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

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. 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!

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 delive 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 Panazzo

AUSTA Performance Day

for String Players doing AMEB exams in September and later sessions

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 what sections of the pieces are least well known, or unsure regarding intonation, rhythm, or tone. Playing through the pieces without breaks helps the students prolong 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 they 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 $25 and Grades 6-8 $30

For details and Registration Form, contact Agnes at austasa@hotmail.com

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