

NEPTA TEACHERS' EXCHANGE

Monday, December 8, 2014

HOW TO PREPARE TO PLAY MUSICALLY

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A.B.R.S.M. PIANO EXAMS and CONCERTO PREPARATION

Thuyen Phiet spoke of her background in Vietnam, and in France where she studied with Jules Gentil and Alfred Cortot and received a lot of exposure to Western music. Since then she has acquired over 40 years' experience teaching in conservatories, colleges and private studios in Vietnam and the United States. Out of this experience, she gathered motivation to develop a piano method with an emphasis on the musicality of rhythm, playing fluently, correctly and musically.

This approach by the rhythm became the "See-Hear-Play" Thuyen Phiet Piano Method. She spoke of the many activities today's students have and the need for efficient practicing for maximum achievement in a minimum of time. She advises using rhythm as the core of the process. She describes this method: an application of the theory on keyboard; keeping the concentration on rhythm; use the counting to read the notes; see the staff to read; see the keyboard to put fingers; hear the sound value of each note; play the singing counting.

This is an easy way for the student to learn to practice accurately. It provides a clear explanation of the theory, and easy application for playing. It is easier for teachers to use and to teach. For more information visit her website at www.phietpianomethod.com.

She provided a handout with graphics on learning to read notes and their location on the keyboard: how to use your eyes to read the notes.

Then she showed us a video of a busy student practicing the 1st movement of Mozart's Sonata in G, K.283. She coached the student throughout the exposition and into the development in an efficient manner keeping the rhythm at the core, for example, several times practicing the counting out loud before playing.

Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian spoke about applying the See-Hear-Play method to students of more advanced literature. To learn a phrase, sing the phrase. If you want to know how to play it, sing it. She advised that singing the counting organizes the music going forward. She spoke of the organizing force of rhythm starting with the heartbeat. Singing counting provides a foundation. Singing counting helps one learn faster and shows understanding. Hearing our own voice speeds up learning. One is more likely to hear mistakes. One who is more involved practicing is less likely to be distracted. Sing and count

different voices to find hidden elements in the music. Singing counting helps one connect physically and intellectually. It's a special way of listening.

Winnie Ip spoke about The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) exams. She gave us a brief 125 year history of ABRSM. It was set up in London and is run by some of the most prominent musicians in Britain. A network of local representatives in the UK was established immediately. 1893 marked the year of the first international exams which were held in South Africa. In 1897 the Prince of Wales wrote to universities in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand seeking to set up exam centers, "By adopting the standards and Syllabus used in Great Britain throughout the Colonies, we shall unify the system of musical examination which is currently in the Old Country in all parts of the Empire." 1986 marked the year when exams first started in the United States. The first exam in Boston was in 1990. Winnie Ip was a recipient of the LRSM (Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music) diploma and a grade 8 music theory candidate before being appointed ABRSM Boston representative in 1991. There are now 5 exam centers in the area: Boston, Cambridge, Andover, Worcester, and Nashua, NH. Almost 80% of the candidates internationally are for the piano practical.

The ABRSM exam is a comprehensive system. There are choices in the syllabus. Each list A, B, C has 6 pieces to choose from and candidates choose 1 piece to play in the exam out of each list. There are scales and arpeggios, sight reading and aural listening on each grade exam.

Administration of ABRSM: The head office is in London, UK and about 120 staffs work in UK. There is also an ABRSM office in New York.

There are over 600 trained examiners. Marking the grade is uniform. The examiners are moderated every 2 to 3 years and undergo continuous professional development throughout the year at conferences and seminars.

There are 2 practical exams per year. Winnie gave us a folder which included a copy of Libretto magazine; a brochure about "Getting Started"; and, booklets regarding Exam Information & Regulations, Motivating Musical Achievement, Piano Syllabus 2015 & 2016, and These Music Exams. She also gave us a handout of current dates and fees.

While one is taking the exam, the examiner will be filling out a mark form and comment sheet. After the candidate finishes the exam, the examiner will add up the points. Grading of exams: 100 pass, 120 and up passed with merit, and 130 and up passed with distinction.

Music theory exams, Grade 5 is a prerequisite for practical grade 6, 7, and 8. For more information visit the website www.abrsm.org.

Lucille Keril was the first teacher to come to Winnie to participate in the ABRSM exams. She says the exams aren't for everyone, but those that participate are given goals. They have a clear path to another level and can see how they're progressing. Ear training is very important. One can watch Youtube videos of the exams. There are Theory textbooks available as well as specimen exams. Those that pass receive a very nice certificate and a concert is presented of the high achievers. Winnie says the grades 6, 7, and 8 Theory is like college level. Lucille includes Theory in the lesson as an extended lesson.

Robert Finley spoke of Preparing Students to play Concertos with Orchestra, and Preparing Students to play chamber music.

Benefits of playing concertos with orchestra

- Unique and exciting experience for student
- Collaboration with up to 70 other musicians
- A “guest” soloist
- An all-encompassing event including solo, chamber music, accompaniment, etc.
- Helps to develop student into well rounded musician

Choice of concerto and preparation

- For first concerto, start with something easy
- Haydn, Mozart, slow movement of concerto
- Learn solo part just like learning any other piece, learn it well
- Extremely important to know orchestral part
- Student must listen to performance, follow in orchestral score
- Topics such as balance, synchronization and timing must be explained
- Student must know when he is playing solo, accompanying orchestral instruments and being accompanied
- Importance of looking at conductor’s baton for timing
- Practice with accompanist on 2nd piano is essential
- Accompanist can be teacher or someone else
- Student must have meeting with conductor to discuss tempi
- Student must have at least one rehearsal with orchestra before performance
- Teacher must attend rehearsal and listen for ensemble and balance
- Soloist must not be drowned out by orchestra, and *p* or *pp* is relative. Maybe have to play louder than expected to be heard
- Recordings of rehearsal and performance very useful

Teaching aids for concerto preparation

- Listen to recordings
- Music Minus One: useful to hear accompaniment but not very useful as an accompaniment
- Home Concert Xtreme: MIDI-based software that provides synthesized accompaniment that follows soloist

Opportunities to play Concertos

- IP piano school concerto concerts: www.ippianoschool.com
- California Concerto Weekend (adult amateurs): www.californiaconcerto.org
- PianoTexas Festival concerto competitions for young artists (very high standard), adult amateurs, piano teachers: www.pianotexas.org
- Some suburban orchestras have concerto competitions
- Some piano competitions have concertos as final round

Multimedia

- California Concerto Weekend:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3tlZ3S2-Nc>

- Piano Texas Concerto Competition:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fj616OsypLY&list=UUFEL5baK_NVYY9-gmCuQccw

- IP Piano School Concertos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_WbkIkiOW8

Choice of chamber music and preparation

- Perhaps start with duo, piano and violin, build up to trios, quartets etc
- Learn solo part and parts played by other instruments
- Student must listen to recordings, follow in score
- Topics such as balance, synchronization and timing must be explained
- Student must know when he is playing solo, accompanying other instruments and being accompanied

Choice of work and preparation

- Teacher must know work being studied well and listen for ensemble and balance
- Recordings of rehearsal and performance very useful.

Teaching aids for chamber music preparation

- Listen to recordings
- Music Minus One: useful to hear accompaniment but not very useful as an accompaniment
- Home Concert Xtreme: MIDI-based software that provides synthesized accompaniment that follows soloist.

Opportunities to play Chamber Music

- IP piano school www.ippianoschool.com
- Music Camps, Summer Schools and festivals, eg Worcester Chamber Music Society
www.worcesterchambermusic.org
- NEC arranges chamber music weekend (contact Gillian Rogell)
- PianoTexas Festival provides chamber music opportunities for young artists, adult amateurs and teachers
www.pianotexsa.org
- ACMP Chamber Music Network: worldwide directory of chamber musicians, arranges sessions and courses:
acmp.net

Appalachian Mountain Club sponsors chamber music and hiking etc
Amcboston.org

Benefits of playing chamber music

- Enjoyable experience to play with small group of musicians
- Collaboration with one to 4 other musicians
- Huge variety of chamber music for pianists from duos to quintets
- Integral part of group
- Pianist has to be solo player, accompanist, blending in with other players. An art in itself.
- Helps to develop student into well rounded musician