New Syllabuses
We are delighted to announce two new syllabuses being released in 2015: Musical Theatre and The Guitarist.

Musical Theatre will fill a gap in our current vocal offerings that will appeal to this popular and growing part of the marketplace. Music theatre is being offered at tertiary institutions such as WAAPA and VCA and is also serviced at a beginning level by a large (and growing) number of privately run schools and studios. AMEB’s Musical Theatre syllabus will begin with Preliminary and culminate with Licentiate and will appeal to the younger beginner, mature age enthusiasts and those students wanting to go on to a tertiary degree. Grade Books will be available from Preliminary to Grade 4 and publications will also include a technical work book composed specifically for this syllabus.

The Guitarist is a contemporary/popular guitar syllabus that will form an alternative to the current CPM Guitar syllabus. The syllabus covers Preliminary to Grade 8 and is crowned by a Certificate of Performance. Grade books will be available from Preliminary to Grade 8 and other supporting resources will be provided. The Guitarist will appeal to schools and studios teaching contemporary guitar to children, older students and adults looking to expand their musical life.

Reviewed Syllabuses
Musicianhip has been reviewed and the syllabus from 2016 will take a new form. Grades 1-6 will remain the same as they are now. Grades 7-8 will be removed. There will be two Diplomas: Associate and Licentiate and these will be concentrated on aural at a very sophisticated level. This means those people wanting to undertake higher level harmony, counterpoint, musicianhip or orchestration should look to the Theory of Music syllabus and those wanting to develop their aural skills to a very high level should use the Musicianhip syllabus.

The Brass syllabuses are being reviewed and the manual lists will be updated from 2016. This will be a progressive release over a number of years as we work through the syllabuses and we will keep you up to date with the order of the syllabus releases.

Recorded Accompaniments
I am pleased to announce that the first release of recorded accompaniments for Violin, Flute and Percussion are now available as CDs and as digital downloads through the iStore and Google Play. Our first app, MyTempo, is also available for download and this can be used to change the tempo of the recordings for practice purposes.

I am aware there has been some opposition to the introduction of Recorded Accompaniments and even suggestions of ‘controversy’ surrounding the release but this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding in the rationale behind them. The principal objection from the dissenters is that it is better to play with a professional accompanist than a recording. This, of course, is true. AMEB agrees with this. More than that, AMEB encourages and endorses the use of professional accompanists wherever this is possible. So AMEB and the dissenters are in complete agreement on this ‘controversial’ point.

The real question for AMEB is one of access and equity. Independently conducted research has made it very clear that the difficulty of accessing an accompanist is a major barrier to undertaking an AMEB exam. If a student comes from an area that doesn’t have an accompanist, or is unable to afford an accompanist that student is effectively barred from undertaking an AMEB exam.

AMEB sees innovation through the suitable use of technology as an important part of our educational future. The release of online written exams is a very successful example of this. Recorded Accompaniments program is another innovation that will continue to make AMEB exams as affordable and accessible as possible.

Please remember that using Recorded Accompaniments is optional.

Bernard Depasquale
General Manager, Federal Office
Why take an exam?

Every year thousands of Australians of all ages sit AMEB exams in music and speech & drama for a variety of reasons. Many take exams at the advice of their teacher, or as a prerequisite for tertiary entrance or as a benchmark of their education or for recognition of their year’s hard work and achievement.

Preparing for exams can be challenging and time-consuming and sometimes the effort and time required to complete an exam seem insurmountable.

How do you respond to the question, ‘So why sit an AMEB exam at all?’

Here are 5 good reasons why it really is worth it after all:

1. To assist in setting goals
   Preparing for an exam requires a significant amount of planning and hard work. Exams provide clearly defined goal posts that are a powerful motivating force. Leading musicians and educators set realistic and appropriate goals within AMEB syllabuses and examinations are an opportunity for students to measure themselves against these goals.

2. To encourage the development of a broader range of skills
   AMEB exams challenge students not only to perform repertoire on their instrument or subject of choice, but also to demonstrate other important skills like sight reading, technical prowess, aural recognition and general knowledge. These additional requirements support their learning and provide context and meaning to the experience. Gaining this full range of skills supports their overall music education creating successful musicians and giving them the tools required to develop into well-rounded, professional players.

3. To gain valuable performance experience
   For many people, one of the hardest parts of taking an exam is presenting your programme on stage in front of an audience of strangers. Performing in front of others helps to develop poise and confidence: life skills that are useful for all sorts of future endeavours including making presentations, public speaking or even just giving a toast at a party.

4. To get constructive feedback
   Every candidate that completes an exam receives a personal written report from their examiner. This independent feedback encourages the student to progress by highlighting areas of strength and weakness under performance conditions to help guide students in their development.

   The feedback provided can confirm issues previously identified by the teacher and also introduce areas for improvement and further study.

5. To recognise achievement
   Each successful candidate receives an official certificate and examinations are an opportunity for students to measure their year’s hard work and achievement. Most students completing exams are not necessarily on their way to becoming professional musicians or actors. That being said, there is overwhelming evidence that childhood music and speech education leads to well-rounded, high performing adults across all fields. For students to set and then achieve a goal such as an exam, they are learning the value of hard work, discipline, and the incredible feats they are capable of in their lives ahead.

AMEB practical examination candidates are encouraged to consider presenting their own composition as an Extra List piece.

The composition can take any form: for example, it might be an accompanied or unaccompanied instrumental or vocal solo, or a duet with a melody played on iPad, or a piece of music for keyboard, or a piece of music created just using the sounds produced by fingerling the key-work on a saxophone.

For the purpose of examination, a score of such a composition needs to be provided for the examiner.

The following are some suggestions about how such a score might be created and presented:

- a score created using music notation software such as Sibelius, or the free cross-platform music notation program MuseScore which is available for download at https://musescore.org
- a score in graphic notation – this might be in the form of a grid, or it could be just a single line along which instructions to the performer are written. The graphic notation represents the sounds to be played – it should show pitch (eg specific notes, high/low), duration (eg. using a time signature, bar lines, numbers of repetitions, or length in seconds) and other performance instructions

Some Composition tips:

- give the composition a title
- give the composition cohesion and structure (eg. binary, ternary, sequence, echo, call and response)
- give the composition rhythmic and/or melodic interest
- indicate articulations and dynamic contrasts
- if there is an improvised section, the score needs to provide information about what will be happening – eg. the length of the improvised section (number of bars/seconds/repetitions) and particular notes or rhythmic patterns that might be used as the basis for improvisation.

On the score, include the name of the composer, the instrumentation, and the performance tempo (in words, or as a metronome mark)

A descriptive paragraph could accompany the work, providing performance instructions about musical style and intent.

I look forward to hearing candidates’ compositions!

Anna Lester, AMEB examiner

Candidates’ own compositions

Motivate your students

For those teachers looking for a way to motivate your students, help is on the way.

Teachers who attended to 2015 AMEB Information Day were shown a website that uses awards and rewards called

http://heatherlucaspianolessons.com.au

Most students enrolled on this website, practise 7 days a week, working towards a reward they really want.

Progress on the new site, that other enthusiastic teachers will be able to trial, in an upcoming beta test, is going ahead in leaps and bounds. We are aiming for start up at the commencement of Term 3 2015.

Just email us: heather@heatherlucaspianolessons.com.au if you would like to be added to the beta test.
Ownership, commitment and ongoing reward

Since the formal release of Piano Series 17 in December last year, many teachers have been introduced to the repertoire through seminars and workshops organised by the AMEB and by teacher organisations. It has been wonderful to witness the enthusiasm with which the series is being received.

All the material was selected because of its distinctive and accessible musical character. Each of the pieces invites players to explore and experience the music in their own particular way. Perhaps the most valuable role a teacher can play is to lead their students towards this kind of ownership and commitment, assisting them to see what gives each piece its own special character, and helping every player to make the music their own. Once experienced, this level of personal engagement provides the framework for maximum satisfaction and achievement, together with the incentive for active and sustained learning.

Any series of grade books will show a progressive level of difficulty from one grade to the next. Music can throw out many different types of challenge, not confined to the purely technical. For example, some pieces may demand refined listening skills and call for precisely judged quality, balance and blend of tone. Others may require the player to make sense of surprising harmonic and expressive digressions, or pose special problems of style or musical characterisation. As a teacher, I have always sought to ensure that every student plays at least some repertoire that lies well inside their technical capacity, enabling them to experience the expressive core of a work without being constantly pre-occupied with technical concerns. This does not mean that such works are “easy”. Rather, they explore aspects that go beyond the purely mechanical.

In Series 17, the majority of works in each grade are entirely consistent with the normal technical expectations for the level. Occasionally, there may be one piece that extends the technical demands just a little further. Conversely, there may sometimes be a work that contains less technical complexity but which demands special musical and expressive awareness. Such pieces, when they are encountered, are certainly not to be regarded as “easy options”. On the contrary, players who present them will be expected to demonstrate a level of finesse and musical insight commensurate with the expressive demands of the works themselves.

The point of all this is to emphasise that music is much more than mere accuracy of notes and note values. The aim is always to translate the notes on the page into convincing and personalised expressive gestures. Each player will bring their own background and experience to the music that they play. This is what makes one player’s interpretation different from another’s, and such individuality is to be celebrated. I hope that Series 17 will provide teachers and students with a personal and rewarding musical experience that invites ongoing engagement and commitment.

Emeritus Professor
David Lockett AM

Saturday 22nd August. Venue to be advised.

This year AUSTA SA will organise a Performance Day for string students doing AMEB exams in the latter half of the year. The aim of this event is to give students a chance to experience playing their pieces in a performance situation similar to their exam. We have timed this event so that the feedback and suggestions given in written reports can be acted on before the real exam.

Some of the gains to be had from a ‘preview’ performance include a gaining of knowledge of which sections of the pieces are least well known, or unsure regarding intonation, rhythm, or tone. Playing through the pieces without breaks helps the students prepare their concentration for the duration of the performance or exam length. Very helpful is the confidence gained by having to continue on without stopping, even if the performance is not going so well. This confidence is then carried into the exam and relieves some of the performance anxiety.

Students are encouraged to use the accompanist they will be playing with at the exam, but if this is not possible we will have professional accompanists on hand that they can use. If you need an accompanist please let us know 2 weeks in advance and from Grade 4 and upwards we will get you to directly contact the accompanist to arrange final details.

We will use AMEB examiners to write brief reports and if sufficient numbers of players enrol we will have an instrument specific adjudicator for cello.

The performance should include List pieces only, no scales or extra lists.

Costs up to Grade 3 $15, Grades 4-5 $20 and Grades 6-8 $30
For details and Registration Form, contact Agnes at austasa@hotmail.com

A musical marriage…

Those of us who love the Performing Arts, love really good Musical Theatre! So it’s no surprise that Singing teachers have teamed up with Speech and Drama teachers to work on a syllabus that will reflect a marriage made in heaven – that of musical theatre!

It’s an exciting development for the AMEB and one which many singing teachers and Speech & Drama teachers will no doubt embrace with their students. Already the Adelaide Eisteddfod Speech, Drama and Communication Division has a Musical Theatre section for students who love the stage and can explore their talents.

We’re really looking forward to the development of the new AMEB Musical Theatre syllabus and the opportunities which will arise from it. But where did it begin for us?

Of late, Singing teachers and Speech teachers have been getting together! We shared a professional development day several years ago and the past two Information Days have seen a combined professional development seminar aimed at the particular needs of both Singing and Speech teachers.

At the recent AMEB Information Day in January, Speech and Singing teachers and students discussed the importance of emotional truth in performance, how breathing affects the delivery of this authentic emotional truth and how it can be best taught and practised amongst our students. It was interesting to learn about the different types of breathing, their purposes and the varying approaches to teaching that the Singing teachers and Speech and Drama teachers employ.

At the end of the day, we found that we have much to learn from each other. Speech and Drama students can learn from singers, and from becoming singers themselves, a different way of presenting emotional truth and authenticity in their performances. Singing students can learn different ways of presenting their work through the use of movement and physical expression.

After all, it is all about the authenticity of the theatre, encouraging our audiences to delve a little into the world of the performer, to be a little mesmerised and a little changed from the experience.

The launch of the AMEB’s Musical Theatre Syllabus is an exciting development for both the Singing and Speech communities.

Louise Borgo and Stella Panozzo
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.

Geoff Bradley, AMEB Brass Advisor