

1999

Teaching Policy

Aims

You can expect to learn:

music from the classical piano repertoire (including excursions into Gershwin, Joplin, and the like, depending on your level)

the piano technique needed to play this repertoire

something of the development of music, through this repertoire

music reading skills

aural skills

music theory, according to your needs

I will also prepare you for exams and recitals as needed.

My primary aim is to pass on my love of playing the piano. So I hope you can also expect to have fun!

Practice

You won't achieve any of the above if you don't practise – so please practise every day! This isn't always going to be possible, I know – but you should realise that if you don't practise, you won't improve. Learning to play the piano needs commitment on your part. This has nothing to do with your ability, potential or actual: it has all to do with the effort you're prepared to put in. The more you practise, the quicker you get better. Technique is vital – I can't stress that too strongly. It's the foundation of your playing and integral to it. It allows you to play pieces in the way you want. In a lesson, if technical exercises haven't been properly practised, then it is unlikely that there will be time to hear pieces – so please read and do what I write in your notebooks!

Playing the piano is immensely satisfying, emotionally, mentally, and physically, and it requires concentration, self-discipline, and co-ordination. (Research also shows it can improve intelligence and spatial skills.) If you're not prepared to practise enough, and show enough commitment, then, although it sounds very hard, I'm sorry to say I shan't be able to continue to teach you.

Fees

Fees are usually payable half termly in advance, that is, by the week after I give you the bill, and at the absolute latest by the fourth lesson of the half term. If they are not paid by then, I shall charge a late payment fee of ££, at my discretion.

Absence

Please tell me if you know you are going to be absent. If you tell me at the beginning of the half term, the first lesson, I shall not charge you for planned, missed lessons. Lessons missed without adequate notice will be charged for. I will try to make up, within that half term, lessons missed because of pupils' illness, but I cannot guarantee it. Lessons missed if I am ill or otherwise unable to teach will of course be made up or credited.

Pupils' concert

I hold an annual pupils' concert in July each year. This is your chance to play some lovely music, and to show how hard you've worked; it also gives you experience in concert etiquette and playing in front of others. Nevertheless, it is not obligatory: performing can be daunting, even with an informal

audience. So I always play too, on the basis that if I'm putting you through it, then I ought to as well! It is also a pleasant opportunity (I hope!) to meet other pupils and parents, at the end of the year. Afterwards, there are drinks and crisps, and suchlike, on offer. This is my treat to all of you, after all your work during the year. Even if you don't want to play, please come!

Exams

I do not automatically enter pupils for exams. I do so if I consider that you will benefit by working for a particular exam, or if there is a school requirement.

There is a gap of around six weeks or so between the closing date and the first week of an exam session. Most applicants ask for the last week, and so are quite likely not to get it. Asking for the first week means you are more likely to get that week. In order to plan the exam preparation properly, therefore, I will only ask for the first week of the session, and so you must be all but ready for the exam by the time of the closing date. If you are not, I will not enter you.

It is very important to realise that exam preparation is time-consuming. A great deal of piano technique must be in place and secure before taking time out to work for an exam. It must be taken very seriously; it's not a walk-over. In an exam you are not just showing how musically you can play the set pieces; you must also demonstrate how technically competent you are (scales and arpeggios) and how well-rounded you are as a musician (sight-reading and aural tests). It is perfectly possible to play the pieces reasonably well, and fail the overall exam if other aspects have not been properly prepared.

I do not remove pupils from practical playing in order to concentrate on theory exams: preparation for theory exams is a background activity (at least until the very last few weeks). If not, the continuity of practical work is lost. You must have almost completed the relevant theory workbook and be about to start the past papers before I will enter you.

Finally, the most important part of learning to play the piano is just that - learning to play. It is vital to be driven by the important, and not by the urgent; sometimes exams can be seen in that light, urgent, rather than in the overall context of learning to play the piano.

My decision on whether I will enter a pupil for an exam is final!

Length of lesson

If you are working towards grade 5, or are beyond it, it may be necessary, or at least advisable, to have three-quarter-hour or hour lessons, since at that level, there is usually too much to fit into half-hour lessons. This can be discussed on an individual basis.

Parking

And finally, may I please ask you to make sure you park on the road, not on the pavement, and please don't obstruct my neighbours' drives! I don't want to upset them!

Teacher

July 1998, updated January and May 1999