

Catherine Leach Piano School News Letter

December 2014

Dear Pupils and Parents,

2014 has been such a busy year in many ways for myself, the school, and no doubt for everyone reading this. We live in such a chaotic world just now, which constantly reminds me of the beauty and specially calming and transforming effect music has on each of us. Hopefully amid the frenzy of Christmas you can find a few minutes to sit down with a cup of tea and read through this letter, feel proud of what your child has achieved (or yourself if an adult pupil) and I hope you manage to get a chance to sit, relax and listen to your children playing the piano at some point over Christmas and savour and cherish those special moments. Each have a selection of carols and Christmas songs (amongst other repertoire) which I hope will entertain you throughout the festive season!

Over the last 22 years I have organised an annual Christmas Piano Concert. This year due to many different reasons it has not been possible, but I am intending for these important events to continue into the future (not necessarily a traditional Christmas event every year as traditions and rituals inevitably have to change eventually) but I intend for there to be taking place at least one pupil concert per year, and I am still hoping to arrange another event similar to the one in 2010 at an appropriate venue where parents, siblings and Grandparents can also come along and enjoy the music.

A Warm Welcome

Firstly a very warm welcome to the following pupils who started lessons during 2014 and hopefully have now settled in well.

Amy, Eva, Alex, Thea, Amelia, George, Lilia, Rebecca, Emma, Joanna, Lindsey, David, Abigail and Abbie.

CongratulationsTo the following pupils achieving exam successes during the last academic year.

Autumn Term 2013

Clare Horn Theory Grade 2 ABRSM with merit

Min Min Grade 1 ABRSM

Beth Malinowski Grade 2 ABRSM

John Mitchel Grade 5 ABRSM

John Mitchel Grade 2 Theory ABRSM with distinction

Dave Mottershead Grade 2 ABRSM with merit

Elena Nam Grade 3 Violin T/G

Elizabeth O'Rourke Grade 3 Violin T/G

Spring Term 2014

Gabriella Gauld Initial T/G with merit

Caner Aydn Initial T/G with merit

Ella Rimmer Initial T/G with distinction

Joshua Mo Grade 3 ABRSM with distinction

Stefan Wilkinson Hill Grade 3 ABRSM with distinction

Stefan Wilkinson Hill Theory Grade 2 ABRSM with distinction

Matthew Woosey Theory ABRSM Grade 2 with distinction

Claire Horn Theory Grade 3 ABRSM with merit

Summer Term 2014

Jack Alker Grade 8 T/G

Jean Sherry Grade 6 ABRSM with merit

Sophie Ward Grade 4 ABRSM

Maria Malinowski Grade 4 ABRSM

Anna Malinowski Grade 2 ABRSM

Grace Rooney Grade 2 ABRSM with merit

Matthew Rooney ABRSM Grade 1 with merit

Mia Kane Grade 2 ABRSM

Grace Whittle Theory Grade 2 ABRSM with merit

Elizabeth O'Rourke Theory ABRSM Grade 1

Min Min Theory Grade 1 ABRSM

Sam Anderton Theory Grade 1 ABRSM

Joshua Mo Theory Grade 2 ABRSM with merit

Poppy Halliwell Theory Grade 2 with merit

Matthew Woosey Theory Grade 3 ABRSM with merit

Claire Horn Theory Grade 4 ABRSM with merit

John Mitchel Theory Grade 3 ABRSM

Elena Nam Violin Grade 4 T/G

Elizabeth O'Rourke Violin Grade 4 T/G

Autumn Term 2014

Lindsey Dyer Initial Solo Piano T/G with distinction

Elizabeth O'Rourke Initial Solo Piano T/G with merit

Jessica Booth Grade 3 ABRSM

Dave Mottershead Grade 3 ABRSM with merit

Diary of Events, and Concerts attended by piano and violin school members during 2013-14

2013

November 10th Lang Lang at the Bridgewater Hall Manchester.

December 16th Adult Pupil music sharing evening

December 22nd Children's Christmas Piano Concert

2014

January 26th Manchester Piano Teachers Forum discussing the new ABRSM syllabus Grades 7 and 8

January 19th Joshua Bell in concert at the Bridgewater Hall

March 8th Burnley Music festival Stefan Wilkinson Hill achieved first prize in his age group.

April 5th Young Musicians Showcase Concert at Parbold Douglas Music Society

May 1st Maxim Vengerov performing at the Bridgewater Hall Manchester.

July 20th Summer Concert for all pupils

August Chetham's International Festival for Pianists

14th September Manchester Piano Teachers forum discussing the new ABRSM syllabus for 15-16 (Grades 1-5) including all alternative pieces.

November 8th RNCM Session Orchestra Concert featuring Tom Stott 2nd year student and (former pupil) on key boards

November 14th and 15th St Helens Got Talent Contest. Stefan wins his age group in both piano and clarinet.

November 16th Manchester Piano Teachers forum focussing on /discussing ABRSM Grade 6 pieces and all supporting tests in exams and a detailed comparison of 4 exam boards.

Special Congratulations To:

Jack Alker in achieving his Grade 8 piano. Jack commences a performance and composition course at Liverpool University from September 2015 and I wish him all the best for his future. I do hope Jack will keep in touch with the piano school and come and play for us at future concerts from time to time.

Special Congratulations also to Stefan Wilkinson - Hill in achieving first prize in his age group at both the Burnley Festival last spring and in the St Helens Got Talent contest recently. Also in achieving distinctions in both Grade 3 practical and Grade 2 theory examinations. Also in being offered a place at St Edwards (specialist music) College Liverpool. Well done to you Stefan -lots of achievements to be proud of!

Special Congratulations also to Grace Rooney in achieving Grade 1 and Grade 2 with merit at age 8 and to Matthew Rooney in being awarded a place at St Edwards College. Good luck to both of you at your new school. Please do keep in touch following your move to Liverpool next year and come and play in the concerts.

Also congratulations to Claire Horn in passing brilliantly three theory grades within a year (a first in my experience of teaching!) and surely an inspiration to those rather reluctant to study for theory exams, proving that it is possible to move swiftly through these important exams when a positive and determined attitude is in place!

Congratulations also to Lindsey Dyer who having just started learning the piano from scratch from September this year 2014 passed with distinction her very first piano exam in November 2014! To prepare from scratch and pass an exam so quickly is also a record breaking achievement in my experience of teaching!

This piano school newsletter is primarily a focus on pupil achievements within the area of music studies. I know many pupils pursue other instruments and activities and achieve astonishing things (such as Joshua Mo representing Lancashire in his age in the field of badminton!!) I'm sorry I cannot list every individuals achievement but when you tell me in lessons I am pleased to hear about these and I think you are all quite amazing!

Other Notable Highlights Throughout 2014

The Young Musicians Showcase Concert was the first of its kind to be held at Parbold Village Hall and organised brilliantly by Parbold Douglas Music Society. This concert featured sixth form music students from local Colleges namely Winstanley, John Rigby and King George V, Southport, and was a wonderful opportunity for the students to perform their A level programmes to a live audience. The initial idea of this concert was presented to the society by my pupil Jack Alker who took part himself. I enjoyed this event immensely and I am hoping that there will be many more of these and also that Parbold Douglas Music Society will agree to my piano school hiring the venue at some point in the future.

The fourteenth Chetham's International festival for pianists took place in August and I went along for a couple of days this time with my pupil Jean Sherry to soak up the culture. We were lucky enough to meet Jason Rebello after sitting in on one of his inspirational jazz lessons. This was particularly wonderful as he was the composer of 'Wise Bud' one of the C pieces in the Grade 6 ABRSM syllabus and one of the pieces Jean had prepared for her exam! Check out the photo featuring Jean meeting Jason Rebello soon to arrive in the gallery page!

We also enjoyed the superb concerts featuring Carlo Grante and Lesley Howard.

Other highlights at the festival included Murray McLachlan's talk on piano technique and the launch of his new book "The Foundations of Technique" which I would recommend to anyone interested in familiarising themselves with what exactly "technique" is! I loved Murray's description of it being the magical "Fairy Godmother", once in place enabling one to create their hearts desire on the piano. The book covers all aspects of technique, is aimed at every level and is published by Faber music. If you sit in on lessons you are welcome to browse my copy on the coffee table.

Another interesting feature was author Jessica Duchen talking about her new book "Alicia's Gift" which is about a musically gifted child and her journey through life. To be honest I have not yet had time to read this exceptionally beautifully written story fully. It sits on my coffee table in the music room and has been dipped into by several parents and grandparents during lessons and everyone has commented on what a wonderfully captivating novel it is.

The Summer Concert held in Orrell in July was a lovely event. As well as all the wonderful piano music it was so good to be able to take an interval in the garden in the sunshine. Thank you to all the Mums who made delicious cakes and to Stuart Mo who took the lovely photographs of each pupil performing and which are available to browse via my face book page but will

also appear on the website soon. Everyone played the piano beautifully! It was an event which stood out for me in 2014.

I am intending for videos to be available on the website soon so that everyone can hear the music! (Possibly videos on You-Tube as well).

Special Notices

Term finishes on the 20th December 2014 and recommences on the 6th January 2015. If in any doubt regarding term dates check the agreement document which is on the website.

Later into 2015, lessons will be available on one day per week at my new home/premises in the Burscough and Rufford area as soon as work on the piano studio has finished. It would be helpful for me to know which of my existing pupils would be happy to travel over to this area during 2015. Please note lessons will continue as normal in Orrell for the foreseeable future.

Up Coming Events

Harry Harris... `Harry the Piano` is performing at Parbold Douglas Music Society on December 13th. Around ten piano school members are looking forward to this event.

Adult Pupil Music Sharing Evening Monday 15th December 2014

Joan Greenburgh (Who is one of my previous teachers!) performs a lunchtime recital of Mendelssohn`s Piano Trio No 1 in D minor Opus 49 in Southport on Monday 5th January 1pm at The Art Gallery`. I was invited to sit in on a rehearsal of this and I am sure it will be a wonderful event.

Music Group

John Mitchel one of my adult pupils recently expressed the notion of being interested in organising a music group for adults wanting the opportunity to get together say one evening a month to perform and share their piano playing/repertoire etc. He already attends a group within the U3A society and is interested in being involved in another one. Clearly he cannot get enough of this ☺ as obviously it is incredibly rewarding for him on many levels. He has asked me to mention this in the newsletter and he would be interested to know which of my adult pupils would like to be involved/interested and would be prepared to consider taking turns to host these at individual homes. It is always interesting to play on different pianos. As I teach late most evenings I doubt I would be able to attend myself, and John is thinking that this could be a nice idea and the co-ordination could be shared out. If anyone is interested please talk to John at

the soiree on Monday 15th or let me know and I can pass on his details. If anyone is reading this who is not connected to my piano school and would like to get involved and set something up with John drop me a line via the website with a contact telephone number I can pass onto him.

Thank You To:

All Parents and Grandparents for getting children to lessons on time.

Joan Greenburgh for hosting the Manchester Piano Teacher Forum Events four times a year which provide such great support to teachers in their private teaching and Valerie Langfield for continued efforts in coordinating the meetings. Both ladies do a sterling job and I personally greatly value these opportunities to meet with other professional piano teachers.

Also to Murray and Kathryn McLachlan for the tremendous work they do both regarding EPTA and the amazing summer festival which I urge you to check out if you have not already done so.

Piano Practise

Younger pupils do need the essential support of parents to set out a routine to enable practise to become a regular part of their daily schedule. Without this in place progress WILL be slow and sporadic. **Many pupils could progress at a much more rapid pace** if this **DAILY PRACTISE** could be taking place at home.

Lessons are not an opportunity to put in the practise which should have been done during the week!! The lessons will hopefully guide, stimulate and motivate the pupil. True motivation and inspiration comes about when a pupil feels for themselves the changes taking place – when sections of a piece are mastered and the music becomes fluent and easier to play. At this stage the pleasure and joy of it all becomes a fabulous reality.

Older pupils do still need parental support but not quite in the same way as younger pupils. Older pupils will probably have an idea of how much time they will need to invest in order to make progress from what they will have so far experienced, but this is not to say that they may underestimate the amount of time they need to invest and there is often the need for practise time to be increased as they progress through to higher grades. I feel that if parents ask with interest what they are currently working on and ask to hear a specific piece and respond positively, that little bit of interest in itself can be hugely effective and helpful.

Technical Work and Theory Exams

In order for the development of technical skills (scales, arpeggios etc.) the pupil MUST become **interested** in what exactly it is they are doing and trying to improve. I often find myself feeling that I am putting the pupil (and myself) through a sort of torture experience when I try to encourage and help many pupils who obviously feel that scales are boring and tedious. The fact of the matter is that scales are fundamental to many aspects of developing good technique and becoming key aware. Exam boards would not include these in exams if they were not crucial to the development of piano skills. Many pupils WANT to progress through grades but are reluctant to put the necessary time into working on their scales. If not enough time and effort has been invested into learning and perfecting scales and all the other technical requirements the reality is that these such pupils will not have any chance of passing comfortably and passing a grade with a merit or a distinction will be out of the question for sure! No matter how brilliant the pieces may be!

If grades are an intention then technical work must be approached with a conscientious and positive attitude. The same must be understood about the theory grades. Grade 5 theory is a prerequisite to grade 6 ABRSM and therefore theory grades should be progressed as a matter of course gradually alongside the practical grades **and a positive attitude towards this must be adopted**. It is crucial that parents and pupils are aware of the facts.

Of course Exams need not be embarked upon at all and piano can be just `for fun`butin progressing through grades or at least attempting the various areas involved even if an exam does not take place, the carefully structured exam syllabus provides the individual learner with a good balanced programme of work through which (assuming everything is tackled correctly) will inevitably result in and natural development of skills which in time become intrinsic to the individual's playing. Although the thought of an exam can often seem a bit scary to the individual, they are not intended to be! And you never know, the pupil may actually amazingly discover that this **IS** just **as** fun as, or even **more** fun than tackling a random set of isolated projects vaguely and in isolation.

The sense of accomplishment in studying an instrument properly and building skills which will last a life time are surely worth all the hard effort involved and this leads me to finally reiterate Mark Tanner's recent message in his article on `Staying Motivated' in a recent Pianist magazine publication where he recalls someone stating that perhaps.... "Genius is one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration"!..... Food for thought!

With Best Wishes for a wonderful Christmas and all the very best for 2015

From *Catherine*