Confident Scales

There is one segment of the AMEB exam that manages to invoke fear and trepidation in some candidates – SCALES! However, with thoughtful preparation early in the year, and with some regular encouragement and imagination on the part of teachers, this apprehension can be avoided. It is possible to be confident with technical work!

Young students seem to be innately wired to be competitive. 'Who was the fastest?' 'How long did I last?' 'What was the best time?' – this type of question is quite common for a younger age group. If this natural competitiveness can be harnessed in a useful way, without any negative connotations (eg: I was the slowest, I achieved the lowest time, etc) then it can be a useful teaching tool. The use of charts to plot an individual student's progress can be a motivating practice tool. By measuring a student's individual metronome markings with specific scales, progress can easily be seen on a weekly basis. This type of chart could also include specifics such as variations in touch and volume. The student could tick off each aspect when achieved comfortably. When viewed over an entire term, students will feel a tangible sense of achievement in this area – particularly when rewarded with stickers or prizes!

With slightly older students, this form of micro-managing may be less important. Even so, a simple tick chart to complete in each practice session may provide an extra prompt as to what needs to be covered. Often reminders are useful! As the range of scales increases, with some instruments so the difficulties of the extremities of range are encountered. Encouraging students to spend the majority of their time practising the 'tip of the iceberg' rather than mindlessly playing through passages they have already mastered, with help them avoid 'scale fatigue'! Spending 80% of the time practising the difficult 20% of the scale makes sense, and can help to build some good habits that will hopefully overflow into their preparation of repertoire.

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