Brass exam preparation

At the AMEB seminar in January, I met with several brass teachers and examiners to discuss how to manage problems in exams, and if possible avoid them in the first place. Our discussions are summarised below.

When a candidate is fully prepared, and informed, the exam should generally go smoothly for all. Unfortunately, there are occasionally glitches that can unsettle a candidate.

To ensure the best possible result for your student’s brass exam preparation is of course the key.

It may seem obvious, but it is important to ensure the candidate is entered for the correct subject. There is a significant difference between the Band syllabus and the Orchestral Brass syllabus requirements. Careful reading of the syllabus is vital for your student’s success.

Correct repertoire choice, from the appropriate lists, can be an issue also. The syllabus is quite clear on the choices available. Extra lists are essential but they give the student great flexibility to explore music beyond the syllabus.

Technical work when prepared well will give your student confidence in the presentation of his or her exam. It is important for the student to know which set he or she is presenting. In fact it will help to actually mark the set on the exam slip to be presented to the examiner. The Technical work requirements are set out also in the relevant technical work books, grades 1-4, and from grade 5 and above sets of scales are set out in the syllabus.

If an examiner mistakenly asks for technical work from the wrong set, encourage your student to mention this to the examiner, rather than feel pressured into performing it. It can be as simple as saying, ‘I haven’t learnt that one.’

All works requiring accompaniment must be performed with accompaniment, except for the extra list works. Try to ensure the accompanist arrives at the exam venue in time for a relaxed warm up before the exam.

Other issues that seem to affect confidence are the aural and sight reading sections of the exam. Quite often it is obvious that these are the ‘forgotten’ sections, and only worked on at the last minute. Regular work on these sections over the course of the exam preparation, can greatly aid a candidate’s confidence, not only in this section, but across the whole exam.

The AMEB aims to make the exam process a positive experience for the candidate. Candidates need to be as fully prepared as possible, so the candidate can relax and present well. As examiners, we understand, and respect, the work required by students, teachers and families in preparing for an exam, and want each candidate to achieve their best possible performance on the day.

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