Technique* (Robert B. Luce, 1974) is one of the most useful books on the subject of famous pianists and their approach to playing and teaching. It provides answers to such questions as, "Who wrote the earliest surviving keyboard method?" and "Does any of the advice given in the method relate to piano playing today?" (Girolamo Diruta, *Il Transilvano dialogo sopra il vero modo di sonar organi, et istromenti da penna*, Venice 1593-1609). Gerig outlines all the major keyboard methods up to the 1970s.

Of the twentieth-century literature on pianism and piano teaching, these books could be a starting point to establish a broad base:

George Kochevitsky, *The Art of Piano Playing* (Summy-Birchard, 1967)

Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing* (Barrie and Jenkins, 1973)

Walter Gieseking, *Piano Technique* (Dover 1972)

Seymour Bernstein, *With Your Own Two Hands* (Schirmer, 1981)

Boris Berman, *Notes from the Pianist's Bench* (Yale 2000)

(See the reference list for further suggestions – page 82).

## **INSTRUMENT**

Here lies accumulated information on piano care, transport and purchase and newspaper/magazine articles on piano manufacturers. The section has many pictures, often providing a quicker and easier explanation.

## **INTERNET**

This section contains listings of the major music stores for purchasing music, bookstores, sites that offer free music and sites for information (See Appendix, page 81).

## **INTERPRETATION**

Areas covered in this section include articles on specific pieces of music, interpretation of baroque-ornaments, pedalling and fingering. However, the possibilities for inclusion are virtually endless.

## **MUSIC**

This section includes lists of music such as music for children, urtext editions, repertoire for piano one hand, my favourite music store's catalogue of music and a photocopy of the titles I have on CD Sheet Music™ for easy access.

## **PRACTICES AND PROJECTS**

Here is information on topics such as beginner lessons, adult needs and group piano. One of the most useful sheets is a pronunciation guide for French, German and Italian. Students are encouraged to sound the composer's name, title and any signs and terms correctly, as this helps overall confidence.

## **PERSONAL**

Contracts are stored here along with curriculum vitae and a short biography.

## **A BASIC LIBRARY**

When purchasing music make sure that it is an URTEXT (original text) edition. This means that the music should clearly show what the composer put on the page as distinct from any editing. With music for beginners it can be helpful to work from editions that have good fingering as it can be time-consuming working these out as well as guiding the student through all the other basics. However, I still like to have urtext scores of all my music so that I know what the original music contained especially regarding articulation, phrasing and dynamics. The score each teacher wishes to use is personal. I would suggest that once you find a good edition, keep a record of it as a reference for students who want to purchase a new score. Here are some of my favourites:

Johann Sebastian Bach

- Henle

Domenico Scarlatti

- Heugel/Le Pupitre (Kenneth Gilbert) – this is expensive but would be worth citing as a score available in a library.
- Henle
- Editio Musica Budapest

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

- Henle
- Könnemann
- Neue Mozart Ausgabe Bärenreiter

Franz Joseph Haydn

- Wiener (Christa Landon/Oswald Jonas)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- Universal (Schenker)

Franz Schubert

- Universal (Fussl/Landon)

Fryderyk Chopin

- Henle

Robert Schumann

- Henle

Franz Liszt

- Editio Musica Budapest (Gardonyi/Szelenyi)

Claude Debussy

- Wiener (Stegemann/Beroff)
- Durand-Costallat (Roy Howat)

Maurice Ravel

- Peters (Roger Nichols)

Factors which determine why you are attracted to one score and not another could include:

- A hard or soft cover
- The quality of the paper
- The layout
- The preface notes, such as by Christa Landon in the Wiener edition of Haydn, which are extremely informative and well researched
- The fingerings, such as Beethoven's in the Universal and Dover Editions, are fascinating and essential information even if not always chosen
- Clear information if there is doubt over any detail or difference between the autographed score and first editions

Scores that are not urtext can still provide ideas and extra insight into the music; e.g. The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music's edition of Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas (Craxton and Tovey).

A good reference book to have at the ready if students sustain a hand or arm injury is Theodore Edel's *Piano Music for One Hand* (Indiana University Press, 1994). It lists 1,000 left-hand and 60 right-hand solo works as well as dozens of concerti and chamber music for one hand.

The library of a music studio should contain *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (second edition; 29 volumes; London, 2001) or the teacher should subscribe to Grove Music Online. A smaller investment in the short term could be *The New Oxford Companion to Music* or *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* and the concise *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Composers and Musicians* or *The New Harvard Biographical Dictionary of Music*.



It helps to have Italian, French, German and Spanish dictionaries for unusual terms that are not listed in a small music dictionary. When choosing a small dictionary where signs and terms can quickly be checked and defined, look for one which lists the major composers and provides pronunciation of their names.

The section “Great Teachers” (page 68) has already detailed some helpful pedagogy books/methods. I would add *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* by Uszler, Gordon, McBride-Smith (Schirmer, 2000) for its comprehensive overview of piano teaching and its extensive reference list. The section on interpretation also has suggestions for a studio library.

Maurice Hinson’s *The Pianist’s Bookshelf* (Indiana University Press, 1998) outlines nearly 700 videos and other resources that have been published in the decade since 1987. It must be remembered that much has been published before and after these dates.

## REPERTOIRE SELECTION

The teacher’s role includes:

- Making sure the choice of music is suitable. The student’s level of musical maturity, technical ability and the size of the hand might be restricting factors
- Choosing from a variety of periods so that the student has exposure to styles including early keyboard, baroque, classical, romantic, twentieth century and contemporary
- Providing a variety of genres: dances, sonatas, nocturnes, etc.
- Choosing from a wide range of composers
- Involving students in choosing repertoire. “Are there any pieces in this book that you want to learn?” or “What composer would you like to study next?”
- Encouraging students to listen to a wide range of music so they can be more informed when helping to choose repertoire
- Getting to know students’ predilections for repertoire selection
- Continuing to sight read, listen to recordings and keep playing new repertoire so that one’s reference list grows
- Maintaining one’s professional development through repertoire, books, seminars, conferences, magazines, DVDs and CDs
- Fostering a love of good music
- Ensuring that the student is feeling, inwardly hearing and completely absorbing all the detail in the score

## THE INSTRUMENT

Do you know the answer to these questions?

- What is the make of your piano? You would be surprised by the number of people who cannot answer that question.
- How long has the manufacturer been in production?
- What is the history of the firm?
- How many pianos does it produce each year?
- Are there any special characteristics that belong just to your piano?

The story of how I came to own my piano began when my university teacher mentioned years ago the name of a fine piano that had impressed him whilst touring in New Zealand. It was a Fazioli and it was this name that caught my eye in a music shop when my husband and I were strolling through a lane in the middle of Bern, Switzerland. We learnt that we would need to take a tram ride to the factory where the instrument was stored and as it was rather late in the day we declined this suggestion. However, it prompted us to contact the Fazioli retailer on our return to Paris and ask if it would be possible to try out the instrument. We arranged to meet the next day and the manager promised to have several instruments tuned for our inspection. On our arrival we found a “six-foot” and a special “ten-foot” concert grand sitting in the showroom and we both excitedly moved from one to the other enjoying the experience. Soon after that a gentleman who was not part of the sales team entered the room. It was Paolo Fazioli who happened to be in Paris to attend a recital that Aldo Ciccolini was presenting in a circus tent at Parc de St Cloud. It was wonderful to talk to the maker and find out about his instruments first hand. He suggested we attend the Ciccolini concert the next night. Finding a circus tent in the middle of a very big park at sunset is another story other than to say that I remember asking my husband to get out his mobile phone in case of a mugging. Our Paris hosts laughed later at our story, incredulous that we could equate the Parc de St Cloud to Central Park, New York. Fortunately, we found the tent in time where a recital of Chopin and Liszt was to take place and were overwhelmed by the power and resonance of this beautiful instrument. Even in a circus tent the sound was magic.

On our return to Australia we ordered a six-foot grand for our studio and three months later it arrived via air. One of the most exhilarating moments for us came as the back of the tightly packed box was opened at the airport to allow the quarantine inspector to have his sniff. The underside of the instrument was a sight to behold with its polished wood and exquisitely finished edges. You can imagine how excited we were on its arrival at home, the instrument was unpacked before our eyes, assembled and then we were able to try out the sound. It was as Fazioli himself had promised – master craftsmanship.

My piano had a relatively easy journey from the opposite side of the world, in comparison to that of icy winter storms of the Straits of Gibraltar and a lumbering carriage ride over muddy roads for the Broadwood piano sent from England to Beethoven. Up-to-date technology such as indicators that change colour if the box is tipped at too much of an angle now enable the transport of an instrument to be monitored over long distances.

It is really thrilling to have an instrument that you love the sound of and the maker is known to you. We have never regretted purchasing such a fine instrument. I am dealing with sound

for hours each day and if it can be the best sound possible how much more enjoyable the day is. Even my youngest students work on this instrument because teaching them about good sound is essential to understanding musicianship. Sometimes, if a student is wearing a large ring with exposed diamonds, I ask for the ring to be taken off. This helps to avoid scratches on the polish when the music gets exuberant. May I give a word of warning here? Do not allow students to place anything on the side of the music stand. A mature-age student took off her ring and placed it in this position. In the heat of the moment when the music was gaining momentum, the reverberations sent the ring inside the piano. We searched in vain until it was spotted on one of the tuning pins camouflaged by the golden tints of the metal frame. I also cover the music stand with a soft cloth so that music files do not scratch it. With these precautions I am more than happy to use the Fazioli for lessons.

J.P. Williams' *The Piano* (Watson-Guptill, 2002) covers the history and special characteristics of pianos. It also has relevant information on voicing, regulating, buying, renovating and caring for pianos.

David Crombie's *Piano – A Photographic History* (Balafon, 1995) gives a clear and interesting history of the instrument. This book came in handy when I took on a five-year-old student who arrived for his first lesson after having fallen asleep in the car. Naturally he was fairly grumpy. I picked up this book and started to turn the pages and talk to myself about the different types and shapes of pianos. Before long he started to look over my shoulder to see what I was talking about. He was then willing to go over to the piano and find out what shape it was under the cover and once there had his head in the belly discovering all sorts of things. We were off and away. I worked really hard to make this initial meeting successful because it could be the making or breaking of music in a person's life. It was the beautiful colour pictures that helped to save the day.

Here are some questions that could be the basis of fun projects for students:

- What is voicing?
- What is regulating?
- What do you need to look for when purchasing a second-hand piano?
- What are favourable temperature and humidity conditions for a piano?
- How often should a technician attend your piano?
- What shape is a lyre, pyramid, square, doggy kennel and cabinet piano?
- How many keys are on the average piano?
- What are the three pedals for?
- Are there dampers for every note?
- How many octaves were in the pianos of Mozart's time?
- There were two main piano types around 1790 – the English and the Viennese. How did these pianos differ?
- How does a grand piano fit through a door?

- What was the piano workshop like in the 1770s, 1830s, 1860s and 1960s?
- When was the iron frame invented?
- What shape is a clavichord?
- What is a short octave?
- What is the difference between a fretted and unfretted clavichord?
- What are the shapes and sizes of harpsichords and spinets?
- How does the touch of a harpsichord differ from that on the piano?
- What is the action of the harpsichord?
- What is the nature of a harpsichord's sound?

## **PIANO CARE**

For the best response from pianos, the temperature and humidity need to be right. A humidity of between 50 and 60 per cent is ideal. Materials such as wood, leather and felt are highly responsive to atmospheric change so they need consistent conditions. Too much humidity can cause rust, sticking keys, a dull hammer action and resultant unclear tone. On the other hand excessive dryness, mostly caused by heating and cooling systems, can be even more damaging. Wooden and felt parts can shrink resulting in the soundboard and joints splitting or coming apart and this can cause extraneous noise. The tuning pins can become loose perhaps putting the piano out of tune. Excessive dryness can be rectified using a humidifier or pot-plants in the room.

Sudden temperature changes should be avoided. A cold room warmed suddenly means that moisture can condense on the strings causing rust. Protection from the elements when the weather is unusually inclement is important. Close windows and make sure that the piano top-board is closed when playing is finished.

The piano's thick cover needs to be aired on fine days. Sudden temperature changes can happen when moving the piano into a room without windows or with windows that let sunlight in.

The piano should not be in direct sunlight.

Ventilation is another important factor. The piano needs some ventilation but should not be in a draught. In the case of upright pianos, against an interior wall is best.

Objects on top of the piano can cause vibrations as well as scratch and damage the case. A vase of flowers if spilled can do serious damage to the action and hammers and rust the metal parts.

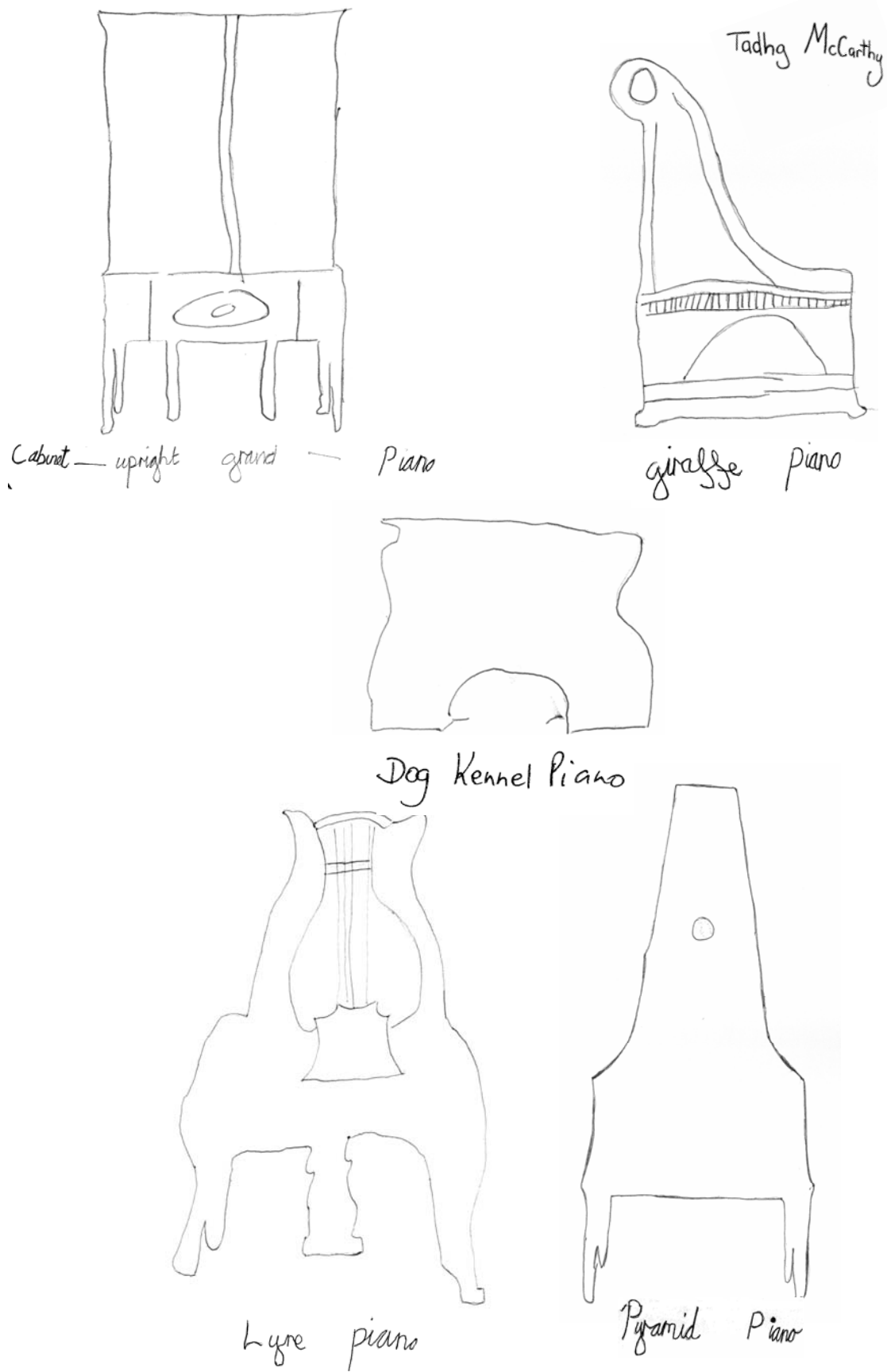


Figure 14. The project of a nine-year-old to outline piano shapes

## PURCHASING AN INSTRUMENT

Whether one opts for a grand or upright depends on circumstances. Points to consider include:

### *The Grand*

- Because of the action, a note can be repeated when the key is only half returned so repetition is faster.
- Touch is more responsive because of the longer key length, giving greater dynamic control.
- Those over the size of five feet (1.5 metres) in length have longer string lengths and larger soundboards than uprights so will be able to generate a larger dynamic range and richer tone.
- It is an aesthetically pleasing addition to any decor.
- When working with instrumentalists and singers, making visual connection between the musicians is easier than with an upright.
- The choice of lid positions makes different levels of sound possible (with the lid closed, small stick, half stick and full sticks).
- The music desk is wider and pages of music can be stretched out.
- Most grand pianos have the middle sostenuto pedal, a selective damping effect.

### *Uprights*

- The shape takes up less floor space than a grand.
- Some uprights have a middle pedal, a mute effect useful for late-night practising.
- Taller upright pianos (over four feet or 1.2 metres) generally produce a richer sound than grand pianos smaller than five feet three inches.
- Uprights are generally less expensive than grand pianos.

### *Electronic*

Pianos have a vibrating string and touch sensitivity which cannot be duplicated on an electronic instrument. Using one of these instruments could be useful to gauge whether the student is serious about piano study. However, if a healthy touch is to be developed, students will soon need a pianoforte.

One of my former pedagogy students rang me distressed because the school where she was to begin teaching had announced just before the start of term that the piano lessons would have to be given on an electronic keyboard. Her dismay was understandable after she had spent

three years training to teach pianoforte plus many years in learning the piano herself. She was a musician specialising in and committed to the classical repertoire. Her area of expertise was classical piano and it was this subject that the students' parents were paying lessons for. She had every right to be teaching on the instrument that she had agreed to teach. If the school wanted a keyboard teacher, that is who they needed to employ. Fortunately, after putting in writing the reasons for her unwillingness to teach on anything other than a piano, the school reconsidered and a piano was made available. If the piano is our choice of career, then we can unashamedly be proud of teaching this wonderful instrument and its enriching repertoire.

#### *Second-hand*

I recommend when purchasing a second-hand instrument that once a piano has been found where the sound and touch are to the buyer's satisfaction, the services of a qualified piano technician be engaged to give a professional opinion. Avoid small pianos as the tone is unsatisfying. Also avoid pianos which have an over-damper system (birdcage actions) because they are hard to service and the damping of the strings can be unreliable.

#### *Makes*

A thorough list of piano makes and their histories is in John-Paul Williams' *The Piano*. This also gives pictorial information, including unusual casework. For instance the Steingraeber & Söhne's model Eucalyptus stunningly contrasts black and eucalyptus panels. This firm also makes an upright piano that can be used by players who do not have use of their legs, positioning the pedal levers wherever the player finds it the most comfortable.

## **GOODBYES**

Piano teaching is not without disappointments. There are patches when students do not achieve what you believe they are capable of. At other times reports and exam results do not reflect a student's true capabilities – we all have good and bad days. There are times when the student seems to sit on a plateau and we wait with anticipation for them to take the next step up. Nevertheless, remember: the tougher the battle the sweeter the victory. A capable student mostly progresses well and quickly and of course this sort of progress produces quiet satisfaction. Where there has been blood, sweat and tears and eventually a musical matter mastered, the feeling can be quite euphoric. Then you begin to understand the special nature of music teaching.

Care needs to be taken not to mix disappointments with failure. If there is musical growth then failure is not part of the equation. The tougher moments are sometimes perplexing and frustrating. The upside is that problems are often the catalyst for finding better ways of teaching.

On rare occasions, I have declined to continue lessons when a student has been disrespectful. This is a hard decision and made only after trying to talk through the problem and the students having the opportunity to change their attitude. I do not regard this as a failure. Human relationships are complex and one personality is not going to click with all student types. Making a stand in such circumstances may be the only opportunity for disrespectful students to learn that such behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable.

The student-teacher dynamic reminds me of the parent-child relationship. Students are on loan to us for just a short while. If we do our job well then they will leave the studio strong and capable musicians. We can feel delighted that we have been a small part of helping them along the way. They leave the studio knowing that with time and work there is no ceiling on

their development. Here are a couple of my favourite comments in letters from students or their parents...

- Isn't it amazing how truly brilliant music just hooks itself into some place inside you? (This is what we wish for the children to carry through their whole lives.)
- I know one of the most important things a teacher can do is to teach their students to teach themselves and I certainly feel well on my way to tackling new material with confidence.
- It isn't easy, yet your belief in me is giving me the courage to take on the piano accompanying at school...
- Thank you for resurrecting my confidence in both myself and my playing. When it comes to performance, I always wrote myself off as a mediocre student and although I'll never be a concert pianist, you have helped me to see that I can create beautiful sounds. You have returned my joy in playing the piano...
- Thank you for putting music into my own hands.

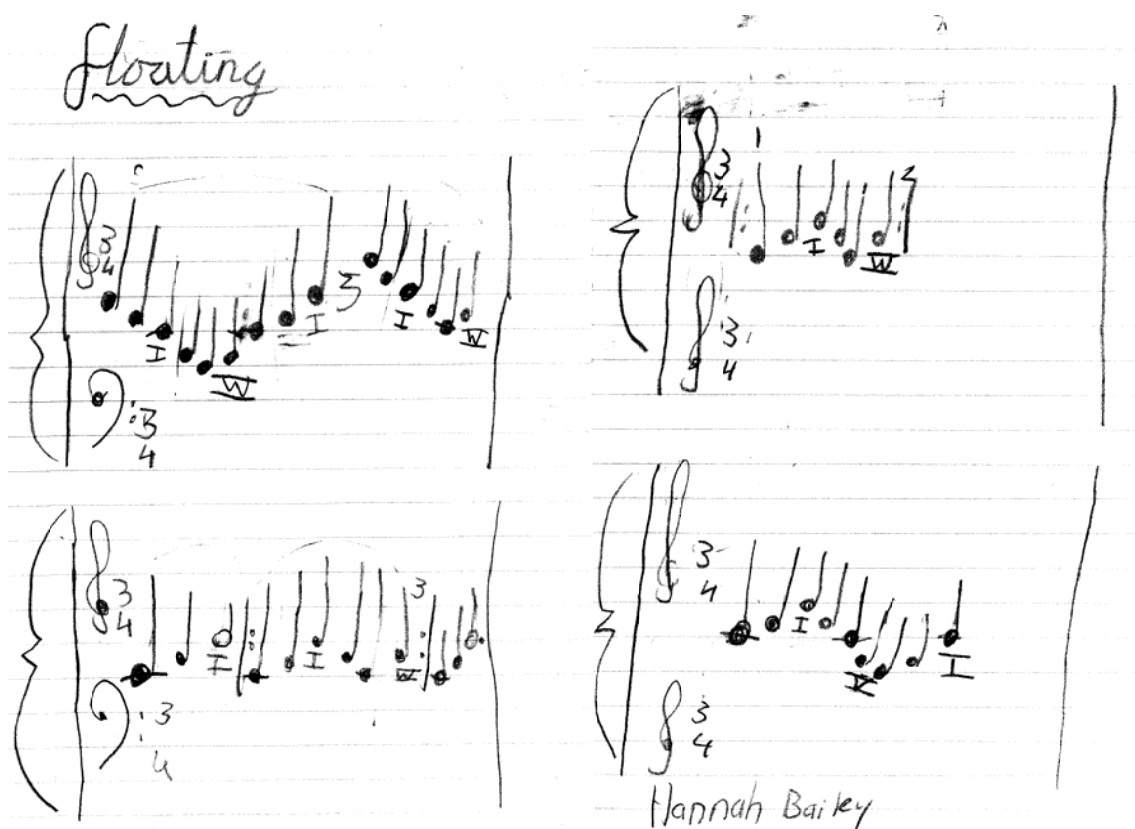


Figure 15. *Floating* by Hannah Bailey

After learning tonic, subdominant and dominant chords and harmonising simple well-known tunes, Hannah brought me her composition. This was completely unsolicited and she was bursting to perform it. What was it that caused her to write her own music with such urgency that she had to get it down on the first piece of paper that came her way? We can learn much from her enthusiasm. The result was an example of originality springing from what she had learnt through past musical experience. When we can tap into this kind of spontaneity and approach to work, then we will reap unique, creative and worthwhile moments. I wish you many rushing-for-a-piece-of-paper moments throughout your teaching careers.



## **APPENDIX: INTERNET SITES**

### **Books to buy**

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

[www.amazon.uk](http://www.amazon.uk)

[www.bamm.com](http://www.bamm.com)

### **Bach**

[jan.ucc.nau.edu/~tas3/bachindex.html](http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~tas3/bachindex.html) (Well-Tempered Clavier)

### **Beethoven**

[www.ludwigvanweb.com](http://www.ludwigvanweb.com)

### **Chopin**

<http://chopin.lib.uchicago.edu> (over 400 first and early editions of Chopin scores)

### **Concerts**

[www.wigmore\\_hall.org.uk](http://www.wigmore_hall.org.uk)

### **Education**

[www.classicalmus.hispeed.com/articles](http://www.classicalmus.hispeed.com/articles)

[www.pianoeducation.org](http://www.pianoeducation.org)

[www.musicteachers.co.uk](http://www.musicteachers.co.uk)

[www.web-helper.net/PDMusic/Biographies](http://www.web-helper.net/PDMusic/Biographies)

### **Music – CDs, DVDs, Videos**

[www.cdnw.com](http://www.cdnw.com)

[www.towerrecords.com](http://www.towerrecords.com)

### **Music Scores**

[www.di-arrezzo.com](http://www.di-arrezzo.com)

[www.sheetmusicplus.com](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com)

### **Free Music**

[www.chopinfiles.com](http://www.chopinfiles.com)

[www.freesheetmusicguide.com](http://www.freesheetmusicguide.com)

[www.mfiles.co.uk](http://www.mfiles.co.uk)

[www.music\\_score.com](http://www.music_score.com)

[www.sheetmusicarchive.net](http://www.sheetmusicarchive.net)

### **Reviews**

[www.andante.com](http://www.andante.com)

[www.gramophone.co.uk](http://www.gramophone.co.uk)

[www.guardian.co.uk/arts](http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts)

[www.nytimes.com/pages/arts/music](http://www.nytimes.com/pages/arts/music)

### **Tuners**

[www.aptta.org.au](http://www.aptta.org.au)

[www.pianotuner.org.uk](http://www.pianotuner.org.uk)

[www.ptg.org](http://www.ptg.org)

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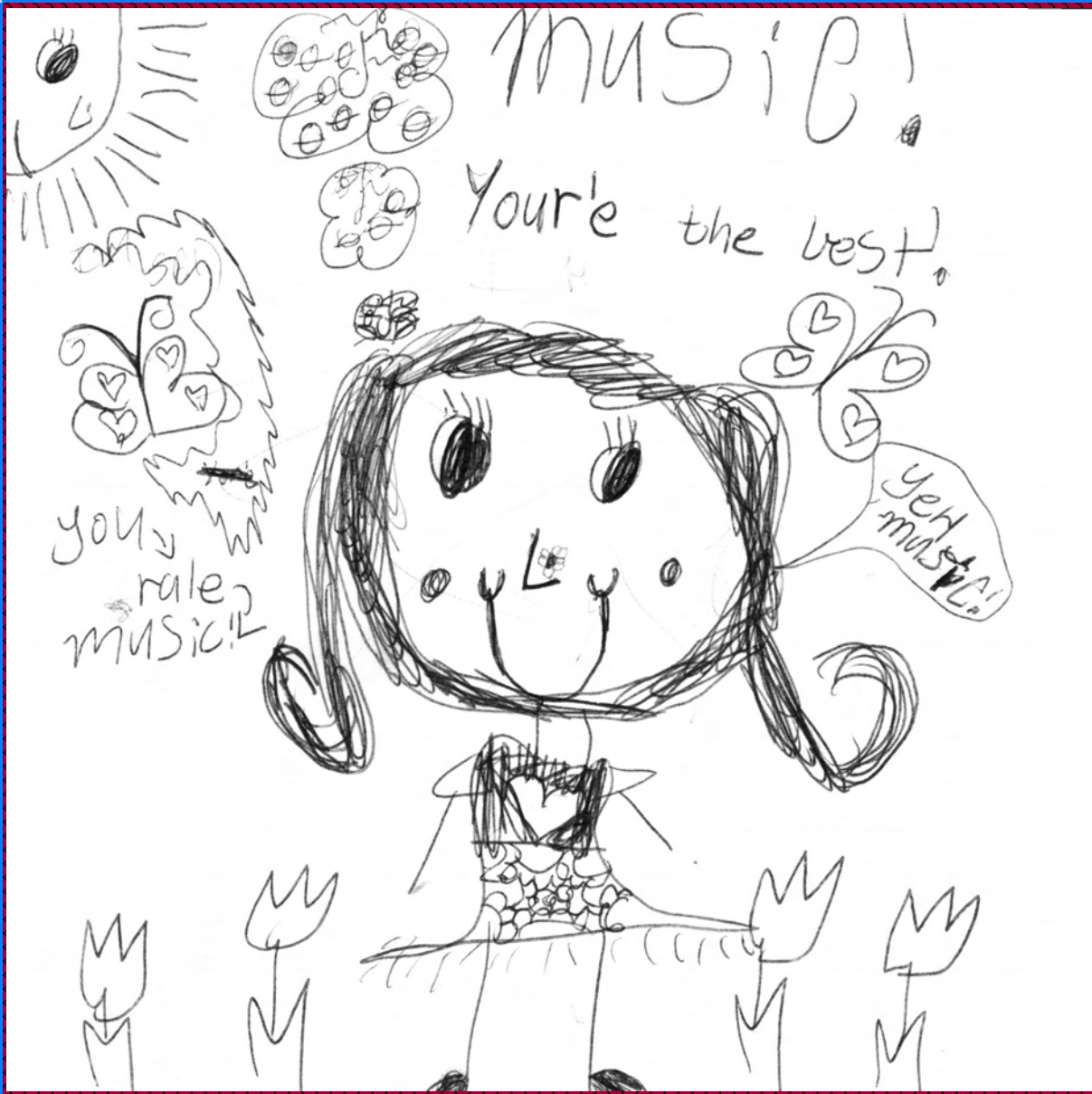


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