Five thoughts for enjoyable exams

I was one of many instrumental students who sat for an AMEB exam every year throughout most of my time at primary and secondary school, and I well remember the feelings of nervousness, stress and even straight-out cold fear in the days and hours before the exam.

Almost everybody experiences some degree of nervousness when put under pressure to perform at their best, but I think I would have enjoyed the process more if my teacher had told me the following five things:

1. The exam is for you!

An AMEB exam is a benchmark, a goal point and an opportunity for external feedback to help guide your progress, and all of these things are aimed at assisting YOU in YOUR musical pursuits. AMEB syllabuses are all designed to progressively equip you with the tools to engage in music making at the best of your ability, and the exams are simply a way to consolidate and check your skills at each stage.

2. The examiners are on your side

As a young student going into a music examination, I imagined that the examiner was waiting to pounce on every error, every slip of intonation and every cracked note that came out of my instrument. In fact, it was exactly the opposite going on - the examiners were listening for my best musical attributes. Thinking of an exam as a chance to reveal your musical strengths rather than hide your weaknesses could be the first step towards a more enjoyable exam experience.

3. Fall in love with your repertoire

Practice time is an absolute joy when you have a genuine love for a piece, and this joy shines through in any performance. When choosing repertoire with or for a student, teachers have a number of things in mind – a particular piece may be perfect for strengthening an area of technique or exploring an aspect of a musical style. A student may connect with that piece immediately, but if not it’s worth spending a little bit of time getting to know it before dismissing it. Listening to recordings of great musicians playing your piece can be a great way to spark a love affair that lasts well beyond the examination date.

4. Get the full picture early

It seems obvious, but one thing that is guaranteed to cause extra stress is being unprepared for an aspect of the examination. So often, students focus on the repertoire component of the exam until the very last moment, and then try to cram their technical work, general knowledge and sight reading in the last few weeks. Getting a picture of the full exam requirements early on and chipping away week by week will help you gain more from all components of the exam and ensure that there is no last-minute panic.

5. Make practice a daily habit

It’s been said before, but the best way to make progress on your instrument is to spend time with it every day. Even if you REALLY don’t feel like practising, it’s easy to squeeze in 15 or 20 minutes. This is so much more enjoyable and productive than a panicked session spanning multiple hours the night before your lesson!

If only I’d known then...

Steven Hodgson,
Head of Publishing, AMEB Federal Office

Speech, Drama, Voice, Communication – The strength of the pack!

At a recent viewing of Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book, (Disney) the law of the jungle recited that ‘the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.’

Now while we are not wolves, it was evident at a recent Professional Development seminar of both Speech and Singing Teachers that we are indeed ‘the strength of the pack’. Bridging the gap and seeing similarities, strengths and exciting developments was the focus of the day, with both Singing and Speech teachers joining together to celebrate ‘the stage.’

Some new developments from the Federal Board about Diplomas on Demand, online examinations and Alternative Examinations were discussed as was a truly exciting collaboration that we now have with The Actor’s Centre here in Adelaide.

South Australia is a vibrant State, where our Artistic mastery is highlighted during ‘mad March’ with the Fringe and Adelaide Festivals and of course echoed throughout the year at various performances which celebrate the art of life – DRAMA!

The Actor’s Centre, Adelaide is a new and dynamic Drama Centre. Students can gain accreditation and mastery of their acting skills right here in S.A. What’s even more exciting is that the dynamic rigour which is part of the Actor’s Centre drama courses is echoed in our own AMEB Speech and Drama syllabuses. So much so, that we are able to unite with the Actor’s Centre to offer their students an opportunity to further their study with the AMEB, sitting both practical and theory examinations and eventually gaining their Associate in Drama and Performance (Performer’s) Diploma. These candidates will use the knowledge and skills gained with The Actor’s Centre along with the knowledge and skills gained through AMEB Speech and Drama, to strengthen their performance skills, ready to propel them toward the next step in their lives.

Speech and Drama has enjoyed a rich history with the AMEB. From its beginnings with Elocution to the move toward the understanding of the Voice (breathing, posture, vocal dynamics, the voice as an instrument, phonetics and physiology) and also of the richness of text in Drama (movement, staging, theatre history, performance – prose, verse, drama, non-fiction texts) found in its Speech and Drama syllabuses, it really is a comprehensive area of study which acknowledges the diversity of life and the multitude of talents in our students. Our syllabuses in Drama and Performance, Voice and Communication, Drama and Communication and Drama and Performance Theory hold something for absolutely everyone out there.

It is through the strength of the syllabus, the diversity of our community, the excitement of new adventures and new collaborations, that we are indeed ‘the strength of the pack’. When we share ideas with colleagues, not just in our own specialities but in building bridges across syllabuses and skills, then our collaboration can really be seen as a celebration of the art of life!

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