Introducing ARSM
Discover our new performance diploma

Syllabus updates
Exploring new repertoire for piano, trumpet and trombone

Making a difference
How ABRSM supports a unique chamber music project in New Zealand
The Associate of the Royal Schools of Music (ARSM) is a new post-Grade 8 diploma that’s all about performance.

This exciting exam:
- is an opportunity to demonstrate performance skills
- gives purpose and direction to post-Grade 8 learning
- can help bridge the gap between Grade 8 and DipABRSM

Candidates perform a 30-minute programme, bringing together their musical skill, knowledge and understanding.

If successful, you can add letters after your name!

First exams from January 2017. Find out more now: www.abrsm.org/newdiploma
Welcome to Libretto and an issue packed with ABRSM news and views. This has been a busy year for everyone here. We’ve been developing new exams, resources and syllabuses, we’ve been talking, listening and responding to many people involved in the music education world, and we’ve been planning for the future.

We’re now beginning to see the early results of all this activity. On page 8 you can read about our exciting new performance diploma: Associate of the Royal Schools of Music – or ARSM. In contrast, for beginners we have refreshed Prep Test books for piano and brass players, and new Piano Star books on the way for young pianists. If you teach the piano at these early stages, turn to page 10 for ideas and inspiration.

Our new Scales Trainer app is designed to help students make scale and arpeggio practice a regular part of their musical lives – something our article on page 14 thoroughly recommends. We’ve also extended our Piano Practice Partner app to cover all eight grades of the new Piano syllabus. You can read about some of the wonderful pieces on offer on page 7. Trumpet and trombone players also have new repertoire to explore as highlighted on pages 12 and 18.

I’d also like to share some news about Libretto and our move to a new home. As you may know, this is the last print issue of Libretto, but you will still be able to read articles about music teaching and learning at www.abrsm.org/libretto.

Finally, as 2016 comes to a close we’re looking forward to our move to offices in Salters’ Hall, in the City of London. With purpose-built exam rooms and dedicated spaces for events, this will be somewhere we can offer a warm welcome to teachers, learners and the music education community in the coming years.

Michael Elliott
Chief Executive
New for piano, trumpet and trombone

Brass and piano teachers have a wealth of exciting music to discover in our new syllabuses for Trumpet, Cornet and Flugelhorn, Trombone and Piano. Valid from January 2017, these syllabuses feature refreshed repertoire lists with a variety of styles and genres to inspire you and your students. There are no changes to scales, sight-reading or aural tests for any instrument, or to the repertoire lists for other brass instruments.

As usual, we’ve produced a range of resources to support students and teachers as they prepare for exams. For pianists we have books of selected Piano Exam Pieces for Grades 1 to 8, with recordings available on CD or as audio downloads. We’ve also updated our approach to the Teaching Notes on Piano Exam Pieces book. For the first time it covers all eight grades with guidance based around musical context, technical challenges and performance and interpretation. Then for students, our Piano Practice Partner app will be available for all pieces in the Piano Exam Pieces books. It’s a great tool for encouraging essential and effective hands-separate and slow practice.

Trumpet and trombone players will find that a number of recently issued and existing ABRSM books provide a great starting point for choosing exam pieces. The Shining Brass books include repertoire for trumpet and trombone in all lists at Grades 1 to 5, while our anthology of contemporary commissions, Spectrum for Trumpet, features in the higher grades. Finally, our Time Pieces books (available for both instruments) include pieces through the ages set for Grades 1 to 5.

We hope you enjoy exploring the new syllabuses. To see what’s on offer, visit www.abrsm.org/piano or www.abrsm.org/brass. To read more about some of the fantastic music featured, turn to pages 7, 12 and 18.

Piano Star offers brilliant repertoire for beginners

Following in the footsteps of our popular Violin Star books, we’re about to bring out an exciting series of beginner repertoire books for young pianists.

The three Piano Star books contain over 70 solos and duets to take players from pre-Prep Test level to around Grade 1. Composers include Mike Cornick, Jane Sebba, Edmund Jolliffe and Christopher Norton, and all pieces have been carefully compiled and rigorously edited by David Blackwell and Aisling Greally.

With their colourful illustrations, learning activities and focus on music that’s fun and enjoyable, these books are a must for budding young pianists.

Piano Star, Books 1 to 3, will be available soon from www.abrsm.org/shop or from music retailers worldwide.

Favourite violin pieces rediscovered

Violinists and their teachers will soon have a new series of books to choose repertoire from. Our three Encore Violin books contain best-loved pieces from our syllabus archive and are set to become essential items for violin students.

Spanning Grades 1 to 6, Encore Violin provides an appealing mix of repertoire for players. Each piece focuses on a particular skill or technique, providing a valuable teaching resource. This is backed up by concise footnotes giving background information and suggestions for supporting lesson activities.

With their clearly graded framework, these books are a great way to explore new pieces, discover repertoire for concerts and develop skills and experience between exams.

Encore Violin, Books 1 to 3, will be available from retailers worldwide and from www.abrsm.org/shop.
New ARSM performance diploma on the way

Advanced students will soon be able to take our new performance diploma – the Associate of the Royal Schools of Music (ARSM).

We’ve created ARSM to provide a meaningful goal for all players and singers beyond Grade 8. It’s ideal for anyone seeking a new challenge at this level, for musicians who want to get back into playing or singing after a break, or for students looking to enhance their performance skills before entering higher education.

ARSM is a post-Grade 8 diploma that’s all about performance. There are no written or spoken elements and no sight-reading, aural tests or scales. Learners of any age who have passed their Grade 8 can take the diploma, and once you’ve passed you can use the letters ARSM after your name.

This exciting new diploma will be available worldwide with the first exams taking place from January 2017. Find out more on page 8 and at www.abrsm.org/newdiploma.

A helping hand for scales and arpeggios

We all know that students sometimes struggle to include scales and arpeggios in their practice sessions. To help with this we’ve created our new Scales Trainer app which is full of activities to make learning and practising scales more enjoyable and rewarding.

Available for pianists and violinists, Scales Trainer provides opportunities for students to learn about notation, listen to performances, play along with a band and track their progress. It’s a great way to increase familiarity with exam scales and arpeggios, build confidence in playing from memory, improve technique and develop aural awareness.

Scales Trainer is available now for Piano and Violin at Grades 1 to 5 on iPhone, iPad or iPod touch.

For more information go to www.abrsm.org/scalestrainer.

Last chance to book for London conference

Time is running out to book your place at our next thought-provoking and inspirational conference taking place in London on 5 November. Come along and you’ll experience a packed day of session with something for teachers of all instruments and backgrounds. Our expert presenters will be covering the new Piano syllabus, our ARSM performance diploma and much, much more!

Find out more: www.abrsm.org/conference
In July we attended a very special graduation day for 45 Mayor’s Music Fund scholars. As sponsors of the event and long-time supporters of the London based Mayor’s Music Fund, we were delighted to be involved in this celebration of musical talent, creativity and achievement.

ABRSM celebrates success for Mayor’s Music Fund scholars

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Update on India

2016 has been a busy year for ABRSM in India. In February we ran a series of seminars exploring our exam marking criteria and supporting tests. Presented by Ryan Lewis, our Malaysia National Consultant, these events took place in Chennai, Mumbai, Lucknow, Trivandrum and Bangalore with more than 530 people attending. We’ve had some great feedback on these ‘informative and interactive’ events with their ‘open atmosphere’ and opportunities to ask questions and meet fellow teachers.

Then, in April we sponsored the India National Youth Orchestra’s All-India Educational Workshop and Concert, which brought together 100 young Indian performers with teachers and students from the University of Vienna. The workshops in Mumbai were followed by an inspirational concert at the National Centre for Performing Arts.

Finally, we’re delighted to bring our Hallmarks of Distinction events to India for the first time in early October this year. ABRSM examiner Ann Martin-Davis and Malaysian pianist Loo Bang Hean will be exploring our new Piano syllabus at presentations in Kolkata, Bangalore and Mumbai. With a focus on how examiners assess different aspects of playing, these events promise to provide plenty of inspiration for future teaching.

New Prep Test books out now

For beginner piano and brass players, we’ve recently published new Prep Test books. The books are available for piano, French horn, trombone and trumpet, with the trumpet book also suitable for cornet, flugelhorn, E flat horn, baritone, euphonium and tuba players.

The Prep Test offers a positive and relaxed introduction to the experience of taking exams with a focus on the skills needed at the early stages of learning. The updated books contain everything you need to prepare for the assessment, with new pieces and materials, and fun cartoon illustrations that young players will love.

Prep Test books are available from shops worldwide and www.abrsm.org/shop.

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Piano music to challenge and inspire

We’ve just published our new Piano syllabus for 2017 and 2018. Here one of our expert selectors, Timothy Barratt, takes a look at some of the wonderful music on offer.

The launch of a new syllabus is always exciting. We all welcome the challenge and inspiration which a new set of pieces brings and this wide-ranging selection offers plenty for all ages and tastes.

Among pieces by composers such as Bach, Mozart and Schumann you’ll find plenty of less familiar works to enjoy. The jazzy pieces will, as always, act like magnets and many pupils will be attracted to the arrangements of well-known tunes. Music from around the world gives an international feel and some names from the past reflect the heritage of the much-valued Piano syllabus. Here are some of my favourites!

** Tried and tested

I have yet to find a pupil who doesn’t enjoy Clowns by Kabalevsky (Grade 3). With its juggling between major and minor, this piece is as good as any study for developing fluency and confidence. Among the many other favourites are The Prince of Denmark’s March (Grade 2) with its bold melody and strong rhythm, and Schumann’s Fröhlicher Landmann, commonly known as The Merry Peasant, (Grade 4) which is excellent for developing melodic playing in the left hand.

The Rondo from Mozart’s C major sonata K545 (Grade 6) will be a popular choice and may encourage a longer-term project to learn the other movements and complete the sonata.

** Cruella and company

Feline lovers will adore the slinky charms of The Cat from Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf (Grade 2) and who can resist the lure of Cruella de Vill (Grade 6), that wicked Disney dame, in a delicious arrangement by jazzer Pete Churchill? Among other fine arrangements, opera gets a look-in with the famous and breezily self-confident La donna è mobile from Verdi’s Rigoletto (Grade 1), while a tear can be shed for the plight of Tom Bowling (Grade 3) with its beautiful melody, expressive harmonies and opportunity to explore legato pedalling.

** Sensitive and soulful

Plenty of pieces explore the piano’s cantabile qualities. Summer Time (Grade 5) illustrates perfectly the piano’s ability to imitate the human voice, while more thoughtful early-grade pupils will be fascinated by the way the left hand imitates the right in Through the Desert (Grade 2).

Hiller’s Polnisches Lied (Grade 3) offers Eastern European melancholy in preparation for pieces at Grades 5, 7 and 8 by Chopin, the quintessential spirit of Poland. Equally Chopinesque in character is Skryabin’s beautiful Prelude in E (Grade 6).

** Fleet and fingery

Canaries (Grade 1) needs a light, crisp touch to bring its staccato and rhythmic detail to life, and the Krebs Praeambulum supra Jesu, meine Freude (Grade 4) will suit pupils with strong fingers and a firm sense of pulse.

At Grade 5, students with good facility will enjoy the airy skip of Maykapar’s Tarantella while the higher grades are full of pieces to show dexterity. A hot favourite will be the popular Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum (Grade 8), Debussy’s humorous parody of the diligent practiser. The wonderful sound world and feeling of exhilaration, especially at the sprint towards the finishing post, make this a great choice – and it sounds more difficult than it actually is!

All that jazz

The opportunity to ‘let go’ in jazz-inspired pieces is wonderfully liberating. They range from the popular slapstick Willie Wagglestick’s Walkabout (Grade 7), making a welcome comeback, to the funkiness of Gospel Flair (Grade 2), Asian Tiger Prowl (Grade 1) is likely to be a winner and Cool (Grade 5), with its challenging rhythms, will transform the exam room momentarily into a jazz club. Equally cool in feel is Ray’s Blues (Grade 7). It’s new to the syllabus and one of my personal favourites.

Less familiar territory

Agathe Backer Grandahl may not be a familiar name but her Sommervise (Grade 7), one of a number of pieces by female composers, has a beauty to melt all hearts as its melody passes between the hands. The inclusion of pieces by Asian composers makes a refreshing challenge at the upper grades. Japanese-born Karen Tanaka’s Masquerade (Grade 6) straddles the continents by offering a fantastical, fleeting scene of a Venetian masked ball, while Selling Sundry Goods (Grade 8) stays closer to its roots in depicting the hustle and bustle of a Chinese street-scene. Finally, use of the bass register and pp dynamic throughout make The Stowaway (Grade 2) an unusual and appealing choice. This piece appeared in the 1932 syllabus yet remains fresh and characterful more than 80 years later!

Timothy Barratt is a pianist, teacher, adjudicator and workshop leader. He is an ABRSM examiner and co-selector with Anthony Williams for the Piano syllabus.

Find out more at www.abrsm.org/piano.
From January 2017 anyone who has passed a Grade 8 practical exam will be able to take our new performance diploma – the Associate of the Royal Schools of Music. John Holmes, our Chief Examiner, outlines what’s involved.

The Associate of the Royal Schools of Music – or ARSM – is our exciting new performance-only diploma. We’ve designed it to provide an opportunity for musicians to develop and demonstrate their performance skills after Grade 8, and gain recognition for their achievement.

Preparing for and taking the ARSM can give purpose and direction to post-Grade 8 learning, with the added benefit of feedback from an ABRSM examiner. It can also help to build confidence and develop skills such as personal commitment, self-discipline and motivation.

All of this makes ARSM a great option for a wide range of musicians – for students who want to develop their performance skills before taking their education further, for those who want to get back into playing or singing after a break, or for anyone looking for a new challenge beyond Grade 8.

How does ARSM compare to Grade 8 and DipABRSM?

In many ways, this new diploma bridges the gap between Grade 8 practical and our DipABRSM in Music Performance – in fact you need to pass Grade 8 before you can enter for ARSM.

Some aspects of ARSM are similar to Grade 8 and some are similar to the DipABRSM, but ARSM is also distinctly different from both of these existing qualifications. Let’s take a look at the differences.

Unlike Grade 8 there are no supporting tests in the ARSM exam – no sight-reading, aural tests or scales. Whereas candidates taking the DipABRSM in Performance need to write programme notes, take part in a viva voce and do a quick study test, ARSM has no written or spoken elements. It is unique in focussing solely on practical performing skills.

At Grade 8, candidates usually play or sing for around 15 minutes, choosing music from three or four set repertoire lists. The examiner assesses each piece or song independently of the others, with no requirement for these works to combine into a programme, or to form an overall performance. This is reflected in the marking for Grade 8, as at earlier grades, where the examiner gives a separate mark for each piece or song.

The step up to ARSM

For ARSM, candidates present a 30-minute programme of music from a much wider choice of repertoire. At least 20 minutes must come from the ARSM list (which is currently the same as the DipABRSM list), with the option for the remaining 10 minutes to be own-choice repertoire, as long as this is of at least Grade 8 standard. This means there is considerably more flexibility and freedom in putting together an ARSM programme than there is in choosing music for Grade 8, and the programme will be assessed as a whole, which reflects a different approach.
Another way of thinking about this is that in a graded music exam, the examiner assesses core music-making skills through the various separate sections of the exam. However, at ARSM level, candidates will need to pull together their musical skill, knowledge and understanding, demonstrating these through their half-hour performance – a performance which will be assessed holistically.

How will examiners mark an ARSM exam?
In an ARSM exam, marks are awarded in two parts. First, the examiner marks the pieces or songs out of 30 using our existing graded music exam marking criteria – writing comments, piece by piece, as the performance takes place. A single mark out of 30 is awarded for the playing or singing of all the chosen works in a candidate’s programme.

Once the candidate has finished playing or singing, the examiner goes on to assess their performance as a whole. This is marked out of 20, using a second set of criteria devised especially for ARSM.

Finally, the examiner combines these two marks – one out of 30 and one out of 20 – to provide an overall result out of 50.

The second set of marking criteria
In this two-part approach to marking, a well-established and familiar set of marking criteria applies to over half the total marks awarded. For the remaining marks, the examiner steps back from the playing or singing of each musical work to consider the performance as a whole. This is where the second set of marking criteria is used.

The new criteria relate to three aspects of performance: musical communication, interpretation and technical delivery. Here’s a summary of what the examiner will be looking for in each of these areas.

Communication – you and your listener
- Consistent outward projection and musical involvement
- Performance commitment and personal conviction
- Effective sequence and pacing of the chosen programme
- Performance awareness and control throughout the programme

Interpretation – you and your music
- Stylistic realisation and characterisation across the programme
- Ability to meet the interpretative demands of the chosen music
- Awareness and control of textures and ensemble
- Effective blending and balancing

Technical delivery – you and your instrument
- Consistent technical assurance and control
- Ability to meet the technical challenges of the chosen music
- Sustained instrument/voice management throughout the programme
- Responsiveness and adaptiveness to the performance situation

What makes a good performance?
The new set of marking criteria gives a clear indication of what candidates should aim for in terms of their overall performance. They need to:
- show consistency in their musical communication, interpretation and delivery
- sustain confidence and control throughout the various demands of their programme
- demonstrate their individual musical strengths and enthusiasms
- show their musical skill, knowledge and understanding, allied to personal commitment and conviction.

The importance of the performance as a whole
You can see from the way ARSM will be assessed that the evaluation of the performance as a whole is a very important aspect of this diploma. Candidates need to choose a programme of music which really suits their abilities, understanding and personality. They then need to be able to play or sing for half an hour, sustaining concentration, stamina and awareness consistently from start to finish.

In graded exams this is not something candidates need to think about, as the pieces or songs are all chosen from set repertoire lists, can be presented in any order and are not assessed in combination with each other. In contrast, for ARSM, candidates will put together a chosen programme of music and perform it, adapting and responding to the live performance situation as it unfolds.

Accessible, challenging and rewarding
So, ARSM provides an accessible first diploma. It gives candidates the opportunity – perhaps for the first time – to devise, put together and perform their own programme of music, and helps to bridge the gap between Grade 8 and DipABRSM. Passing this diploma will be a significant achievement and, as a result, successful candidates can add the letters ARSM after their name.

By preparing to meet the challenges of a complete 30-minute performance, candidates will not only develop their technical assurance and instrumental control, but also their musical communication skills. It’s about both the art and the craft of musical performance. With its focus on creating and performing a sustained programme of music, ARSM provides an achievable and meaningful performance goal for anyone looking for a fresh challenge beyond Grade 8.

ARSM in brief
What is it?
The Associate of the Royal Schools of Music (ARSM) is our new performance-only diploma. It’s an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate performance skills after Grade 8, and successful candidates can add the letters ARSM after their name.

Who can take it?
It’s for all instruments examined by ABRSM, including singing, and can be taken in all ABRSM practical exam venues worldwide. Candidates must have ABRSM practical Grade 8 or a listed alternative before entering.

What happens in the exam?
Candidates present a 30-minute performance. At least 20 minutes of music is chosen from the ARSM repertoire list – the same list set for DipABRSM. Up to 10 minutes of music can be own-choice repertoire, of at least Grade 8 standard. There are no written or spoken elements, and no sight-reading, aural tests or scales.

When can I take it?
The first ARSM exams will take place from January 2017, alongside current practical exams.

Find out more about ARSM at www.abrsm.org/newdiploma, and look out for our ARSM films – coming soon – to see what it’s like to take this new exam.
First steps in piano playing

Working with beginners is at once demanding and immensely rewarding. Piano teacher and author Karen Marshall shares some ideas on this vast subject.

I’ve taught many beginners and, at times, nearly a whole practice of students at these early stages. It’s demanding, yes, but also some of the most rewarding teaching I’ve ever done. There’s something magical about any student moving from not being able to play a note to performing their first tune - even if it is Twinkle, twinkle little star or the familiar extract from Beethoven’s Ode to Joy.

I remember my first piano lesson and how excited I was to take my tutor book home and explore what I’d learnt. So perhaps aim to make the first lesson a happy lifelong memory. Try to make it pupil-led and don’t have a fixed agenda. Also remember that students like to have something to take away with them – not necessarily a tutor book, but something – and be clear on what you expect them to prepare for the next lesson.

Moving on from the first lesson, teaching beginners is a complex business. No student is ever the same and a bespoke method meeting their individual needs can reap benefits. It’s a vast subject, but here are some areas to think about, with resources and ideas to explore. You’ll see that I’ve used the letters which make up the word MUSIC to guide my thinking here and as a reminder that making music is what it’s all about.

Materials
Have a range of materials available to keep lessons energetic and varied.

- **Rhythm cards**: a set that gradually builds in complexity. You can also use these as a stimulus for improvisation. Start with the rhythm only, moving on to rhythms played on one note, then rhythms combined with note motifs.

- **Improvisation note motifs**: try these as starters: C D E; D F G; C D E F G; D E F G A.

- **A practice notebook**: you could also use this to keep a repertoire diary, writing down the tunes a student has enjoyed playing. This provides a record of their achievement which you can celebrate together – always a good idea!

- **Extra-large stave**: you can make this on the floor using masking tape.

- **Coloured pencils**: for colour coding any notes your students find tricky.

- **Post-it notes**: to use as prompts on a tutor book. Students (even adults) can struggle to look at their practice diaries.

- **A range of tutor books**: perhaps use one as your main book but have others to supplement it. As my own piano teacher, Christine Brown, said: ‘no one method’.

- **Note-reading cards**: make a set of cards with a different note on each. Put a selection on the music stand for you or your pupils to move around to create tunes. Pupils can do this at home too!
Traditional folk tunes and rhymes: use these for singing in lessons. Most young children are happy to do this. You can also use them for playing by ear for teenagers and adults. The British Kodály Academy has a great selection at www.kodaly.org.uk.

Understanding
As teachers – and without meaning to – we can sometimes presume knowledge or simply use language our students don’t understand. Take care with this. Other ways to maximise understanding could include:

- **Multi-sensory teaching**: use a variety of activities with your students which include and combine seeing, hearing and doing. Here are some suggestions.
  - Ask pupils to ‘walk the pulse’ while listening to music, with footsteps matching the beat.
  - Draw heart shapes on a piece of card: three hearts for three beats in a bar, four for four beats in a bar etc. Then ask students to tap each heart in turn to mark the pulse while listening to music.
  - Get pupils to mark the pulse of a piece of music by tapping on a drum or using sounds like Ta Ta. Or tap the drum and make the sound at the same time.

- **Working with parents**: parents can be a huge asset in the learning process if you define your different roles well. I tactfully advise parents that they are the child’s greatest fan and I am their teacher. However, there are some areas which parents can definitely help with. For things like posture – such as getting the stool to the right height and in the right position, and creating a good hand, arm and wrist position – parental support at home is invaluable. Or they could make a stave on the kitchen floor with masking tape for practising note reading – the child jumps on it. This is a brilliant way to reinforce note recognition.

- **Systematic**: Most beginners learn best when they are following a logical sequence and a ‘sound before symbol’ approach is always good practice. I often start with pulse, followed by rhythm, pitch, phrasing and expression. I also establish five-finger positions first, before moving out of hand position gradually.

- **Intuitive**: Is your student enjoying what you are teaching? If they’re forgetting their books every week what are they trying to tell you? Perhaps they don’t like the material. Don’t be afraid to change things. If a tutor book simply isn’t working, try moving on.
  - Also be aware that some students can say ‘yes I understand’ when really they don’t. Try introducing some ‘teach me’ activity. If students make mistakes try not to simply correct it, as this can damage confidence and prevent self-discovery. Instead, ask them to teach you what you’ve just taught them. This is a good way to assess what they have really learnt and absorbed.

Curriculum – the first term
We need to follow a curriculum for each student that is tailored for them. Talk to students about their interests (especially teenagers and adults) and always set your pace by their success. Avoid doing too much or making things too difficult, as this can be off-putting and affect their motivation negatively.

- **How the piano works**.
- **Maintaining a pulse**.
- **Understanding the pattern of notes A to G and where they appear on the keyboard, and that they have a place on the stave (treble and bass)**.
- **Producing a good hand, wrist, arm and piano stool position**.
- **Using and understanding finger numbers**.
- **Understanding rhythm: crotchet, minim and semi-breve and their rests – explore quavers aurally**.
- **Pitch**: singing back a simple melody and singing the tonic, understanding high and low and their position on the keyboard.
- **Reading notation independently around middle C (A to E), and up to F or G with support**.
- **Improvising a simple two-note melody using a minor 3rd and copying a rhythm**.
- **Using simple dynamics, staccato and legato**.
- **Establish effective practice routines and a reward system**.
- **Establish a positive relationship with the pupil and parents**.

It’s all about MUSIC
Avoid talking too much in the lesson and let your student play as much as possible – learning music through music. Try to provide plenty of performance opportunities. A small group of carefully chosen students can gain much from listening to one another and hearing repertoire they can strive to play in the near future: ‘I’ve five pieces before I can play Bingo like Layla’ (Elsie, aged seven years). Try to put music making at the heart of every lesson and visualise each student making the piano a lifelong friend.

The ultimate teaching workout
Teaching beginners may not be easy but it really is the ultimate teaching workout which can develop our creativity, musicality, knowledge and empathy. It’s our privilege to be part of any student’s first steps into music. Let’s enjoy!

Karen Marshall is a piano and class music teacher. She co-authored Get Set! Piano with Heather Hammond and compiled ABRSM’s Encore books for pianists.

Look out for ABRSM’s new Piano Star books for beginners – coming soon!
Trumpet taster

With the latest Trumpet syllabus now available, syllabus co-selector Geoff Harniess offers a taste of some of the exciting repertoire on offer and provides ideas for exam preparation along the way.

The trumpet is one of our most ancient instruments. It has variously been used to honour pharaohs, monarchs and emperors, to direct armies in battle, to mark religious occasions and to simply give pleasure to music lovers. That diverse history is reflected in the versatility of the modern instrument (and its relatives) being heard in orchestras, brass bands and ensembles, in jazz, folk and pop music, and as a solo instrument too.

The new Trumpet syllabus caters for players with interests in all styles of music and candidates can choose a programme that really matches their individual musical character and taste. Many pieces will be familiar and have been enjoyed by trumpeters for generations but alongside are exciting new contemporary works from collections such as Shining Brass and Spectrum for Trumpet that present new challenges to the learner and the teacher. There are plenty of fun pieces for young players too, of course.

There are options that will particularly appeal to players of cornet (including Eb soprano) and flugelhorn, and candidates may wish to choose to use an alternative instrument [C, D, E♭ or E trumpets], where appropriate.

Looking at List A
List A focuses on what we might call Classical, in the broader sense, and traditional music – though with some modern twists included too. The trumpet’s ceremonial and majestic side can be explored in pieces such as Philip Sparke’s A Knight’s Tale [Grade 1] and Charpentier’s Prelude to his famous Te Deum [Grade 4].

Look for elegance and grace as well as boldness in the Haydn and Neruda concerto movements [Grades 4 and 8]. Ornamentation in these pieces can add to the style where they enhance the music and don’t interfere with pulse and line. Trills are one of the most challenging things to bring off on the trumpet and need careful and patient preparation! Work on exercises such as those in Arban’s Grand Method (still a must for all ambitious players) and vocalise the trills as well. Avoid the temptation to go as fast as possible and keep it simple and refined.

There is plenty of romance to be found here too, in music by Fauré [Grade 3], Tchaikovsky [Grades 3, 4 and 8], Debussy [Grade 5] and Mahler [Grade 8]. The perhaps less expected lyrical side of the instrument should be projected while more experienced players can add colour and warmth to the sound with some controlled vibrato.

The syllabus caters for players with interests in all styles of music ... students can choose a programme that matches their musical character and taste.

List B: into the 20th century
List B takes us from the late Romantics into the 20th century and right up to the present. Here we find arrangements of music by the likes of Scott Joplin (Grades 3 and 5), Leonard Bernstein (Grades 1, 3, 7 and 8), Andrew Lloyd-Webber (Grade 3) and John Williams (Grades 4 and 5). There are also highly crafted original works by composers who really understand how to write progressively for young and developing musicians. For advanced players at the upper grades compare the musical demands of, for example, John McCabe’s Jigaudon [Grade 6] and Edward Gregson’s concerto movement [Grade 8] with those of Guy Barker’s JW Shuffle [Grade 7] and Kenny Baker’s Virtuosity [Grade 8].

Not just a solo line
Being familiar with the whole of the music rather than just the solo line can have a really positive impact on the musical outcome. Ideally, students should find the opportunity to practise the accompanied pieces with a pianist before the exam day – something which can help them to perform with confidence and security.

List C: playing unaccompanied
Playing unaccompanied tests particular skills beyond the fundamental ‘operating’ of the instrument. The tempo and the pulse need to be firmly set in the mind before the first note is sounded. The player must then take command of the musical time and space in order to shape and pace the phrases in such a way as to allow their breaths to define the melodic line. The pulse always needs to be clear – sometimes tight and strict as in Silver Lining by Dave Gale [Grade 5] but then more flexible when the music demands it, as in Arban’s Andante con spirito at the same grade.

Playing to your strengths
As well as choosing music that students enjoy there are some other considerations to be made. Make sure that candidates play to their strengths. If double tonguing is not totally comfortable perhaps best to avoid Goedcke’s Concert Etude at Grade 8, while Bernstein’s One Hand, One Heart will show off a young player’s developing legato control at Grade 1.

Focus on stamina
All trumpet players have to face the physical demands that are placed on the embouchure and it’s wise to keep this in mind when putting together a programme. Candidates should also try to avoid lots of last-minute practice that uses up their stamina on the day. Better to save it for the exam room!
Syllabus update

Stretching musical minds

Inevitably there is room on the syllabus for only a small selection of an ever increasing repertoire. But the various books featured provide many opportunities for students to delve into other pieces – not just those set for the exams. In doing so, they will find music that stretches not only their instrumental technique but also their whole musical mind.

Geoff Harniess is Head of London’s Centre for Young Musicians and an ABRSM examiner. He has taught at all levels and is Music Director for the London Youth Wind Band. His co-selector on the Trumpet syllabus was Nick Care.

The new syllabus for Trumpet, Cornet and Flugelhorn is valid from 2017. Find out more at www.abrsm.org/trumpet.
Scales and arpeggios – creating connections

Why are scales and arpeggios important? How can teachers make them relevant and interesting?
Louise Matthew explores some answers and looks at ways to link scales and arpeggios to everyday music making.

We all want to give our pupils the best possible start on their instrument, making sure they have the tools that will enable them to go as far as they want to. Scales are an essential part of this toolkit and so we have to set things up from the start so pupils think of scales as an integral part of their overall musical experience.

What do pupils say?
I asked my Year 5 recorder players (aged nine to ten) to tell me why it’s helpful to learn scales and arpeggios. They said that scales helped them to:
- learn new notes and get used to playing them
- warm up my fingers and instrument
- learn new pieces and songs
- improve my sight-reading because they help me to read notes
- play in different keys
- prepare for an exam.

None of this will come as a surprise, but by helping our pupils to make these connections clearly and regularly we can encourage them to develop a positive and healthy attitude towards scales.

Making scales relevant
It helps if pupils understand the role that scales play in music. Comparing scales and music to something which pupils can easily relate to is a good way to introduce these musical building blocks. I often use...
FP Focus on skills

W part of their overall musical experience. Start so pupils think of scales as an integral and so we have to set things up from the start. Scales are an essential part of this toolkit will enable them to go as far as they want.

I asked my Year 5 recorder players (aged 9) what they say?

Why are scales and arpeggios important? How can teachers make them relevant and interesting?

Creating connections clearly and regularly we can easily relate to is a good way to introduce music to something which pupils can all want to give our pupils the best preparation for an exam.

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n learn new notes and get used to scales helped them to:

healthy attitude towards scales.

None of this will come as a surprise, there. Again, it’s about having fun!

Begin these warm-up games at a slow tempo and gradually speed up. Play around with the articulation, starting with none and then using the piece for inspiration. Take it in turns to play different bars. Ask pupils to write some more exercises or extend the ones that are there. Again, it’s about having fun!

Connecting brain and fingers

Moving on, pupils discover that taking scale and arpeggio patterns out of their music and practising them separately can really help their brain and fingers to connect. Extending these patterns and creating sequences helps to motivate pupils with this part of their practice. You could write some warm-up games or exercises to give focus to this activity. For some starting points take a look at the examples on the ABRSM website at www.abrsm.org/scalewarmups.

Begin these warm-up games at a slow tempo and gradually speed up. Play around with the articulation, starting with none and then using the piece for inspiration. Take it in turns to play different bars. Ask pupils to write some more exercises or extend the ones that are there. Again, it’s about having fun!

The theory link

In order to recognise musical patterns, pupils are already making links with music theory, but we may have to help them identify this connection, especially to begin with. Creating and writing out some of the previously mentioned warm-up exercises will also highlight the links between pieces, scales and music theory. It can be a useful way to bring things together in a lesson and help pupils understand the role of musical knowledge and understanding in their playing.

Some pupils might want to improvise or compose a piece using their scales as a starting point. Others might like to try transposing the patterns they find in their pieces.

Developing aural skills

You can also make connections between scales and aural, particularly singing from score. Being able to recognise scale and arpeggio patterns is invaluable here – knowing when and how the notes are going to move by step or jump. Singing scales, arpeggios, exercises, patterns and bits of pieces with our pupils will give them a greater understanding of the music they are playing, as well as helping them to improve their aural skills.

Scales and exams

Where exams are concerned, everyone has a part to play. ABRSM selects scale requirements which create a progressive pathway through the grades for each instrument. As teachers we help our pupils to navigate that pathway. Pupils then need to take responsibility for practising these scales and arpeggios. Finally it’s the examiner’s job to mark this section of the exam fairly and consistently using ABRSM’s marking criteria.

Pupils can sometimes feel disillusioned with scales if they only practise them in the run up to an exam, just as they might learn a list of words for a spelling test. As teachers we need to introduce scales and arpeggios as they come up in pieces, studies and sight-reading. In this way, pupils build up a bank of scales, from within a musical context, that are regularly reinforced and which they can draw on and add to.

A final question

It can, of course, be a challenge to get through everything in a lesson. Perhaps some weeks it feels as if there is just not enough time for scales, and as a short cut we leave them out. But if we can teach scales and arpeggios in a way that connects them with the music pupils are already playing, then can these musical patterns become a short cut in themselves?

Louise Matthew is a flute teacher, primary class music teacher and an ABRSM examiner.

Why scales and arpeggios? ABRSM’s Chief Examiner, John Holmes, provides some answers.

Scales and arpeggios are not music, but music is made up of them. Scales are to music what words are to speech, skills are to sport, ingredients are to cooking and chocolate is to brownies!

Scales and arpeggios are also fantastic skill-builders and a great technical workout. They can help with:

Reading and learning

Once you get to know your scales and arpeggios you begin to recognise keys and patterns, which speeds up reading and learning.

Facility and fluency

Scales help you learn and become familiar with the typical patterns on your instrument, giving you a muscle memory-bank of common figures and shapes. As a result, your brain and fingers know what to expect in advance, leading to better facility and fluency.

Controlling pitch, time, tone and shape

Scales and arpeggios are a great way to develop your sense of: pitch and intervals; rhythmic regularity and flow; tone across the range of your instrument; and feel for contour and shape.

Find out more

You can find Louise’s ideas for warm-up games at www.abrsm.org/scalewarmups.

Our marking criteria explain what examiners look for when they assess each section of a graded music exam, including scales and arpeggios: www.abrsm.org/markingcriteria

ABRSM’s brand new Scales Trainer app is available now for Piano and Violin at Grades 1 to 5: www.abrsm.org/scalestrainer

PHOTO: © BIGSTOCK/DASHK

Louise Matthew
primary class music teacher and an ABRSM examiner.
Supporting music education

Making a difference

Every year Chamber Music New Zealand holds a competition for young chamber musicians and composers which includes a unique coaching programme funded by ABRSM. Sue Jane, CMNZ Education and Outreach Coordinator reports.

The coaching programme sponsored by ABRSM is celebrated by all those who receive it and has become an integral part of the New Zealand Community Trust Chamber Music Contest, held annually throughout New Zealand.

The contest is the only competition of its kind in New Zealand and is open to young musicians and composers aged 13 to 19 years. It attracts over 1,500 entries annually in 15 districts throughout the country. Many of New Zealand’s most celebrated musicians count this competition as the springboard that helped launch their careers. The Doric Quartet, after adjudicating the national finals in 2014, wrote: ‘If only we had something like this in the UK; it is a truly unique event.’

Raising standards
For the past six years ABRSM’s generous sponsorship has funded a coaching programme using professional musicians in a number of centres, as part of the contest build-up. This tuition helps raise the overall standard of performance in each region enabling each group to ‘lift their game’. Through it, students have access to teaching of the highest quality, bringing them closer to reaching their potential.

One of the 2015 coaches explained: ‘It’s very stimulating and rewarding to coach young chamber musicians. They are almost always well-prepared, enthusiastic and responsive.’ When asked if they would participate again, coaches invariably give a resounding ‘yes’. They love seeing the benefit to groups, especially those from small towns.

With so many New Zealand musicians being alumni of the competition, it’s not unusual for coaches to be able to share with contestants their own experiences at that age – always a good connection to make.

This year’s sessions
This year there were coaching sessions covering the country from Whangarei in the north to Invercargill in the south. Some sessions were given by NZ resident musicians in the course of touring for Chamber Music New Zealand. Saxophonist Deborah Rawson visited Motueka ahead of her Saxcess saxophone quartet performing there in June and relished the opportunity to work with the young players.

Thomas Eves is a Kiwi trumpeter who has returned to work in Christchurch as the principal trumpet of Christchurch Symphony Orchestra after postgraduate study at London’s Royal College of Music. He was enthusiastic about driving 250km down the coast to coach the brass quintet at Waitaki Boys’ High and they were glad to have him. ‘Thanks again for providing this service,’ wrote the dedicated local brass teacher Margaret Van Ginkel. ‘The kids in the provinces very rarely get these opportunities.’

School music teachers have huge demands on their time and are grateful for the expert assistance the ABRSM coaching programme provides. Motueka music tutor Sarah Lewis said the coaching programme was ‘so good, and so necessary!’ Commenting on a visit from flautist Hannah Darroch, teacher Gary Wilby of Hutt Valley High School, said: ‘Thank you for the opportunity which was very valuable for the students. One said afterwards that the group were amazed at how all the parts worked together and he now realised how important his part was.’
Orchestral connections
CMNZ enjoys a close relationship with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and looks for opportunities to use these musicians while on tour around the country. NZSO players recently gave coaching sessions on their afternoon off while in Dunedin. Principal flute Bridget Douglas was happy to spend time with several groups at her old school in the city. Once a contestant herself, Bridget worked with the students to get them to do more than play the notes on the page. ‘If you connect with the music, the music will connect with the audience.’

Using technology
CMNZ cannot offer coaching to all the groups that ask – this year 280 groups out of the 469 in the competition requested coaching. Each year 70 to 90 groups receive assistance and priority is given to groups that are least likely to be able to source high-quality professional tuition in their area. Skype coaching sessions were also introduced in 2013. Mark Walton, an Australian-based clarinet and saxophone performer who was awarded the Order of Australia medal in 2005 for his contribution to music education, specialises in using technology for distance tutoring. Mark has been engaged for the last couple of years to Skype-coach groups in remote areas. This year he has helped some Gisborne groups to choose repertoire following their Skype sessions with him.

Composers too
An important strand of the NZCT Chamber Music Contest is the Original Composition section and ABRSM-funded feedback is given to these young composers in the lead up to submitting their scores for judging. This advice can include everything from musical structure and the basics of composition to finding the right title and including programme notes.

Wellington-based composer and arranger Craig Utting has been the Composition Coach for the past three years. When asked for one piece of advice he would give to the budding young composers entering the contest he responded: ‘Three pieces of advice! Listen to lots of music. Play lots of music. Write lots of music. Listen to lots of music! Play lots of music. Write lots of music – the hardest part is writing it down, so the more you do, the easier it gets – it’s called practising, just like learning an instrument!’

A source of inspiration
What has become clear is that the coaching sessions are not only about getting groups and contestants ready for the contest. In many regional centres having a visit from enthusiastic professional musicians can be a source of inspiration and expert advice that benefits students in the broader context of their musical development. After the coaching, students usually feel they need to rehearse more. But they also comment that the instruction they have received is useful in guiding them to improve.

Feedback from students is not confined to the works they are preparing for the contest. Coaching sessions are often an opportunity to receive instrument specific advice about techniques related to posture, tone production, general ensemble skills and much more. As one student said: ‘The session helped for all my playing, not just pieces for this competition.’

Making a difference
The ABRSM coaching programme has made a significant difference to the standard of the players involved and assisted teachers greatly. It is important in ensuring that the contest continues to nurture musicians and lovers of music. As Myles Payne from Nelson College for Girls says: ‘This is an amazing gift that you offer the students. Learning like this is powerful and has made a difference with each group.’

Find out more about Chamber Music New Zealand and the NZCT Chamber Music Contest at www.chambermusic.co.nz.
New for trombone

With refreshed repertoire lists for Trombone now available, our syllabus selectors, Adrian Taylor and Robert Priestley, provide a guide to some of the many choices on offer.
Selecting pieces and studies for the syllabus can be a complex task. Particularly in the early grades, they need to fit within the correct range of notes, within time limits and be in appropriate keys. In addition, notes in 7th position are impossible to reach for most young children so pieces for Grades 1 to 3 are restricted to the first six positions. Once we delivered our long list of pieces, an external moderator checked and commented on all our suggestions before final syllabus choices were made.

The 2017 syllabus contains pieces from current lists together with new choices, some only published in the last few years. Going through hundreds of pieces has put us in the fortunate position of finding music we would otherwise not have come across. Here we’ve looked at newly added books and pieces, although repertoire carried over from the current syllabus remains highly recommended!

New to the syllabus are some early-grade pieces that are also set on the syllabuses for other brass instruments, allowing more effective group teaching of mixed instruments when working towards an exam. There’s also plenty of choice for treble-clef readers as well as solos from the brass band repertoire, and we have maximised the use of books set across Lists A and B, and across a number of grades.

**PIECES: LISTS A & B**

**Shining Brass (ABRSM)**
New on the Trombone syllabus are ABRSM’s *Shining Brass* books, which already appear on syllabuses for other brass instruments. With one book providing pieces for Lists A, B and C at Grades 1 to 3 and a second book for Grades 4 and 5, this is an ideal way to buy music for lower-grade exams. You can buy the piano accompaniment books separately, but the brass books themselves come with a CD to practise with at home. And with *Shining Brass* pieces also set for other brass syllabuses, group teaching of mixed-brass instruments becomes more practical and efficient.

**Tons of Tunes from the Classics (Curnow Music)**
For earlier grades we also like *Tons of Tunes from the Classics* and have chosen pieces from it for Grades 1 to 3. The book features 32 well-known pieces and comes with orchestrated backing tracks on a CD, making it excellent for use in school concerts. It also has a large stave size making it easy to read and is available for other wind and brass instruments so children on different instruments can play together. Trombonists with short arms will appreciate that Bizet’s *Farandole* (Grade 2) and both Grade 3 pieces (Beethoven and Mouret) don’t have notes that go beyond 5th position, allowing for performances with a fighting chance of good intonation for these players!

**Cornish Pastiche (Spartan Press)**
Cornwall is a rich source of great folk tunes and *Cornish Pastiche* from west-country based Mark Tanner has pieces set for Grades 1 to 4 in List A. Some, such as *I Love My Love* (Grade 3), will be familiar but others will be delightful discoveries.

**Nordic Sketchbook (Warwick Music)**
Edward Watson’s *Nordic Sketchbook* provided a wonderful collection of original compositions for Grades 1 to 3. *Trolls* (Grade 1) will appeal to many young players and has the benefit of not going beyond 5th position – trolls have short arms too!

**Ultimate Movie Instrumental Solos for Trombone (Alfred)**
Those who enjoy the music of John Williams will very much like this book, from which *Hedwig’s Theme, Raiders March* and *The Imperial March* (*Darth Vader’s Theme*) have been chosen for Grades 4 and 5. The book comes with a CD with printable PDF accompaniments, MP3s featuring performances and accompaniment tracks. The trombone edition is compatible with versions for flute, clarinet, alto and tenor saxophone, trumpet and French horn giving great opportunities for group music making.

**Across the Pond 02 (Brass Wind)**
Another new book that appears across a number of grades (4 to 7) is *Across the Pond 02* arranged by Jim McMillen. As the title suggests, it features well-known numbers from the USA that we are sure players will enjoy. Highlights include the popular *Hit the Road Jack* (Grade 5), with glissandi and scoops, and a nicely challenging arrangement of Copland’s *Hoe-Down* (Grade 7).

**Get a Handel on It and Savoir Faire (Brass Wind)**
*Get a Handel on It* for Grades 5 to 8 is a new book of Christopher Mowat arrangements and a welcome addition to his popular Bach books. The pieces make ideal concert pieces and each comes with performance advice. *Ombra mai fu* (Grade 6) works particularly well on the trombone, especially for players with a beautiful, controlled sound. At Grade 8, *Adagio and Allegro* is lovely to play, with its aria-like introduction and, as Christopher Mowat describes it, the ‘agile, light on its feet and rather cheeky’ Allegro.

Also new to the syllabus is an earlier Christopher Mowat book, *Savoir Faire*. Again, this comes with helpful advice and provides wonderful arrangements of French repertoire for Grades 4 to 7.

**FOCUS ON STUDIES: LIST C**

The new syllabus features some excellent new study books specifically written for the trombone. There are also a number of general brass books composed primarily with valve instruments in mind. From these we have made careful selections to provide studies which suit trombone players and avoid potential problems with slurring and the awkwardness of moving the slide quickly between near and far positions.

**JazzFX for Trombone (Brass Wind)**
List C pieces in a jazz style have been a mainstay of the syllabus for some years and we were excited to find this new book by trombonist Dave Gale. *JazzFX* will be especially useful to teachers who work with groups of young trombonists. Set for Grades 2 to 4, with a choice of two studies at each grade, the book includes 15 tunes in a variety of styles that can be played as solos, but also with the CD and as duets or trios. From the very playable *The Ending’s Well* (Grade 2) to the gentle ballad *Prairie Contrary* (Grade 4), this is a book that has already found a place in our teaching bags.
Dance to the Beat of the World and Music Makes the World Go Around (Con Moto)
We particularly liked two new Jock McKenzie books – Dance to the Beat of the World (Grades 1 to 3) and Music Makes the World Go Around (Grades 4 and 5). They contain original pieces in styles native to countries across the world. Pop (Grade 1) is a good option for those struggling with higher notes as it only goes up to a concert G. Other favourites are Funk (Grade 3) and Takai (Grade 5). All these studies need a good sense of rhythm and beat.

Hear Today and Bone Tomorrow (Brass Wind)
An exciting new trombone-specific study book is Derek Bourgeois’s Hear Today and Bone Tomorrow for Grades 5 to 8 and beyond. As always, Derek’s studies are tuneful but challenging and very enjoyable to play. Studies set for Grades 5 and 6 use alternative positions to enable natural slurs, with tongued legato not arriving until Grade 7. Tenor clef features in all the set studies (in the bass-clef edition). The book will be a popular choice for students who are serious about becoming good trombonists.

Reel Technique for Trombone (Warwick Music)
Many young trombonists enjoy fast slide movement, whizzing around the instrument and learning to be very accurate. For them, as well as lovers of folk music, Reel Technique by trombonist Bob Quick fits the bill.

We have chosen a List C piece for each of Grades 4 to 6 from the 32 traditional tunes in this very enjoyable book. Featuring playable jumps and runs, Marathon Polka for Grade 6 will be a favourite with energetic players.

OTHER PIECES: GRADES 5 TO 8
Not all pieces come from large anthologies and we were very pleased to set Jean-François Michel’s Galop (Grade 5) as an example of a modern piece specifically written for trombone. The complete work includes three movements: Preludio, Siciliana & Galop. The Preludio and Siciliana are not overly difficult, although a little above Grade 5, so you could work on the whole piece for a solo concert.

As hinted at here, we have tried to feature music written or arranged by trombonists. Arthur Pryor was a famous trombone virtuoso, bandleader and soloist with the Sousa Band. New to Grade 6 is his Cakewalk Contest. The syllabus moderator described this as ‘one of the loveliest discoveries of the new syllabus – such a classic entertainment piece with real trombone pedigree.’

Bringing things up-to-date, Jiggs Whigham is a big name in the jazz trombone world today. His Suite for Trombone is, as he puts it, ‘challenging but accessible’. We have set the bossa nova-style Hills for Grade 7. With the fourth and fifth movements, a slow ballad and a fast blues, set for Grade 8, this suite is a valuable resource for higher-level players.

Also at Grade 8 we have a piece by the prolific French composer Claude Arrieu, who died in 1990. Her Introduction, Scherzo et Choral is a delightful and very playable four-minute piece that would also work well in recitals.

Another discovery for Grade 8 List A was Pièce Concertante by the 19th-century Samuel-Alexander Rousseau. Described by Alan Hutt as ‘a real corker and ready to give the Guilmant a run for its money’, this expressive piece again deserves to find its way into recital programmes. Finally, for Grade 8 List B we have the exuberant Shout! by Rob Wiffin. This challenging Latin-style piece is so good – it’s a must for advanced players interested in jazz-style music!

It has been our privilege to select repertoire for the new Trombone syllabus. We hope you enjoy looking through it and discovering new pieces!

Robert Priestley is a trombonist and teacher with experience as a brass teacher, conductor and manager in a number of UK Music Services.

Adrian Taylor is a trombonist and a brass teacher and conductor for Services for Music Education, the music service for Birmingham. He is also a composer and arranger.

The new Trombone syllabus is valid from January 2017. Find out more at www.abrsm.org/trombone.
Returning to the recorder

What’s it like to take up an instrument after a break of many years? Recorder player Paul Smith shares the highs and lows of being an adult learner.

Like many people I played the recorder at school, never really getting far beyond B, A and G. But four years ago, when week after week of bad weather kept me from getting out cycling, I decided to take it up again – at the age of 55 – and learn to play properly.

Amazingly, I discovered that there’s a cluster of recorder players in the Derbyshire village in which I live and with two phone calls I had someone to teach me and the offer of a group I could play with.

Exam experiences
Since then my journey has been a fascinating one, with huge ups and downs. I have had regular lessons, played with two groups and passed Grades 4, 5 and 6. There is no doubt that nerves have been a problem, not only for exams and concerts but even sometimes for lessons.

One of the strangest experiences was to enter the exam hall for my Grade 5 theory exam, see all the tiny tables in their rows and columns and then sit down and work for two hours – not having taken a written exam for 35 years!

My experience of ABRSM practical exams has been nerve-racking but on balance positive. I found examiners were pleasantly surprised to see an adult come into the room with his music and recorder and I always felt they wanted me to play as well as I possibly could. I’ve not always been pleased with my result but have taken comfort from ‘success begins at the pass mark’. I have been fortunate to have a teacher who praises more than she criticises and is able to start from how I play on a particular day, good or bad, and always point the way forward.

A suite of benefits
Recently I’ve found learning scales a challenge while moving on up the grade structure, but looking back on these four years of playing I’m so glad to have picked up the recorder once more.

I have always been a singer but this is the first time I’ve made any real progress as a musician and it’s delivered a suite of benefits. There is the obvious one of being able to do something that I couldn’t do before and the opportunities, both social and musical, that have opened up as result.

When listening to music played by others I definitely hear new detail and am even more appreciative of the amazing technical standard that professional players reach, apparently effortlessly. And playing has transformed my singing.

As someone who has always sung by ear, I tended to see written music as only a general guide to the ups and downs of pitch and volume! Now I see the music with fresh understanding and basics such as knowing what key we’re in and how time signatures work have made me a more confident and trusted choir member.

I would reassure any adult that it is possible to take up an instrument late in life. Your progress may be slow and each step may take more effort than it would for a younger person. You may have to overcome pounding heart or tense fingers as you wait to go into your exam. And you may feel some embarrassment when you struggle with music your teenage fellow players can just play easily, but the benefits will far outweigh the trouble involved. That, at least, is my story!

Paul’s top tips for practice

- Make practice part of your daily routine.
- Try to play in the morning. The later you leave it, the more it can become a chore.
- Always try something new, even if it’s short. Don’t just play your current pieces.
- Work on the hard bits, don’t just play through.
- Use an online metronome. Play difficult bits really slowly then speed up progressively.
- Always work towards a goal: the next lesson, the next exam, the next concert.
In person:
Chris Pascoe, ABRSM examiner

Chris Pascoe has been an ABRSM examiner for nine years. Having been Manager of Luton Music Service, he now runs his own private practice in Cornwall where he teaches the piano, cello, double bass and music theory.

What first inspired you musically?
At around 12 years old I joined my first orchestra and began playing in ensembles. The first time I played in a full symphony orchestra I was blown away by the experience. Playing music with others inspired me to listen to more music of all styles and learn to play the music I liked, not just classical but other genres too. My advice to all developing musicians – go and play with others!

How did ABRSM exams affect your development as a musician?
Hugely! I began taking exams when I was eight. I then averaged at least one practical and one theory exam each year until I was 16 or so. This meant that I always had reachable goals to aim for and it certainly made me practise regularly – with firm support from my parents. The diversity of pieces in the syllabus also helped me expand my musical knowledge, discovering composers I hadn’t heard of and finding out more about them.

Can you tell us about a special music teacher?
The teacher who stays in my mind is Miss Morehead, who took me through most of my piano grades. I’m still too much in awe to use her first name. She was strict and rarely gave praise, but when she did I felt I had really achieved musical greatness! I only appreciated what she had done for me later. I credit her with actually teaching me to play – others added refinements but she did the most important bit. She was a brilliant pianist too and I loved it when she played to me, which she did in most lessons.

Who are your musical heroes or heroines?
Hundreds, including pianists, cellists and conductors, and singers and guitarists from favourite bands. It’s hard to pick one. However, I do have huge respect for cellist Julian Lloyd Webber. In my teens I saw him in concert and he took time to speak to me afterwards. He has since become a hugely successful soloist, experimenting with lots of different musical styles. Recently he has devoted a great deal of time to music education and to giving as many children as possible the chance to play an instrument.

Is there a piece of music that has particular meaning for you?
Again, so many to choose from. I might go for Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5. I played it with my county youth orchestra when I was around 16. That was one of the first times I was emotionally affected by a piece of music. When I hear it now I still love it and it provokes fond memories of those first orchestral experiences.

What musical activities are you involved in now?
I’ve always been involved in music education. Until recently I taught instrumental music in schools and conducted youth music ensembles and orchestras. I now teach students from my music room at home in Cornwall.

I particularly like my work with a large number of adult students. Some have returned to playing having learned as children and some are coming to music for the first time. I enjoy teaching all ages and ability levels and every student provides me with a unique set of challenges.

What do you enjoy about being an ABRSM examiner?
I enjoy the challenge of doing all I can to put candidates at ease and enable them to do their best in their exam. As examiners, we empathise with candidates and really do want all of them to absolutely do themselves justice. I also enjoy the surprise element of not knowing what to expect until a candidate starts playing or singing.

Can you tell us about a memorable exam experience?
Many exams are memorable for good reasons! One example that I still tell my pupils about, to inspire them, involved a Grade 8 piano exam. The candidate had played their scales and pieces and I had awarded mainly Merit marks. Then came the sight-reading and aural tests. Now, Grade 8 Piano sight-reading can be fairly taxing. However, this candidate gave an inspired performance – technically faultless and full of musical shape. They then gave full, insightful responses to all the aural tests. These outstanding performances pulled the overall mark up to a Distinction.

It’s always really pleasing when a candidate has given equal time and effort to preparing all aspects of the exam, and not just the pieces!
Have fun with scales!

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