

Teaching reading

Sharon Goodey has conducted some interesting research. In "The sight-reading didn't go well" (PP25, Spring 2011), she asks if we should "take another look at what we are testing and why". For teachers, an equally important question is *how*. It is important to remember that children's eyes, particularly boys', are not fully developed until the age of seven. Following music (and words) is not easy when the ability to track is poor.

I start my pupils reading in group lessons, using flash cards to identify lengths and pitches of notes. When these are familiar, we clap a row of rhythm cards; and children aspire to become members of my One Minute Club – which means they must identify all the notes in the treble and bass clefs in random order in one minute. However, important though it is to be able to name notes quickly, reading in the early stages should be done mostly by recognising intervals rather than identifying pitch names of notes.

I ask for *prepared* reading long before asking children to read at sight. First children examine the score – clap the rhythm, sing the melody, name the intervals (eg up a note, down a note, same note), possibly name the pitches, then mime the piece. When the music is well prepared, they can then play it perfectly, especially if it is a duet with the teacher (or another pupil) playing the other part. By practising their music reading without being tested on it, and always producing a good result, so their confidence and ability develop. My new book, *Successful Practising*, makes these points as well as suggesting memorising, transposing and improvising to develop sight reading skills.

I agree with Sharon Goodey that, in the early stages, it would be far better to test children on identifying pitches and clapping rhythms than on their ability to read at sight.

■ Jenny Macmillan

Thanks to Sharon Goodey for her radical and systematic study of the early years of sight reading. When primary children start to read text they are usually given a font twice the size that an adult would read. At present the Associated Board use a uniform stave through all grades. Beginning piano readers may have increased note recognition (and thus a more rewarding experience) if the size is doubled as in text reading.

■ Bob Stuckey

National Electronic Keyboard Teachers' Forum

18 August 2011 New Hall School, Chelmsford
1.45 - 5.00 pm

This free forum will include presentations about Trinity Guildhall electronic keyboard exams, Alfred educational resources and suitable Yamaha instruments, along with discussions with industry representatives and other music teachers. Refreshments will be served. It is held during the National Electronic Keyboard Summer School for 9-18 year olds and there will be an opportunity to watch their rehearsals. Further details can be found at www.keyboardcourses.com

The downloadable registration form should be sent to Carolyn Van Dongen, Trinity College London, 89 Albert Embankment SE1 7T. ■

2011 EPTA UK Annual Conference: Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Thursday 1-Saturday 3 September 2011

The 2011 EPTA UK conference will be held at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Castle Grounds, Cathays Park, Cardiff. CF10 3ER. The programme promises to be both inspirational and educational. Artists include John Amis, Humphrey Burton, Isabel Beyer and Harvey Dagul, Ivan Ferčić, Adam Gorb, Murray McLachlan, Richard Mc Mahon, Irina Ospipova and Michael Young. The programme includes gala recitals, Kodály, masterclasses, a composers' workshop, and participant workshops on electronic keyboard and dancing, lectures on Bartók, sight-reading and Liszt for intermediate pianists, as well as prize winners' recitals by young artists.

Further details and booking forms are available from the website www.epta-uk.org or from the EPTA UK office on 08456 581054. Credit card facilities are available online. There is a 10% discount available for the whole conference if booked before 24 May. ■

2011 European EPTA Conference

EPTA Switzerland are pleased to host the 33rd EPTA European Conference from 11-13 November 2011 in Lucerne. The theme is *'Music Pedagogy in 21st century- which impulses and ideas do piano playing and piano lessons need today?'*

Full information from the secretary of EPTA Switzerland, Niklaus Meyer: epta.ch@bluewin.ch Tel: 0041 71 866 2932 Fax: 0041 71 866 30 83. ■

About Young EPTA

We all know the benefits that EPTA UK provides to members, we piano teachers. I think it is also very important to acknowledge how much EPTA UK helps our pupils – for example, with performance opportunities at local and national concerts, and with participation in masterclasses, workshops and competitions, where pupils are adjudicated by musicians of high standing. But this does not necessarily mean that our pupils really understand what EPTA stands for and how it operates to help them as young pianists.

I see the main task of "Young EPTA" concept as creating for pupils the sense of belonging to EPTA. This will come in many ways but mainly by keeping going with established events for our pupils, possibly starting new ones and by giving more specific recognition to pupils' participation and playing achievements. Such recognition will be given in the form of specially designed certificates, medals, EPTA mementos etc. And to encourage an active interest in piano teaching, Young EPTA pupils who are post Grade 8 will also be given the opportunity to attend for one day (without charge) the Practical Piano Teaching Course at the Purcell School.

So who can become members of Young EPTA? The answer is simple – all our pupils become members of Young EPTA automatically. Membership is free. Please encourage your pupils to take advantage of this new development, take part at regional and national EPTA UK events and let them find out how they may benefit from them in some of the ways outlined above.

■ Ilga Pitkevica