

# **An Introduction to the Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program**

*by Aasta Levene*

When piano teachers get together as a group, conversation sometimes turns to a comparison of the circumstances in which people first began to teach. Questions such as “When did you first start teaching?,” “What did you use for a “studio?,” “Did you teach as a part-time job in high school?,” “Did you know then that piano teaching could result in a satisfying career?,” often reveal a wide variety of experience and situations. In fact, many distinguished musicians on this continent began teaching as teenagers while they completed their academic and musical education.

RCM Examinations would like to support young teachers with information and certification that will help them establish themselves in the community when they begin to teach. Preliminary thinking and planning for the project began in late 2000, and was continued (and greatly strengthened) by reaching out to focus groups of teachers across the country.

The result of all these efforts is the new Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program: three levels in Piano Pedagogy that, together with their respective practical piano co-requisites, culminate in the Teacher’s ARCT Diploma. This program, offered by RCM Examinations, will ensure standards and recognize accomplishments of senior piano students who have an interest in teaching.

The new Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program will first appear in document form as an addendum to the *Piano Syllabus, 2001 edition*, for use beginning in September 2005. In three years’ time, it will be incorporated into the new *Piano Syllabus, 2008 edition*. The aim of the program is to provide greater depth in the training of piano teachers by expanding the requirements for the current ARCT Teacher’s Examination Part 2 and Part 3. The Program is intended to make the examination process more manageable by creating three levels of teacher training: Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. Certificates will be awarded for each of the Elementary and Intermediate levels. Upon completion of the Advanced level, candidates will be awarded the ARCT Teacher’s diploma.

## **The Structure of the Program**

### *Three Levels*

The Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program consists of three levels: Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced.

- The Elementary level specifically addresses issues of piano pedagogy in the context of teaching beginning level students, and students in Grades 1 and 2.
- The Intermediate level addresses issues of piano pedagogy in the context of teaching students in Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6.
- The Advanced level addresses issues of piano pedagogy in the context of teaching students in Grades 7, 8, 9, and 10.

### *Three Parts*

Each level of the Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program consists of three parts:

- Part 1 – a practical piano co-requisite
- Part 2 – a viva voce examination

- Part 3 – a written examination

The Part 1 practical piano co-requisite for each level is:

- Elementary level: Grade 9 Piano Certificate
- Intermediate level: Grade 10 Piano Certificate
- Advanced level: Teacher’s ARCT Part 1 (Performance of Repertoire, Technical Requirements, Ear Tests and Sight Reading)

Finally, the three levels are cumulative. Candidates for the Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificate must have successfully completed all the requirements for the Elementary Piano Pedagogy Certificate. Candidates for the Advanced Piano Pedagogy/Teacher’s ARCT Diploma, must have successfully completed all the requirements for both the Elementary and Intermediate levels. Moreover, candidates for the Intermediate and Advanced examinations should expect some reference in the examination to earlier levels.

### **Examination Requirements**

The examination requirements for each Piano Pedagogy examination are focused on pedagogical issues and teaching repertoire specific to the teaching level being examined (elementary, intermediate, or upper grades). Since most topics are universal—that is, they apply to teaching at every level—it is assumed that candidates will discuss topics within a context appropriate to the teaching level being examined.

The examination requirements for each level include a list of teaching points subdivided into the following groups. The headings are the same for all three levels, although some categories inevitably overlap.

- General Pedagogical Topics
- The Beginning Student (Elementary Pedagogy only)
- Rhythm and Tempo
- Technical Matters
- Other Essential Skills (such as ear training, sight reading and pedaling)
- Musicianship and Artistic Considerations
- The Professional Studio

A more detailed description of the teaching points listed under these headings and further details regarding the required teaching repertoire will be provided in articles on each level in upcoming issues of *Music Matters*.

It is worth noting that some aspects of piano pedagogy are more appropriately described in the context of an oral discussion, with demonstrations at the piano, while other aspects are more suited to written discussions.

### *The Viva Voce Examination*

In the oral—or *Viva Voce*—examinations, candidates will be expected to structure their discussion so as to address three principal aspects of a subject:

*definition:* What is it?

*demonstration:* How is it done?

*explanation:* Why is it important?

The procedure of the *Viva Voce* examination has been simplified to make this examination more relevant and practical. Unlike the current Teacher's ARCT *Viva Voce* (which is divided up into parts A, B, and the demonstration lesson), the format for the new examinations will be unified and all-inclusive. *Viva Voce* examinations will take place at the piano, so that the candidate can demonstrate at the keyboard. The examiner may or may not participate at the piano, but candidates are strongly encouraged to apply their knowledge by including examples at the piano. Discussion will focus on both theoretical knowledge of piano pedagogy and the teaching repertoire chosen, prepared and performed by the candidate for the examination.

### *The Written Examination*

Like the *Viva Voce* examination, the written examination will focus on the material presented in the topics listed in the examination requirements. However, the written examination will address topics that particularly lend themselves to a written rather than an oral discussion. Candidates will be expected to illustrate their answers with examples of specific repertoire selections and studies where appropriate.

### *Resources for Piano Pedagogy*

The bibliography included in the Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program document has been significantly updated and revised to include many recent publications. These resources are divided into three categories—keyboard reference, piano performance and piano pedagogy—so that students and teachers can easily find information on specific topics.

## **Benefits for All: Students, Teachers, and Examiners**

The new Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program has the potential to benefit everyone who is involved in the learning process.

### *Students*

- The Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program allows students to begin their study of pedagogy at an earlier point. If they are already teaching, the in-depth information acquired in studying at the Elementary level will be invaluable.
- By focusing on one level at a time, students will learn to organize and build their knowledge and skills gradually in a manner that is similar to the way pedagogy itself works—a fundamental step-by-step methodology in teaching.
- As they progress, students will find that the special focus on specific grades required for Intermediate and Advanced levels not only makes studying more efficient but also adds a great deal to their own musical, pedagogical, and even performance knowledge.
- Certificates awarded at the Elementary and Intermediate levels give students the option of completing the examination requirements one level at a time. This allows students who choose not to, or are unable to, continue immediately in the Pedagogy Program, to achieve the ARCT Teacher's diploma at their own pace.

### *Teachers*

- The information and research possibilities that teachers can provide to students at each level is infinitely greater.
- Lessons, reviews and tests are more efficient when concentration is focused within a specific level, even though content is more comprehensive.

- Patterns of learning pedagogy for the students, particularly in a class situation, are easily established by covering the Elementary level first, in the greater depth that this program permits.
- Professional rewards for the teacher will include the satisfaction of being able to cover the subject of pedagogy in the detail that both pedagogy and the teaching profession deserve.

### *Examiners*

In the present system, candidates are examined on teaching all levels of students from beginner to Grade 8 within one limited space of time. The focus of the new Certificate Program on specific teaching levels provides examiners with the time and framework in which to work with candidates in a more relaxed yet comprehensive way. Without the constraints inherent in the current *Viva Voce* structure, examiners will have the opportunity to draw out the candidates' knowledge in many areas of learning as the candidates demonstrate their theoretical knowledge of pedagogy at the piano. Within the same time frame, examiners will be able to test candidate's musical knowledge and pianistic skill by directing questions about and responding to the candidates' performance of prepared teaching repertoire.

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On behalf of RCM Examinations, I welcome all piano teachers and students across the country to a new era of Piano Pedagogy—one that will raise standards in teaching and in the study of pedagogy, and also raise public awareness of the studio piano teacher as a professional. We will all be the beneficiaries of this significant leap forward!

Aasta Levene holds a Licentiate Diploma from the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto. Her principal teacher was Pierre Souvairan. Ms. Levene's further training includes graduate studies at the University of Toronto in philosophy and musicology, masterclasses with Kendall Taylor and Karl Ulrich Schnable, and pedagogy research at the Maryland Summer Institute. She was a member of the Keyboard Faculty at the Royal Conservatory of Music from 1987 to 2002, and is currently teaching Piano, Piano Pedagogy and Keyboard Harmony at her private studio. Ms. Levene is an adjudicator, lecturer and workshop clinician, as well as Project Editor and Reviewer for The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited, Chief Examiner Emeritus, Practical Subjects of RCM Examinations. Ms. Levene is currently a consultant for Keyboard Harmony, and is Chair of the Pedagogy Curriculum Development Project.