How cool is Rockschool?

I have been examining AMEB CPM candidates for a number of years now, but this semester I experienced my first AMEB Rock School London (RSL) exam.

As I am not yet a fully trained RSL examiner, I was asked to oversee the bass guitar grade exam that would be videoed and then sent to Melbourne and on to London for official marking. Rockschool offers both grade exams and performance exams.

At the grade exam an AMEB staff member videoed the exam on an iPad. I was given a script to read from that outlined the exam requirements for the candidate. Each section was clearly laid out for both the examiner and the candidate. Like the AMEB CPM exams, the exam consisted of a number of short pieces, technical exercises, an aural test, a creative improvisation section, a general knowledge section and a sight reading component. There were minor differences in the type of questions asked, but a very similar format is followed. It was clear that the candidate was well prepared for the exam by his teacher, which resulted in a well-executed exam and was reflected in a strong final mark.

As an educator and incoming examiner I have found the RSL publications to be excellent. They cater for beginners through to advanced levels, in drums, bass, guitar, keyboards and vocals. The books are clearly laid out with all exam requirements and are continually updated to include relevant contemporary material. As an RSL examiner I will be expected to examine all of these instruments. Having taught and played in rock bands for many years, I play all of these instruments to a degree, but this will still be a challenging aspect to being an RSL examiner. I am looking forward to completing the training, which will consist of online components and live exams, and hope to be examining many more RSL candidates, with fellow RSL examiner Stuart Storer, in 2017.

Robyn Habel
AMEB Examiner and Trainee Rockschoool Examiner

It’s the excellence that really matters…

I’ve always liked the philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca because he makes me smile. One of his teaching principles was to expect the worst, and if that doesn’t happen, then rejoice! A little extreme, but it does give you a smile doesn’t it?

As a Speech and Drama practitioner I can also smile at the view he held that Life’s like a play: it’s not the length, but the excellence of the acting that matters.

I’ve been really fortunate recently to experience that excellence of acting in the lives of some adult students with an incredible passion for acting. They come from diverse backgrounds – law, psychology and there’s even an electrician in the mix; yet, they are working for several hours each week to achieve their Associate Diplomas in Drama and Performance. They are skilled and committed performers, willing to take a risk and put it all on the line and play life, with excellence in acting.

There’s no doubt that the AMEB Drama and Performance syllabus is one which asks nothing but excellence. Yet, it is an achievable syllabus! Students learn so much about speech, voice, movement, physicality, literature, history and of course drama! They become excellent at reading prose, verse, drama, essays, diaries and so on. They can show their versatility as an actor and as a person through a great variety of performances, all managed themselves. They become the stage director, set designer, music director and actor in one examination and there is nothing more satisfying in the world for them than to do this with excellence.

At the local branch of Actor’s Centre Australia (ACA Adelaide), students are working incredibly hard to also study Speech and Drama. They have spent the last few months working individually and in ensemble performance to learn about drama, characterisation and most importantly, conveying the emotional truth of stories. In collaboration with Adrian Barnes from the ACA Adelaide we have been able to take a chance and give eight students a chance to really demonstrate excellence of performance as they take the ‘Next Step’ not only within the Actor’s Centre course, but also in doing an AMEB Speech and Drama course, which recognises their skill and prior learning, taking it to a new level, developing talent, fostering talent, watching talent grow and thrive.

It is important to recognise the skills and talents in all our students – to step ‘outside the box’ and see that all experiences of life can contribute to incredible performances, because Seneca was right when he said Life really is like a play and as Shakespeare says “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players”. So we play our own part in helping our candidates achieve excellence and in December at the AMEB Award’s Ceremony, I invite you to take the time to celebrate our adventures and successes.

Louise Borgo
Speech and Drama Examiner and Advisor