

## Video Repertoire Exams - Dipping your toe in the great unknown!



AMEB (NSW) contacted a handful of people who have already experienced the new Video Repertoire exam from a variety of perspectives. Our panel of respondents included a private studio piano teacher, a music school that teaches singing and musical theatre, an AMEB (NSW) examiner who has both examined and prepared his own candidates for AMEB Video Repertoire exams, and a multi-instrumentalist school music teacher who has enrolled himself and his students for Video Repertoire exams this year.

Between these four music enrollers, they have already submitted video exams for P Plate Piano, Piano for Leisure, Piano, Musical Theatre, Rockschool, French Horn, Violin, Viola and Recorder in the past few months.

### *What equipment was used to film your Video Repertoire exams?*

The majority of the enrollers we spoke to used smartphones or an iPad for their recordings. When backing tracks were used, these were played on a computer with speakers to amplify the recording. One teacher commented about the use of their iPhone: “the recording quality was surprisingly high. The sound and video were crystal clear and the dynamic contrasts were evident in the recording.” He offered the following tip to further improve recording quality: “students can use Apple headphones which contain a better quality microphone than the one inside the iPhone. Hanging these in the air over a music stand or door handle stops them from picking up the vibrations when they are placed on other surfaces.”

### *Were the instructions on the AMEB (NSW) website helpful?*

All four of the enrollers we contacted found the instructions comprehensive and the steps easy to follow.

AMEB (NSW) staff have provided some additional reminders and tips:

- Check the sample performer images provided in the [Video Repertoire exams](#) section of our [website](#) to ensure you have the correct angle for your recording
- Remember that the candidate's feet must be visible on the piano pedals in Piano exams for Grade 5 and higher
- Remind the candidate to say their name, exam subject/grade and date to camera before they commence playing
- Grade 8 candidates must also show their ID to camera before commencing
- Ensure you have the YouTube footage set to 'Unlisted' and not 'Private'. Videos set to 'Private' cannot be opened and viewed by AMEB (NSW).

### *Was your exam preparation conducted online also?*

Busy piano teacher, Ron Ogden, commented as follows: "all my students have been having lessons online. Online teaching is not as enjoyable as face-to-face, but pretty much all students are at or even slightly ahead of where they would be. The usual technical glitches are annoying, but you can get through more material in an online lesson...maybe because of less chat!"

Our multi-instrumentalist teacher (as a self-enrolling candidate) commented that he would prepare the pieces in his own time, then bring in their recorded work-in-progress to show his instrument-specialist mentor in their face-to-face lessons. This ongoing feedback guided him in the lead-up to filming each Video Repertoire exam.

Piano teacher Anthony van den Broek agrees that technology has been a vital part of the exam preparation process. "A lot of pre-recording has been going on to facilitate better audio clarity in online lessons. This has been necessary because neither the student nor teacher can really be sure that what they are hearing is objectively true (eg, did my student really play with no dynamic contrasts just now or is it a problem with the technology?). Small recordings can easily be made on a device and then sent via a platform such as WhatsApp to or from the student. For the younger students, spending lots of time copy-cat singing, sight singing and clapping has improved their ears, sight reading and their musicianship significantly, which has been a surprising benefit of the online lessons."

### *How did the student's Repertoire report compare to their usual face-to-face exam report?*

All teachers seemed very pleased with the reports they received, with everyone commenting favourably on the greater level of detail provided in this format where the sole focus is the program of works. Teachers seemed happy that remarks about style and technique were made in Repertoire reports so they could still prove to the student the importance of the other skills covered in lessons such as technical work and general knowledge.

### *Did your student respond positively to the idea of filming their performance rather than coming to an exam venue?*

Lauren Moxey felt that her students enjoyed recording exams in a familiar and comfortable environment: “They also appreciated the chance to re-record their Video Exam if they felt their first continuous take didn’t fully reflect their achievements.”

Ron believes that his students’ performance standard has improved by going through the process of preparing for the video.

Anthony van den Broek is also an AMEB piano examiner. As he has already examined Video Repertoire candidates, he has observed that “the usual nerves that arise when a student steps into an unknown space evaporates. Piano students hardly ever get to perform or do an exam on their own instrument, so they felt fully in control of their sound rather than having to negotiate an unknown piano in a face-to-face exam setting.”

Other feedback received at the AMEB (NSW) office has been that mature-aged candidates can feel quite uncomfortable attending a busy exam venue alongside much younger candidates, and they enjoyed the privacy of being able to instead present to camera from their own home. Similarly, candidates who are shy or have communication challenges have shown a definite preference for this non-interactive exam format.

***Did their student learn something about their performance that they mightn’t have learned in conventional exam preparation?***

Ron felt that this was the best part of the video exam preparation, where students can “really focus on lifting their performance skills, and (ironically given it’s a video!) improve how they will engage with their audience (ie the examiner). Dressing to perform, looking into the camera and clearly projecting their introduction are all part of this preparation.”

As both a candidate and a teacher, our multi-instrumentalist noted that seeing your performance objectively means that the performer ‘sees the penny drop’. By actually sitting back to watch and listen to their recording, the realisation dawns – “Ahhh, *that’s* what you mean about sound production/ tone/ intonation etc.”

Anthony added the observation that it improves a student’s self-listening skills: “students are more able to objectively assess and understand what their performance *actually* sounds like, not what they *think* it sounds like.

***Do you have any tips for other teachers as they prepare their students for video exams?***

Organisation is key:

- Start the preparation for the video exam early. Don’t leave it until ‘filming day’ to talk to the student about how to present their performance
- Record every step of the learning process and spend some lesson time listening and watching the work in progress with your student
- To reduce nerves, get students used to recording and even introducing themselves and the piece they are about to play in their lessons

By making it part of the weekly lesson tasks, students will find themselves becoming more poised and more comfortable with this medium by recording day.

***A final teacher comment:***

“I think the ability to do the exam at your own home takes away the stress of lining up an accompanist, taking time off school and making the trip into the city. This makes the exam process far easier for families and students.”

***A final examiner comment:***

“The students I have examined clearly take it seriously. They get dressed up, speak well and play well. It’s been a pleasure and an honour to see so many polished performances. It is also heartening to see that students are able to thrive and enjoy their music in these difficult times. Bravo to the teachers who have stepped outside their comfort zone and gone the extra mile to encourage their students to embrace this new exam goal.

***We wish to thank everyone who has generously contributed their time and comments about the Video Repertoire exam process: Ron, Anthony, Daniel, Lauren and the Sydney Vocal Academy.***