State Manager’s Message

Thank you to all the teachers who took the time to complete our teacher survey a few months ago and congratulations to Sydney piano teacher, Paddy Ge, who was the happy winner of the iPad mini in our survey competition draw.

A recurring theme in the responses we received was the concern about having to submit entries so far in advance of the examination period. The good news is that one of the benefits of moving to an online enrolment process is that we can start scheduling later. Therefore, we are thrilled to be able to announce later closing dates for every examination session in 2015! It is important that teachers note that we will no longer be offering a two-tiered late-fee system. All late fees are now $60 per candidate per enrolment. As all closing dates will be at least a week later than in previous years, there should be no problem in submitting enrolments well in time to avoid penalties.

Another initiative which will be introduced from the 2015 examination year is a new system for recognising teaching excellence, with more awards to be presented each year. This allows us to recognise the changes we have seen in the AMEB enrolment landscape in the past decade. Awards will now be distributed more evenly across instrument categories and enrolment numbers, and a Top 5 Teacher Certificate for each category will also be awarded. Over the years, many of our teachers might have been unaware how close they have come to winning one of the Shields. Now if you are in contention for an award, you will certainly receive an accolade to acknowledge this achievement. Please keep an eye on our website during 2015 for further information about these new teaching awards.

AMEB (NSW) is also excited to launch our new retail store! Candidates who wish to buy their grade books for the next year of study can now do so when they come to Clarence Street for their examination. Our range of available products include the new Series 17 Piano grade books and the CD/Handbook packs for Preliminary to Grade 8. Visit our Level 6 reception for purchases or contact our office to place your order.

Before the teaching year commences, AMEB (NSW) will be holding a professional development workshop to introduce the content of the Series 17 suite of Piano publications. During our full-day workshop on Saturday 31 January 2015, two professional musicians, senior examiners and respected educators (Dr Jeanell Carrigan and AMEB (NSW) Keyboard Advisor, Dr Christine Logan), will bring these pieces to life grade by grade for piano teachers and point out important technical aspects of these works. You can gain a valuable insight into the specific challenges of these pieces, teaching techniques, examiner expectations and the assessment process.

Enquiries:
AMEB (NSW) office
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Dr Christine Logan, will bring these pieces to life grade by grade for piano teachers and point out important technical aspects of these works. You can gain a valuable insight into the specific challenges of these pieces, and will have the opportunity to ask our experienced examiners any questions about aspects of these pieces, teaching techniques, examiner expectations and the assessment process.

The 2015 Enrolment Handbook is enclosed with this newsletter. It is very important that teachers check for changes (highlighted by ) before enrolling. Please check enrolment policies and closing dates for your period carefully.

MAREE LUCAS, STATE MANAGER

USEFUL LINKS
AMEB Connect
www.ameb.nsw.edu.au/connect
Federal website
www.ameb.edu.au
P Plate Piano
www.pplatepiano.com.au
Online written exams
www.amebxam.nsw.edu.au
Online theory courses
www.amebtheory.edu.au
Dr Brett McKern is a written examiner with AMEB (NSW), as well as an organist, composer and lecturer. Over fifty of his compositions have been published, and some performed and broadcast in Australia and abroad. Recent performances of his works have been played in prestigious places such as Westminster Abbey and York Minster in the UK. He was assigned the marking for August 2014 Theory of Music Grade 3 and Music Craft Grade 5 and also examines Grades 3 to 6 of all written syllabuses on the online examination panel.

Q: What are the most common errors you see students making in AMEB exams?
A: Carelessness when writing notation can lead to very simple errors such as misplacing a note stem, rest or a dot. Accuracy is vital. Even a slightly large note head near the bottom of the treble stave can change an A minor chord into F major. Harmony is often seen as a difficult task. When students write practice harmonies, see what it actually sounds like. Even if played really slowly at the piano, one can diagnose most mistakes and learn from that. Analyse how the masters harmonised. Borrow their ideas as you seek to discover your own. If you can sing something, you know you can hear it in your head. That is an important skill. Sing each line of your harmony. This will help with phrasing and balance, not to mention keeping within standard vocal ranges.

Q: Were you always planning to make music your career?
A: Music was never going to be my career! I was going to read architecture, but after achieving the scores I needed to do so, I changed my plan and read music and education at a completely different university. So I decided to make music more than just a hobby at the age of eighteen.

Q: You now have degrees in music, education and theology. Did your faith and your interest in theology precede your interest in church music?
A: My family were always churchgoers, so growing into faith was a natural progression. As a keyboard player I was always fascinated by the organ, and the first time I chanced to play the church pipe organ was a wonderful moment I can still remember. The organ remains the instrument of choice in the church. As a wind instrument, the organ breathes; it is filled with a spirit. For me, playing the organ unites faith and music. Sometimes something wonderful occurs musically which I feel is beyond my technical capabilities. That is an example of the Spirit at work with me and the organ.

Q: What attracted you to the art of composition?
A: Perhaps it is the architect in me, but I find the construction of forms and harmonies to be fascinating. The myriad decisions, years of training, and workings and re-workings that go into producing a score intrigue as the vast amount of effort can result in a mere piece of paper. Of course, as musicians know, the next step of the magic trick is the life breathed into that paper as the performer recreates and develops the composer’s intentions. Hearing one’s work performed can be very exciting and fulfilling.

Q: What do you consider to be your greatest achievement so far?
A: As an Anglican composer and church musician, conducting a performance of my own Westminster Service in Evensong in Westminster Abbey will always remain a highlight.

Q: How can we access your music?
A: One of my works appears in the newly released Series 17 grade books. In addition, Wirripang publish a lot of my music (www.australiancomposer.com.au), and a number of my works can be accessed via the Australian Music Centre (www.australianmusiccentre.com.au). Occasionally my works are played on ABC-Classic or 2MBS Fine Music, or you could see a McKern hymn in a hymn book. You can also visit my website (http://brettmckern.com).

Q: Do you have any words of advice or encouragement for music students?
A: Harmony has many rules and can be right or wrong. Within that, however, there is an incredible flexibility. We can all harmonise the same melody and come up with an almost infinite number of different correct solutions. Try to see the challenge as exciting not painful! Play and sing your work. Music theory also develops the ‘inner ear’, as some call it. The music educationalist Edwin Gordon pioneered the term audiation for ascertaining musical solutions and analyses through hearing the possibilities in one’s head. That is, to ‘think music’. This is a crucial tool for the musician, not just the composer, but the performer and musicologist as well. The musicologist can see a score and ‘hear’ it. The performer will notice what they played and what they expected to hear differed and can practise to reconcile the difference. I would encourage all musicians to continue to develop their inner ear. Once you can hear a note in your head, try melodies; then chords, textures, even tone colours. If a deaf Beethoven can compose, imagine how we could use the same skill!

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Syllabus News for 2015

Piano Syllabus – introduction of an additional resource
Series 17 grade books (available from November 2014) for Preliminary to Grade 8 will now join the existing syllabus List options to supplement the resources for this syllabus. There will be no alteration to the Manual Lists in the current syllabus and no grade book series will be withdrawn as a result of Series 17 being added.

Piano for Leisure Syllabus – no syllabus changes
There will be no alteration to the Manual Lists in the current syllabus and Series 1, Series 2 and Series 3 grade books are all included in the 2015 syllabus.

Flute Syllabus – old (2012) syllabus withdrawn*
From the beginning of 2015, the Flute syllabus (last printed in the 2012 Manual of Syllabuses) is no longer available for examination. Please consult the 2015 Manual of Syllabuses for the correct preparation for 2015 Flute examinations.

Percussion Syllabus – one year’s notice of old (2013) syllabus withdrawal*
From the beginning of 2016, the Percussion syllabus (last printed in the 2013 Manual of Syllabuses) will no longer be available for examination.

Double Bass Syllabus – one year’s notice of old (2013) syllabus withdrawal*
From the beginning of 2016, the Double Bass syllabus (last printed in the 2013 Manual of Syllabuses) will no longer be available for examination.

*Once these old syllabuses are withdrawn, only those syllabuses printed in the current Manual of Syllabuses will be valid for examination.

Syllabus Reviews
The Trumpet, Trombone and Euphonium syllabuses will undergo review in 2015.
The Oboe syllabus review will continue in 2015. If you wish to participate in the syllabus review process, please visit the Federal Office website, www.ameb.edu.au.

Revised Syllabus
Theory of Music
A revised version of the Theory of Music Syllabus appears for the first time in the 2015 Manual of Syllabuses. There have been no changes to Grades 1 to 6; these grades remain the same as previously published. Grade 7 has been removed so candidates now progress from Grade 6 to Diploma level. Three new diplomas have been added at Associate and Licentiate level: Musicology, Harmony & Counterpoint, and Orchestration & Arrangement. This will allow candidates to complete a Diploma in their own area of interest or skill. For more information, consult the 2015 Enrolment Handbook or the 2015 Manual of Syllabuses.

Online written examinations
AMEB continues to expand its offering of online examinations in theory syllabuses. Online examinations are currently available for Theory of Music Grades 1 to 6, Musicanship Grades 1 to 6, and Music Craft Preliminary to Grade 4. Online examinations are available from: www.amebexams.edu.au

Online Theory courses
AMEB now offers interactive online courses in Grades 1 and 2, and Grade 3 will be released in the near future. AMEB Online Theory courses allow students to learn music theory at their own pace, independently or by supporting what is taught in the classroom or private music studio. Online Theory courses are available from: www.amebtheory.edu.au

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Smooth sailing for your students’ music examinations

AMEB (NSW) office staff work Monday to Friday to ensure the enrolment process runs smoothly from the initial enrolment lodging, to syllabus enquiries, through to the mailing of your certificates upon successful completion of your examinations. You may not be aware that these are also the smiling faces you see when you attend your examinations at Clarence Street and the Sydney Conservatorium.

Although venues can often be extremely busy (particularly on Saturdays), when candidates are properly prepared and parents are fully informed, examination day will generally run very smoothly for all concerned. Nevertheless, there are certain ongoing ‘bumps in the road’ that our examination supervisors notice happen with regularity, and these problems can be easily avoided.

Below, we list a few questions the candidate should be asked before they leave home.

1. **Do you have your Notice?**
   Having the Notice of Examination already filled out prior to arriving at the venue saves time and stress before the examination.

2. **Have you read your Notice?**
   Check the venue address (and correct building level) and examination time carefully. Many candidates get a horrible shock when they show up at the wrong venue, or sit waiting on the wrong level of the building, and then realise their error too late. Remember that you may have been scheduled at a different venue from your last examination. Check the examination venue address on your Notice carefully.

3. **Have you packed your music?**
   Even if the candidate has memorised their pieces, the examiner will need the music for the general knowledge section. It’s also a great idea to add flags or post-it notes to your books to access each piece quickly.

4. **Do you have a copy of the accompanist’s music as a back-up?**
   Accompanists are human too and the candidate has more to lose than the accompanist if the accompanying part is not there for the examination.

5. **Do you have the accompanist’s contact details?**
   Ensuring you have a way to touch base with your accompanist will mean that you are both aware if either has a problem, and can find a solution before the examination. It is also important that the accompanist is given a copy of the candidate’s Notice of Examination (this can be emailed) so they have all the necessary information to find you. It is not only the candidate who has shown up at the wrong venue!

6. **Have you packed your instrument?**
   Of course it sounds obvious, but in all of the nervous energy on the day, you wouldn’t be the first to arrive at the venue and have that horrible realisation that something important is still at home!

7. **Have you rubbed out the pencil marks on your music?**
   Again, doing so before you get to the venue reduces stress for the candidate and is one less thing to worry about.

8. **Have you checked for possible transport delays?**
   Particularly if you have a Saturday examination, it pays to check if there is a special event that may cause travel delays or increased parking restrictions if you are driving. If you are relying on public transport, a quick check of the transport website (www.transportnsw.info) will tell you if you need to allow extra time due to delays that may be caused by traffic accidents or trackwork on your train line.

9. **Have you remembered other important accessories?**
   Prior to the exam day, candidates should make a list of these with the teacher. Depending upon the instrument, these could include spare strings, reeds, throat lozenges, a footstool, warm gloves in winter or a bottle of water. Any item that might help the candidate be as prepared and comfortable as possible should be included.

10. **Have you packed a ‘waiting room’ note?**
    It can be really effective for candidates to have something positive or constructive to focus on as they wait for their name to be called. This might be written by the teacher or the candidate and might either include important last-minute reminders about the things that have been covered in lessons, some relaxing breathing exercises, or a few inspirational or calming thoughts to read just before entering the exam room. A written ‘mantra’ might be exactly the thing to put a candidate in the right headspace to replace the nerves or self-doubt with thoughts that will bring out their best performance.

By correctly preparing for music examinations, students set themselves up for a less stressful examination experience, and also acquire important life skills. The ability to ‘wrangle’ nerves into something more constructive (adrenaline!), to check details and to plan methodically are all transportable skills for any future challenges, musical or otherwise.

Please inform parents that this article can be downloaded from www.ameb.nsw.edu.au

General Knowledge for music teachers and students

Thoroughly researched and clearly presented notes on over 1000 musical works, including:
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