New Piano Syllabus and Publications

Every new AMEB syllabus is discussed and debated by a panel of examiners representing each state of Australia. Additions and changes are made with due consideration for concerns registered with the Federal Office by teachers and other interested parties. Generally the changes in the new syllabus have been small - the actual repertoire "refreshed" to replace long-used material, more contemporary works included, and this year a Certificate of Performance has been introduced.

The works presented in the SERIES 16 Grade Books make an attractive and interesting custom. Be careful in your reading of the technical work and check the new Technical Work Book which has the material for each grade very clearly set.

In that this format of the Manual has been published for many years only the occasional misprint, the editor's standard of proficiency being commendable. Fortunately the latest publication struggled with difficulties "out the scenes", resulting in a number of errors. You'll find RIFICATIONS on the AMEB site. Those who haven't yet ventured into the computer world, print-outs are available from our local office.

Enjoy!

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For examination in all new syllabi, please refer to the current Manual of Syllabuses. For Piano, Saxophone and Clarinet, both the 2009 Manual of Syllabuses (yellow cover) and the 2008 Manual (black and grey cover) are examinable in 2009. It is important for teachers NOT to mix the requirements of the two examinable syllabi. Please note which grade books and technical work are specifically required for examination in each syllabus as listed in the Manual of Syllabuses.

Swinging Ideas

As a recent addition to the AMEB team of violin and viola examiners I have increasingly become aware of the importance of the position of the left elbow in all grades of violin and viola students.

The elbow should never be rigidly set. Whatever its basic placement, it changes position beneath the instrument as the fingers move across the strings. When the fingers approach the lowest string, the elbow should swing to the right and for the upper strings to the left except when engaging the higher positions, where it should naturally move to the right.

This is basically an arm steering technique and indeed the German word for it is "Armsteuerung". The problems occur particularly when the arm is under far enough to play on the lowest string with ease and richness of tone, but during string crossing to the higher strings some students neglect to engage the elbow, and, with the left arm unyielding, the left hand loses its basic framework, the fingers become more arched and the wrist may kink backwards, resulting in increased tension.

When the fingers approach the lowest string, the elbow should swing to the right and for the upper strings to the left except when engaging the higher positions.

This may cause problems with sound, pitch, shifting, vibrato, stamina and the general efficiency of the hand.

This is the challenge confronted in its initial stage in Preliminary Grade of the AMEB Technical Work Book 2001, page 10-Exercise 3 "Copy Cat Pinkie Swings." Despite the detailed description, many young students still come to the examination with a rigid left elbow position. The exercise demonstrates the ability of the arm to swing from side to side, and, as in all exercises, the technique should be translated and used in all aspects of playing. Utilizing this technique will aid comfort and relaxation of the left elbow. This in turn will free up the left hand and fingers, enabling them to perform at their best.

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