

Piano Professional

News & Letters

The Editor welcomes letters from members but reserves the right to edit them for publication

Teaching the PIANO?

Michael Maxwell Steer raises an interesting and important point in his letter (PP 24) replying to Sally Chappell's article on sound before symbol (PP 23). He says that parents pay him "to teach their offspring the **piano**".

Personally I don't think of it that way, and my pupils and their parents certainly don't complain. I teach musicianship and a love of music **through** the piano. I would go so far as to say that, through learning how to play the piano, my pupils are learning how to learn. For instance, they learn to break up complex problems and work on each part separately before building them back together again. They learn that, with thorough preparation, they will give a good, confident, musical performance while poor preparation would lead to an insecure performance. The way they learn the piano clearly helps them when they learn a second instrument. I would even claim that the study techniques they learn are transferred to studying subjects at school – they learn to listen carefully, they develop their ability to focus, their memory, their co-ordination and their self-discipline.

Are parents of primary age children expecting their children to become professional pianists, or are they hoping music will broaden and deepen their children's interests and sensitivities so they may lead more interesting, creative and fulfilled lives? Even in China, notorious for hothousing musicians (and athletes), parents are now introducing music lessons as a way of developing a child as a whole person rather than as a prodigy.

Jenny Macmillan Cambridge ■

Music Industry Association Music Awards

ABRSM, completed a spectacular sweep of four awards at the Music Industry Association (MIA) Music Awards on 24 November at the Landmark Hotel, London. Recognising 'the best people, products and companies in the industry', awards are given to manufacturers, distributors, retailers, publishers and educators alike across 30 categories.

Joining the Dots, the new hit series of sight-reading tutor books by Alan Bullard, received the awards for **Best Education Publication** and **Innovation in Printed Music Publishing**. Bullard was at the ceremony to be presented with the trophies, as was Roger Gale, ABRSM's UK & Ireland Sales Executive, who received the **Retailers' Award for Distinction in Printed Music Publishing** award for the second time in three years, as voted for by the retail trade.

The final flourish came as ABRSM was presented with the much-coveted **Printed Music Publisher of the Year** award, for a year that included the successful release of *Joining the Dots* and a large range of universally well received exam publications: the new edition of *Specimen Aural Tests*, and exam repertoire and support materials for piano, organ and trumpet.

Score or Music?

Michael Maxwell Steer's letter commenting on Sally Cathcart's article (*Sound before Symbol ... a question*, PP24) stirred my memory of a PP article some years earlier written by Heli Ignatius-Fleet. Checking through back issues, I found it: *I have forgotten my music*, Sept 2004. Heli, as a non-native English speaker, pointed out how easy it is in the English language to confuse the *score* with the actual *music*, i.e., the *organised sound* which music is, since in English we use the term 'music' to mean both things.

I have suddenly realised that this linguistic confusion is so ingrained in native English language speakers that all of us, even highly trained music teachers, are not aware of the distinction between these two concepts (the *score* on the one hand and the *sound* of music on the other), and think they ARE one and the same thing.

Michael explains how he uses the first two teaching terms to concentrate on developing young pupils' hand-eye-brain coordination as the first step in teaching the piano. He advocates his own ColourMuse system which enables pupils to play from a score from lesson one. I am convinced Michael's system works brilliantly for teaching students *how to read the score*. But it brings me back to the question that stirred in my memory, a fundamental question for all music educators - what is music? Is it the *score*, or is it the *sound*?

In the UK most instrumental teachers, along with Michael, start to teach the *written* language of music at the first lesson, as has been the absolute tradition in this country for a long time. Most piano beginners go away from their very first lesson proudly clutching their first piano tutor book. They and their parents believe that because they can now find Middle C on the keyboard, and have learned to recognise Middle C written down in stave notation, they have begun on the path to music. They too are confusing the *score* with the *sound*.

My Kodály training over many years gradually helped me to become clear about the confusion between the *score* and the *sound*, and to re-educate me as to what my priorities as a piano teacher should be. Like most UK teachers I had started out using the 'Middle C' stave approach, but came to realise that it is more fundamental for students to experience music at first through the **ear**, rather than through the **eye**. Without the experience of music, which is accessed through the ear, how can a young beginner make real musical meaning of the *score*, or begin to develop the *inner ear*, that essential musical guide we all need?

I'm therefore with Sally Cathcart on this one (*Sound before Symbol - PP23*). I favour **hand-ear-brain** coordination for beginners. I have found that pupils who have learned short, easy songs from memory quickly learn to transfer these to the keyboard, guided primarily by the ear, not by the eye. These songs can be used to develop technical progress on the instrument, including hand and finger coordination, as well as musical progress. I have realised that developing the ear and the musical memory is far more important and fundamental for beginners than score-reading, so for my beginners the stave is left to a later stage. Many parents