

Pianoforte Newsletter

VOL.3



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Yamaha Piano Competition in Indonesia



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The Voices of Students and Teachers
from Various Countries

The Voices of Students and Teachers from Various Countries



From : Indonesia Student : William Qu

Hi, my name is William Qu. I'm 10 years old. I enjoy playing the piano because it makes me feel relaxed and happy. Pianoforte has a lot of beautiful and also fun pieces. On Pianoforte Book 6, my favorite piece is 'March of the Toy Soldier'. I like the piece because the music is very cheerful and I really have a great time playing it.

Message from his teacher : Ms.Yenny Riany Djafar

William is one active and smart kid. He always likes to explore new pieces from pianoforte and diligently practices them until they get better and better. I hope he can keep on improving and become a great pianist one day.



From : Malaysia Student : Ho Kuan Yih

Hi, I am Kuan Yih. I have started learning in Yamaha group lesson at the age of 3. I then joined Yamaha Piano Course and completed my Yamaha Exam Grade 8 in NOV 2013. Besides learning all types of music pieces, I also learned Sight Playing, Hearing and Keyboard Harmony from the textbook. There are many exercises in the textbook that I can use for exam preparation which I had and passed with flying colors.

Message from his teacher : Ms. Goh Hui Chong

When Kuan Yih started learning with me 3 years back, I started to teach him to learn to pitch every lesson by using Pianoforte textbook. One day, when we were doing Sight Singing for ABRSM Grade 4 exam, he managed to pitch out of a sudden. That surprised me! And I was so glad he did it.

Pianoforte textbook has all the subjects and syllabus in there including scales and arpeggios. By using the textbook, Kuan Yih gets to learn many pieces from different kind of styles and genres.



From: Thailand Student : Sirinada Sirisathitgul

Hello, my name is Sirinada and I am studying Pianoforte book 10. At first, my parents encouraged me to play the piano for relaxing purposes. Nowadays, I love to play the piano and enjoy learning new songs. I would like to encourage our Pianoforte friends to keep practicing the piano everyday and try hard together in order to pursue our joy for music and to pleasure ourselves and our parents. Lastly, I wish to study more music styles and repertoires.

Message from her teacher : Ms. Podjane Wattanamongkol

My student possesses musical talent. She practices and does well with her homework every week. Moreover her learning pace is very fast and has the ability to develop advanced skills. She has strong motivation and a lot of support from her parents. I am looking forward to seeing her bright future.



From : Hong Kong Student : Jeddy Kwok Tze Yuet

Hello, I'm Jeddy. I'm 7 years old and I'm now learning Pianoforte Book 4. I love the pieces in the book as most of them are very beautiful. Thanks to my piano teacher, Ms Candy, who has been giving her teaching to me in a very interesting and flexible way which advances myself to a wonderful musical exploration.

Message from her teacher : Ms. Candy Chung

For many young students, music is "something to enjoy".

In order to stimulate Jeddy's motivation, I let her listen to the CD or my model performance, having her sing the melody and discuss about the pieces together. Jeddy is ready to take Grade 3 ABRSM Piano Examination this year.



From: Singapore Student : Javier Lim Jie Wei

Hello everyone. My name is Javier Lim Jie Wei. I am 9 years old this year. I was introduced to the keyboard while I was in kindergarten. I love playing the piano so I do practice everyday, I find some of the pieces difficult, but I improve when I practice more. Taking piano lessons has helped me to become more patient. I am very happy that I passed my first piano exam recently with Distinction, and I am now preparing for the next grade.

Message from his teacher : Ms. Seng Puay Kiang

His progress from Pianoforte Book 1-6 has been extremely good and he has now advanced to Pianoforte Book 7 level. The many experiences in solfege singing and keyboard harmony have also helped develop Javier's keen musical sense in a positive way. Javier's parents are absolutely pleased with his progress and are clearly satisfied with the Distinction result in his first attempt in the recent ABRSM practical exam. I hope he will keep up the excellent progress and continue to enjoy learning music within our school.

The Special Interview

~Piano Education in Asia~

Pianist, Teacher and Educator Ms. Lena Ching

Ms. Lena Ching

The Head of Keyboard Studies / Senior Lecturer at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts

Singaporean piano teacher Lena Ching graduated from the Royal College of Music, London, where she studied both the piano and the harpsichord. She considers herself a privileged beneficiary of her teachers Victor Doggett, Yonty Solomon, Phyllis Sellick and Ruth Dyson. Among Lena's passions in life is to share and impart knowledge, to see young people cultivate a genuine love for and understanding towards music, and to see them excel in what they do. Through the course of her career, Lena has nurtured and mentored many outstanding young musicians. Her students have won numerous prizes and awards in music competitions, both local and overseas. Many of them have also become successful musicians, or professionals with a deep passion for music. Lena has also worked extensively with teachers and those aspiring to be teachers.

This passion and enthusiasm for music, for teaching and for developing students' musical talents with much greater understanding led her to pursue a Masters of Arts degree in 'Psychology for Musicians' from the University of Sheffield (U.K.). She continues to be inspired and enthused by aspiring and enthusiastic young musicians, as well as the work of her colleagues and contemporaries.

Lena is the Head of Keyboard Studies at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (School of Music), and she also teaches some of the young students at the School of Young Talents, NAFA.



The third special interview is featuring Ms. Lena Ching from Singapore.

She is well known as a pianist, teacher and educator around the world.



Interviewer (I): You are now the Head of Keyboard Studies at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts NAFA (School of Music) and you teach at the School of Young Talents NAFA. Please share with us what motivated you to start playing the piano?

Ms. Lena Ching (C): I remember it was my kindergarten principal who initiated the idea to my parents, both of whom did not play any musical instrument.

I: I understand you have had opportunities to perform as soloist, concerto soloist, chamber musician and accompanist in concerts, competitions and also worked extensively with teachers and those aspiring to be teachers.



Enjoying a small group piano class with full-time NAFA diploma and degree (in collaboration with the Royal College of Music) students

What countries have you performed in and where were the master classes conducted?

C: I did most of my performing during student days and also for many years after I graduated from the RCM, in parts of the UK, a couple of times in Malaysia, but nearly mostly in Singapore when I was younger and had a lot of stamina to combine my teaching (main work) with several concert programmes a year.

For many years after I had graduated, I had attended many memorable master classes and summer courses in countries like Switzerland (Bern, Lausanne, Geneva), Austria (Salzburg, Vienna), United Kingdom (London, Dartington, Aldeburgh, Leeds), Germany (Hannover, Ettlingen). I always felt and believed that I needed to, and that I could, learn more.

I: One of your passions in life is to share and impart knowledge and see young people cultivate a genuine love for and understanding towards music.

How do you feel about the musical growth of the recent students in Asia?

C: I cannot assume to know enough about Asian students, and certainly cannot speak for everyone, but from my personal experience through teaching and interacting with students, I always want to find out what is behind, what is beneath and what is beyond the notes they play...and quite often, I find that I have to direct their focus to the content and substance of the music, and to remind them not to settle for merely notes and technique. In an

The Special Interview

age where we have almost unlimited access to online resources, and also where many people from affluent societies are used to things like speed and information (head knowledge), it is so easy to forget that the learning of music cannot be built on a shallow foundation. We need to remind each other that musical growth requires time and effort to cultivate; not so much different from the past, even though we may have technology to give us certain conveniences.



With students from the NAFA School of Young Talents, analyzing a music score outside of the formal classroom

I : Through the course of your career, you have nurtured and mentored many outstanding young musicians, and seen them become successful musicians or professionals with a deep passion for music. From your experience, how would you explain about the value of learning piano?

C: The term “success” must be applied individually; I feel that a person is successful when he/she is doing the best that he/she is capable of doing, and not what other people are capable of doing. The “value” will be individual as well.

I am not sure if I can really “explain” the “value”, but what I wish to say is, value in learning piano is two-pronged – the subject/instrument, as well as the person.

Anything worth learning will be deemed valuable to the learner, and we have to keep learning, for as long as we are in it, to increase our knowledge and understanding of this subject. We need to study it with understanding, and not just base our understanding on “feeling”. Zeal is not good without knowledge; when we have passion but not according to knowledge as well, we will still fall very far short. It is needful to have zeal and knowledge. My personal take is, the more honestly we study it, the more we will discover its value.

Secondly, music, like any other gift/profession, can be used for the good of society, and therefore, everyone contributing to the overall progress and success of the profession, as well as the well-being of others, is valuable. To make oneself valuable requires a lot of hard work, humility, and honesty; but its reward is satisfying and it is a responsibility to contribute according to each person’s ability. The amount of ability is not as important as the positive contribution that a person is making with the abilities he/she has. To me, that is value on a personal/human level.

I : You received your early music education in Singapore before going to the U.K. for graduate and post-graduate studies majoring in piano and harpsichord. Would you give a message of encouragement to young piano students and their parents for studying further?

C: This is such a wonderful and important question, and I feel I would not do justice to it with my simplistic and short offering here. Please pardon me if my suggestion and views below minimize the magnitude of this arena:

1. Above all, think growth, rather than destination, because this is really a long, arduous and unending journey.
2. Next, know your capacity. We are all made differently.

3. Then, the foundation as well as the knowledge that builds upon that foundation are very important.

There are different stages of growth and development for students learning music/piano, and every stage has different requirements for the physique, emotions, intellect (understanding & application). I would liken it to the growth pattern of a baby – every stage of human growth requires different stimuli and challenges intellectually,

emotionally, physically. For example, being musical alone might work well at a young age, but not forever; being musical is the entry point, one might say, but to study music, we need musical intelligence to get us further. Hence, the need for education. I suppose this is really back to the “zeal with knowledge” principle (above).

Receive a good foundation and good instructional directions, and be prepared to work hard once you have the right knowledge.

I : You pursued a Masters of Arts degree in ‘Psychology for Musicians’ in order to teach and develop students’ musical talents with a greater understanding. Can you share 3 valuable psychology-related lessons that teachers and parents can benefit from?

C: Wow, I cannot be too sure that it will be valuable, as I believe every teacher will have their own valuable discoveries! But let me try...

My starting point to share would be related to what I mentioned in the point above: learning music is a journey, a person’s capacity needs to be taken into consideration, and knowledge towards the different growth stages with their requirements at each stage.

When one has a healthy, balanced and accurate view of oneself, it becomes much more productive in the learning journey. Goals and expectations have to be adjusted according to the child’s capacity, and sometimes the capacity changes. Be realistic. It is good to have dreams, but one needs to balance the dreams with reality, too.

Once the starting point is balanced and well-adjusted, the contents and plans that come along after that can fall in place much better.



Small group lesson with young students from the NAFA School of Young Talents

About the Yamaha Pianoforte Lesson

“Flexible Use for Exams”

Reported by Ms. Liew Mei Ping and Ms. Christina Ang, members of the Yamaha Piano Course Teachers Committee in Malaysia (YPCTC).

“Hello there, we are Mei Ping and Christina. In Malaysia, Yamaha Piano Teachers are studying and analyzing together about our teaching method from the Pianoforte textbook in the YPCTC (Yamaha Piano Course Teachers Committee). Through this committee, we discuss how we can use Pianoforte textbook more effectively for preparing the Yamaha grade examination and some external grade examinations like Associated Board Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) or Trinity College of Music. Today we would like to share with you our thoughts and experience when using the Pianoforte with our students”.

Technique

The Pianoforte Textbooks have all the contents to teach music effectively. We approach the lower levels mainly through a lot of listening and singing. Through this method of imitation, the child can produce accurate performance in playing. All the musical elements like dynamics and phrasing in a piece can be achieved easily through singing first. In the Pianoforte Textbooks, there are also scales and arpeggio exercises to build good performance skills. Besides these, there are also “exercises for finger dexterity” in the intermediate level to further improve and enhance the technical skills to handle more advanced pieces. Through these exercises, students get to learn a great deal about the technical aspect of piano playing. The relaxation of wrists and arms, finger articulation and sound projection are being guided, not just through the various repertoire that students are exposed to, but also these invaluable finger dexterity exercises, scales and arpeggios. Incidentally, external examinations also required this similar aspect from every student. Many sight reading exercises are also included in the book. These sight reading skills can then be integrated into the external exam syllabus.



From left: Ms. Liew Mei Ping and Ms. Christina Ang



Aural Test

This is important to prepare students for this section in external examination. The CD together with the initial few books helps students to practice without the teacher. Also, some pieces have orchestral background and sometimes with added instruments. This helps in the student music appreciation and exposure to the different timbre of sounds of other instruments besides the piano even at an early stage of learning the piano. Imitation singing is really good training for the aural section of external examination. Duet pieces in Pianoforte makes teaching and the music lesson more interesting besides helping the child to develop good sense of rhythm and pulse. It is fun and rewarding playing Duet with my students and they always look forward

to this little “treat” I present to them. Keyboard harmony is good to make student recognize the primary chords by sound and recognize what they will learn years later when harmony is first introduced in ABRSM Theory Grade 4 onwards. In fact, in Pianoforte, the Keyboard harmony exercises from Book 1 onwards, students are exposed to basic harmonic progression, from the simplest Tonic, Dominant to sub-dominant as they progress higher through the textbooks. A great learning ground and preparation for future all-round musicianship.

Repertoire

The pieces in Pianoforte exposes the student to different periods - Baroque, Classical, Romantic and 20th century jazz. Students are exposed to all these different styles. This is a good training as the examination pieces from external exams are also taken from these different periods. There are more interesting and challenging pieces at the end of the book for more virtuosic playing. A wide repertoire is important for a students to excel and do well in external examinations. This is great exposure for my students.

To sum it up, the Yamaha Piano Course textbooks have the flexibility to be used not just solely for Yamaha Graded exams but for some external board of examination too.





Yamaha Piano Course Concert in Malaysia(Ipoh)



Yamaha Piano Course Concert in Malaysia(Tawau)



Yamaha Piano Course Concert in Malaysia(Sandakan)