



Strictly Speaking ...

For young pianists who have difficulties with rhythm, most teachers recommend the use of a metronome, but few students actually take their advice.

They find it difficult to make friends with the metronome, or to use it on any regular basis, because they can always hear it ticking away merrily in the background ... and this can be very distracting! Students seldom realise that if they were able to play *exactly* in time with the metronome they would hardly hear it at all, because the initial, percussive sound of the hammer hitting the string can actually cover the ticking sound, rendering it almost inaudible.

While it is probably unwise to practise playing whole pieces with the metronome, it is always useful for checking speeds, bearing in mind that any **metronome marks printed in grey type are only editorial suggestions**. It can also be used for controlling the tempo in various sections of a longer work, and it is especially helpful in the preparation of classical works – particularly slow movements – where students often succumb to the temptation of playing the simpler passages more quickly: that is, bars with 32 demisemiquavers will often last longer than bars with simple quavers and crotchets!

Two simple exercises provide an excellent opportunity to introduce students to metronome work without them having to experience unnecessary musical frustration:

- (1) Set the metronome on a slow tempo and play a slow scale over one or two octaves, one note per beat; begin by using an even tone, and then progress gradually to extreme forms of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. The aim should be to 'cover' (hide) the ticking sound, and the exercise literally hammers home the point that when playing loudly, there is much more time for the hand to relax between one note and the next.
- (2) With the metronome on its slowest speed, learn to subdivide the long beat by clapping or tapping 2's, 3's, 4's, 5's, 6's and 7's, eventually changing regularly from one to another. Begin with simple 2's and 4's before you progress to 3's, as this exercise is much harder than you might think!