

Preparing for diplomas



For advanced students who have demonstrated a strong personal engagement with music, preparing for a diploma examination can be a rewarding and stimulating project. Compared with the level 2 examinations that precede them, the Associate and Licentiate diplomas have a format that is closer to a concert than to

a conventional examination. There are two examiners and the repertoire consists mostly of standard concert works that require sustained confidence, maturity and concentration.

As teachers, we play a key role in assisting students to achieve their maximum potential at this level. Our first task is to help them select repertoire that is challenging yet achievable. It should allow them to demonstrate their strengths while also covering the required range of stylistic and technical elements. Rigorous early learning is critical. We all know what happens when houses are built on shoddy foundations. It is the same with music. Fingering and other technical tools, together with a “grammatical” understanding of the music, need to be set as priorities from the outset. As familiarity deepens, extra layers of engagement and sophistication are added. Finally, once all ingredients are in place, comes the “cooking” time

– those final weeks when the emphasis changes from learning the notes to exploring and communicating the music.

This is the stage where trial performance opportunities can be extremely helpful. Strategies can include making audio or video recordings for evaluation and presenting home recitals for family and friends. Also worth considering is the opportunity the **AMEB** provides for **performance evaluations**. These enable the candidate to play an excerpt from their program to an experienced examiner, who provides feedback that can be used as a focus for continuing preparation.

While it is assumed that diploma candidates will be able to demonstrate a level of technical competence commensurate with the demands of the repertoire, equally important is the level of expressive ownership that is displayed. A mature focus upon the music itself, rather than merely the mechanics of playing it, will ensure the richest rewards. It is this that engages both the performer and the listener and represents what music is truly about.

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