

Piano Professional Reviews

by Jenny Macmillan

The ABRSM Practice Notebook

ISBN 978-1-86096-930-0

ABRSM

£2.50

This could be a very useful little book for teachers to purchase for their pupils. For those who are organised and like to plan and keep track of their activities, likewise for those who are disorganised but feel they would benefit from being better organised, it offers a wealth of valuable material.

It begins with space to fill in lesson timetable details (day, time, room, other information) for 36 weeks, and finishes with space for the end of year report. In between, it includes 36 double page spreads with space for lesson notes, and for comments from pupils and from parents. It also has space for students to note down how long they practised each day or to add a sticker, for teachers' assessment of effort and achievement grades, and a couple of lines of stave. Interspersed between every 12 lessons are lists of Ten Top Tips for practising, from tip-top musicians, for preparing for exams, on why do music exams, and for exam day (obviously this is published by an examination board!). Together with a shopping list for teachers to note down what parents should purchase, a holiday practice diary and some essential theory, this is highly comprehensive.

To lighten the serious content are a few amusing cartoons, plus a quote for each week such as: "We all have ability. The difference is how we use it" (Stevie Wonder, b1950), "Where words fail, music speaks" (Hans Christian Andersen, 1805-1875), "Over the piano was printed a notice: Please do not shoot the pianist. He is doing his best" (Oscar Wilde, 1854-1900).

You may be reading this magazine near the beginning of January. I wonder how many of you have kept your New Year resolutions?! The determination to continue to fill in the practice book regularly may well wane after a few weeks. However, even if it were used for only a month or two, it would be worth purchasing in order to establish some structure to music lessons and practice.

Waterman/Harewood Piano Series

Me and My Piano

Part 1 Very first lessons for the young pianist

ISBN 0-571-53200-4

Repertoire for the young pianist

ISBN 0-571-53202-0

Faber Music

£5.95

There can be no doubt that Fanny Waterman and Marion Harewood's *Me and My Piano* series of teaching books for beginners is extremely successful. With reported sales of over half a million copies since its launch almost twenty years

ago, this series will continue to sell well. *Me and My Piano Part 1* is attractively laid out, with lovely illustrations, useful fact boxes, occasional theory pages, musical detective questions, and simple duet accompaniments to some of the pieces. *The Repertoire for the young pianist* book is totally appropriate for the early stages.

I have just a few small quibbles. First, in the illustrations of children demonstrating posture at the piano, both children are sitting too far back on their stools, and their feet should be supported on a box of a suitable height rather than just dangling. Second, middle C is not an ideal place to start playing the piano. If the arms are allowed to hang loosely and then raised to the keyboard, the hands will be approximately over the Cs an octave below and an octave above middle C. The hand alignment is now correct and it is much easier to play without strain (see Penelope Roskell's article on this subject in the Autumn 2008 issue of *Piano Professional*). Third, there is a lot of right hand work (the first half of the book, in fact) before the left hand is introduced. I imagine this is for simplicity and so that the right hand, learning one new note at a time, can start playing tunes. However, I like to introduce the left hand as soon as possible, otherwise it can lag behind the right hand in developing control and agility.

These are minor reservations. Fanny Waterman's success as a teacher stems from her concentration on security of technique combined with the development of imagination and musicianship. These books convey a sense of excitement which will enthrall many a young aspiring pianist.

Debussy

Suite bergamasque

Barenreiter Urtext BA 8769

ISMN M-006-53281-0

£5.50

The *Suite bergamasque* has a fascinating history. It was composed in 1890 but not published until 1905. Debussy sold the publishing rights to Paul de Choudens in 1891. Choudens didn't publish it. Georges Hartmann, though declared bankrupt in 1891, was supportive of Debussy and continued to publish works under the name of the publisher Eugene Froment for whom he worked in an advisory capacity. However, Hartmann died unexpectedly in 1900 and his nephew and heir demanded Debussy return the advances he had received. In 1905, in an acrimonious deal, A Durand & Fils purchased exclusive rights to publish Debussy's works.

The movements of the *Suite*, too, bear a curious history. In 1900 an announcement was made of Debussy's *Nocturnes* – four pieces entitled *Prelude*, *Menuet*, *Promenade sentimentale* and *Pavane*. Yet in 1904 the same work was announced with three movements – *Masques*, *2nd*

Sarabande and *L'isle joyeuse*. The *Suite bergamasque* was finally published in 1905 with four movements – *Prelude*, *Menuet*, *Clair de lune* and *Passepied*. All these titles, with the exception of *Clair de lune*, are movements from the French baroque suite. A *bergamasca* was a popular 16th century dance from Bergamo, though nothing in Debussy's life, nor the pieces, relates to that dance. It seems more likely that the *Suite* was inspired by poetry by Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) whose evocative poem *Clair de lune* alludes to *masques et bergamasques*. Verlaine's poetry, one collection of which was entitled *Fetes galantes*, was inspired by the art of Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) who painted in the aristocratic *fetes galantes* style.

For the introduction to this new edition of the *Suite bergamasque*, the editor Regina Back has consulted the latest scholarly work by Roy Howatt and Paul Roberts, as well as Debussy's *Correspondence* published in 2005. Although Debussy was fastidious and precise in providing instructions to the performer, he barely touched on the areas of pedalling, tempo, phrasing and fingering. These are discussed in the introduction. This new edition is based on the first edition corrected by Debussy, with its original harmony. Later alterations are noted; sources and critical commentary are given. With its clear, uncluttered pages, this Barenreiter edition is highly recommended as an authoritative text. ■

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With MUSIC in MIND -for beginners at the piano

by Gillian
Skottowe Earl



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the beginner to play musically - any rhythmic distortions having been overcome through singing.

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