



# Jon's Teaching Group Spring 2005

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*Happy (very late) New Year!!!*

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**Welcome** to the fifth group newsletter, and I would like to wish everybody late New Year's Greetings! Many thanks for the generosity shown through gifts and cards, it is all highly appreciated, and despite a dreadful struggle to make it through all the wine and chocolate I just about managed!!!

Congratulations as always for the excellent examination results of last terms candidates. I finally experienced the nervousness most parents feel, accompanying three exams in succession then listening to a fourth outside, thankfully everybody did very well. A huge twelve exams this time, so a chaotic 2nd half of the term ahead.

It has been extremely pleasing to notice the gain in confidence in the pupil concert and exams. Mainly due to regular performing and observing others, the panicking is now reserved solely for the parents! Getting up and playing, even in front of one or two, is an excellent way to help develop confidence and encourage practice. Try a regular weekly performance in front of all the family of the music currently being learnt. I was always forced to leave my presents and give a concert to my relatives at Christmas, so hopefully there were many festive performances during the holidays.

The 4th Pupil's Concert has had to be postponed until next term, I had been trying to organise a date since Christmas, but due to a bereavement it



has been impossible to get in touch with the organiser at the church and I only found out a couple of days ago the only possible date was not available. Although it would have been excellent practice especially for all the examination candidates, as it is such a short term I think the absence shouldn't be too hard felt.

## Examination Pieces - Which & Why?

Many parents have noticed the piano examination pieces have been replaced by a new set. As the world resounds with collective sighs of relief from parents and teachers alike, *Creepy Crawly* will be heard no more. I discovered even pupils who don't play the piano could play it, and one pupil told me that five performances had been given in assembly that day! Luckily things seem better now, with a more consistent range of pieces that won't drive parents insane, so hopefully there will be some equality of practice this time.

Previously, to chose an exam piece I played through the pieces for each section to let the pupil select their favorite. However, most are influenced by how difficult it looks on the page or if they recognise it. There is often a seemingly large difference in difficulty between pieces at the same grade, though more often than not at first glance the pupil going for the easy option picks a harder work. Also, many pupils dislike a piece in the learning stage solely due to its' difficulty with little consideration to how it sounds. The brass pieces are different as it is often a case of which

piece you can find in the shop as there is no book with them all in. Despite this there is no difference in popularity between pupils who get told what to play and those who have a choice.

While choosing the easiest piece may seem logical, the reverse side is the higher level of musicality expected than in a more complex piece. For this reason many pupils didn't obtain their best marks for *Creepy Crawly*, as due to it's notational simplicity the jazz style had to be of a high standard to achieve better than a pass. Also as marks are related to other candidates only a special performance will obtain top marks.

As my understanding of my pupils abilities grows, I have the dilemma of selecting something they will find easier, due to their own particular abilities, or finding them a style of piece they are not accustomed to which may lead to a lower mark but which will ultimately leave them a more competent and complete musician.

*Next term: How to Practice an Exam Piece.....*

## Performance Points - from the Pupil Concert & Exams:

- Make time to warm-up, if stuck in traffic even a few notes on the mouthpiece can be enough.
- Look after your music and find the page for the accompanist - they could have twenty pieces to worry about.
- Adjust the stand to a level you can see over.
- Play your pieces in the same order as the Programme.
- Make eye contact with the audience - you will both feel more involved.
- Please, please, please thank the accompanist!

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We're not on the  
web yet, but  
hopefully one day!!!

## Pass, Merit or Distinction?

As always with the exam results, in amidst the happiness of having passed, there are always a few quizzical looks regarding the results. This time even I began to question why brass players fared better than pianists.

The main reason I feel is down to the differing complexities of the instruments, or basically a common argument among musicians, which instrument is harder. At a basic glance the piano seems the winner, even for professionals the range of notes is three times greater than the trumpet, whilst using two hands independently and reading, in extreme cases, up to 12 notes at once (two with one finger for those pointing out we only have 10 fingers!). Just a quick glance between Grade 8 Trumpet and brass pieces should be enough to seal the argument. The piano piece would make most trumpeters give up, while a Grade I Pianist could manage the trumpet piece on the piano. Even the amount of practice required to be at the same level seems unfair, roughly double the amount of time is needed at any level (6/7 hours for many professionals). I am being slightly unfair on the brass players though.

Due to physical limitations of the lips three hours is the maximum a trumpeter will ever practice in a day, though this fails to take into account the hours of playing and listening in orchestra, wind band, quintet, and brass band rehearsals. Secondly, brass players of a high standard who take up the piano tend progressing incredibly rapidly. Thirdly, while any Grade I Pianist sounds impressive compared to a Grade I Trumpeter, this is often the technical complexity of the music distracting the listener from the musicality. Brass players spend much more time listening, to themselves and others, devoting care to a few notes, while a pianist rushes through 100s. Thus musically many brass players reach a higher level than the technically superior pianistic counterparts. Any professional will tell you, musicality is the most important factor, as anyone with a little effort can play the notes.

## End of Term Concert

### EXAM RESULTS & RE-CENT PERFORMANCES

Let me know of your achievements - however small you feel they are.

Trumpet Grade 3

- Peter Judge

Cornet Grade 2

Remus Bigg (Merit)

Piano Grade 2

- Remus Bigg

Trumpet Grade 1

- Gabs Parker (Merit)

- Otto Saner

Jazz Piano Grade 1

Izzy Millar

### CONGRATULATIONS!!!

**Robert Millar (trumpet)** has been awarded the top music scholarship at Westminster School and has reached the 2nd round of the Brass Prize which he is attempting to win for the 3rd time.

**Jeremy Judge (French horn)** has reached the semi-final of the Merchant Tailors School Music Competition.

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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**The 4th PUPILS CONCERT has been postponed until mid/late next term.**

### My Performances

Every Sunday morning,

11.00 - 12.15, St John's, St John's Wood, Choral Eucharist

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Thurs 17th to Sat 19th of March, 7.30 pm

Frederick in Gilbert & Sullivan's comic opera *The Pirates of Penzance* with A2 Opera in the Barn Theatre, Oxted, Surrey.

(A few people have expressed an interest, either call 01959 561 811 (before 28th Feb) or 01883 712 241 after.) Tickets are £10.

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Even if you play several instruments, it is sensible to practice them separately!

### ASSOCIATED BOARD EXAM CLOSING DATES - 2005

Spring - Friday 14 January

Summer - Friday 29 April

Autumn - Friday 23 September