

The Advanced Piano Pedagogy Certificate

by Jennifer Snow

In September 2005, RCM Examinations launched the new Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program in order to offer a more expanded curriculum in support of excellence in teaching. The enriched three-level program culminates in the Teacher's ARCT diploma.

As a piano and pedagogy teacher, I always marvel at the lifetime learning cycle of musicians. Discussions with students and teachers invariably result in brainstorming sessions and creative thoughts on how to improve and expand our horizons as performers and teachers. The demands of more advanced repertoire further develop our knowledge of technique, skills, style, musicianship, artistic expression, and the learning process. Many of us received our pedagogy training through work with our mentor teachers, participation in classes and workshops, and most importantly, through teaching. Indeed, our profession is defined by the combination of a great passion and love for communicating music through teaching and a life-long study of pedagogy.

The Advanced Piano Pedagogy Certificate has been designed to allow students the time and focus to concentrate on the connections between the music they study and the learning process in both teaching and performing, and to develop skills in communication and interaction that form a vital element of pedagogical studies. Full details concerning the Pedagogy Certificate Program and the Advanced Piano Pedagogy Certificate can be found in *Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program, 2005 edition*, published as an addendum to the *Piano Syllabus, 2001 edition*.

Components of the Advanced Certificate

Candidates applying for the Advanced Piano Certificate/Teacher's ARCT examinations must have successfully completed all the requirements for both the Elementary and the Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificates at least one session previously. The requirements for the Advanced Piano Certificate/Teacher's ARCT diploma address pedagogical issues in the context of teaching students in Grades 7 through 10 and consist of three parts: a practical piano examination, a *viva*

voce examination, and a written examination. The Teacher's ARCT diploma will be awarded only to candidates 18 years and older.

Part I: Performance of Repertoire, Technical Requirements, Ear Tests, and Sight Reading

The practical examination is required to ensure that candidates develop the necessary levels of performance, musicianship, and skill to demonstrate and communicate musical concepts and expertise in their teaching. The requirements for Part I of the examination include a varied program of five repertoire selections, specific technical requirements, and appropriate ear training and sight reading tests. Candidates should prepare for Part I from the examination requirements outlined in the *Piano Syllabus, 2001 edition*. The evaluation of performance and skill is combined with co-requisite studies in theory to support excellence in teaching through well-rounded musicianship.

Part II: Viva Voce Examination

The *Viva Voce* examination is an interactive oral examination that offers candidates an opportunity to communicate their knowledge and insights through demonstration and discussion at the piano. Candidates are expected to demonstrate and apply their knowledge of the principles of piano technique and the fundamental methodologies used in piano teaching. Candidates should be prepared to perform selections from their chosen teaching repertoire sample and to discuss approaches to assisting students in learning this music. To further support the discussion, candidates should include examples of technical exercises as well as ear training and sight reading materials appropriate for the advanced student.

Part III: Written Examination

The written examination will focus on issues relating to teaching the advanced student, addressing topics that are more suited to written evaluation and discussion. Candidates are expected to illustrate their discussions with examples of specific repertoire selections, studies, and examples from their teaching repertoire sample where appropriate.

Examination Requirements

Teaching Repertoire Sample

Candidates are required to prepare a total of eighteen selections chosen from the repertoire and studies lists for Grades 7 to 10 in the *Piano Syllabus, 2001 edition*.

- Grade 7 (4 selections): one each from Lists A, List B, List C Part I, and List C Part 2, plus one study
- Grade 8 (5 selections): one from each of Lists A, B, C, and D, plus one study
- Grade 9 (5 selections): one from each of Lists A, B, C, and D, plus one study
- Grade 10 (3 selections): two contrasting repertoire selections plus one study

While the repertoire selections and studies need not be memorized, it is expected that candidates will present a polished performance equivalent to “first-class honours” for the corresponding grade level.

Topics for Viva Voce and Written Examinations

Detailed descriptions of topics covered in the *Viva Voce* and the Written Examination are included in the *Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program*. Candidates will be expected to discuss these topics with specific reference to repertoire selections and also to incorporate relevant concepts from earlier levels of student development. The topics are organized in the following categories:

- General Pedagogical Principles – development of diagnostic skills, problem solving techniques, and importance of specific genres in advanced repertoire
- Rhythm and Tempo – understanding of the integrity of pulse and integration of *rubato*
- Technical Matters – knowledge of basic physiology, refinement of technical skills, and tone production
- Other Essential Skills – advanced ear training, sight reading, and pedaling
- Artistic Considerations – stylistic use of articulation, dynamics, phrasing, understanding of form and structure, and artistic communication
- The Professional Studio – teaching materials for the advanced level student, editions and anthologies, current technology, and professional development.

Practical Suggestions for Examination Preparation

With my own students, I have discovered a number of “hands on” techniques for helping them develop their skills, and preparing them to teach at the advanced level. Here are some suggestions:

- Have students write their own personal reflections on aspects of teaching.
- Have students make sound or video recordings of lessons they teach. These recordings can then be reviewed and discussed with a mentor teacher.
- Encourage brainstorming sessions to solve problems creatively and to initiate discussion.
- Create opportunities for students to observe other teachers engaged in both individual and group instruction.

The broad bibliography provided in the *Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program* attests to the extensive field of pedagogy and the wide variety of resources available for students. An equal balance of teaching and evaluation, inspired piano study, and awareness of educational and scholarly materials will provide students with a strong foundation in advanced-level teaching.

Benefits of the Advanced Pedagogy Certificate

The Advanced Piano Pedagogy Certificate builds on the Elementary and Intermediate levels to culminate in a professional credential that encompasses advanced repertoire and concepts. This support of excellence in teaching is intended to strengthen the qualification and to create teachers who are both confident and professionally accomplished.

The Teacher’s ARCT diploma represents a respected professional standard of excellence. This diploma exemplifies the importance of in-depth study and represents an acknowledgement of a level of preparation and accomplishment that is recognized internationally. The culmination of study and achievement through the Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced levels will give students all the necessary skills, experience, and academic background to become successful professionals.

Jennifer Snow holds a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from the University of Western Ontario, and Master and Doctor of Music degrees from Northwestern University. Her graduate specialization is in piano performance and pedagogy. Dr. Snow has appeared as a solo and collaborative pianist throughout Canada, the United States, and Europe, and she is active as an

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