



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 will 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