

The Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificate

by Janet Lopinski

In September of 2005, as part of its ongoing mission to foster the development of human potential through music and arts education, RCM Examinations will launch the new Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program. This is the third in a series of articles designed to provide information about this exciting new initiative in order to help students, teachers, and examiners to prepare for the successful implementation of the program.

Over the past few months I have had the opportunity to speak with many experienced piano teachers who have shared memories of their first attempts at teaching. Among the nostalgic recollections and humorous anecdotes, I have noticed one common theme. We all seem to agree that nothing can replace the “hands on experience” gained only through *actually teaching* real, live students. In simple terms, there is no shortcut to becoming an experienced teacher. The quest for excellence in pedagogy is, for many of us, a lifelong pursuit, as demonstrated by the large number of outstanding music teachers who remain active in the profession well past the conventional age of retirement!

Many teachers commented that in their own training, piano pedagogy classes were focused primarily on the beginning stages of teaching and learning, while master classes with artist-teachers emphasized interpretation of advanced repertoire. The intermediate level – an essential stage of transition in the development of our students – was often neglected. The Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificate – the second of three progressive levels of examinations that culminate in an enriched Teacher’s ARCT Diploma – will address this essential step in the training of future teachers.

Components of the Intermediate Certificate

Candidates applying for the Intermediate Piano Pedagogy examinations must have successfully completed all requirements for the Elementary Piano Pedagogy Certificate at least one examination session previously. The requirements for this certificate address pedagogical issues in the context of teaching students in Grades 3 through 6, and consist of three parts: a practical piano certificate, a *viva voce* examination, and a written examination.

Part 1: Grade 10 Piano Certificate

The practical co-requisite for the Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificate is the Grade 10 practical piano certificate. For complete information concerning the Grade 10 piano certificate, please consult the *Piano Syllabus, 2001 edition*. The requirements for this examination, including repertoire (five selections covering the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic style periods as well as the 20th and 21st centuries), studies, technical requirements, ear tests, and sight reading, ensure that candidates continue to develop not only a high level of performance skills, but also the well-rounded musicianship required for excellence in teaching. Please note that the theory co-requisites for the Grade 10 piano certificate must be completed either before or within five years following the respective session of the practical examination.

Part 2: Viva Voce Examination

The *viva voce* is an interactive oral examination that offers candidates an opportunity to reveal their understanding of principles of basic piano technique and fundamental methodologies used in piano teaching through discussion and demonstration. During this examination, candidates will also be asked to perform selections from their chosen “teaching repertoire sample” and to discuss approaches to assisting students in learning this music.

Part 3: Written Examination

The written examination will focus on issues related to teaching intermediate students, addressing topics that lend themselves to a written rather than an oral discussion. Candidates will be expected to illustrate their answers with examples of specific repertoire selections where appropriate, including repertoire and studies from their teaching repertoire sample.

Examination Requirements

Teaching Repertoire Sample

The “teaching repertoire sample” for the Intermediate level consists of four selections – one repertoire selection from each list (A, B, and C) plus one study/etude – chosen from repertoire and studies listed for each of the four grades (Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6) for a total of sixteen pieces. 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” at each grade level.

Topics for the Viva Voce and Written Examinations

The questions asked by examiners during the *viva voce* examination and those for the written examination are based on a list of topics included in the *Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program, 2005 edition* syllabus. The topics have been organized under the following categories.

- General Pedagogical Topics – including development of diagnostic skills, problem-solving, planning and structure of lessons, long-term goals, learning styles, practise techniques, and stylistic characteristics of musical periods and composers.
- Rhythm and Tempo – including meter, counting, rhythm, and achieving consistency of tempo.
- Technical Matters – such as basic physiology, development of technical facility, playing scales, tone production.
- Other Essential Skills – such as ear training, sight reading, pedalling, and memorization.
- Artistic Considerations – including dynamics, balance, articulation, *rubato*, ornamentation, critical listening, and development of imagination.
- The Professional Studio – including teaching materials for intermediate grades (covering the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Post-Romantic style periods and the 20th and 21st centuries), studio management, technology, and professional development.

Preparing for Examinations

Preparation for pedagogy examinations presents wonderful learning opportunities for both teacher and student. My own teaching includes an eclectic mix of private lessons, classes and lectures for recreational and professional students ranging from beginners to advanced, and occasional correspondence lessons. Preparing students for the current Teachers ARCT examination is, for me, one of the most enjoyable and rewarding teaching and mentoring

activities. As we work through the “teaching pieces” selected for the examination and diligently review background information, plan learning steps, discuss pedagogical goals, and contemplate creative solutions to challenges presented, I am reminded of essential elements in an ideal learning process that on occasion, despite good intentions, may be neglected in my own teaching. The open discussions that often unfold in this context can be inspiring and stimulating for all parties involved: students, pedagogy teachers, and even the examiners who conduct the *viva voce* examinations.

It is highly recommended that while studying and preparing for these examinations, candidates continue to gain practical experience through actually teaching students at the intermediate level. Pedagogy students will also benefit from observing lessons taught by their supervising teacher, gaining insight into what happens in the course of lessons with different types of students. On many occasions I have successfully paired student-teachers with elementary and intermediate students from my class, and assigned specific pieces for “practice teaching” under my supervision. For the students who serve as “guinea pigs,” the student teachers bring refreshing variety into the lesson, and the process is particularly productive when supervised by the experienced teacher.

As the *viva voce* examination draws near, it is also useful to conduct a “mock examination.” Set aside a 45-minute period for questions based on the topics listed in the *Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program, 2005 edition* syllabus. There is an important difference between the current Teacher’s ARCT examination and the new Pedagogy Program: the current *viva voce* examinations are divided into two separate sections (“pedagogical principles” and “applied pedagogy”), but in the new format *viva voce* questions, which are based on the list of topics in the examination requirements, are also applied to the candidates’ teaching repertoire sample. For example, in a discussion of articulation, an examiner may ask a candidate to illustrate a particular type of touch by playing a fragment from a Baroque piece included in the candidate’s sample. Similarly, a 19th-century composition from the candidate’s sample might be used to demonstrate approaches to teaching the concept of *rubato*.

Benefits of the Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificate

The general aim of the Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program is to improve the quality of music instruction in private studio teaching, while simultaneously increasing the value placed on the private studio teaching profession through strengthening the qualifications and teaching techniques of private studio teachers. Preparation for the Intermediate Piano Pedagogy Certificate offers candidates the opportunity to focus exclusively on teaching issues and repertoire specific to Grades 3 to 6. Through the formal study of pedagogy in the context of the intermediate level – including consideration of a wide range of topics specific to challenges encountered not only in teaching at this level but also thorough preparation of a teaching repertoire sample – candidates will gain the experience and build the knowledge that will allow them to develop depth and confidence in their teaching skills.

Getting a Head Start

The Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program is effective as of September 1, 2005, and candidates may apply for examinations beginning with the Winter 2006 session (that is, December 2005 – January 2006).

Full details on examination requirements for all three levels of the Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program are now available as in addendum to the *Piano Syllabus, 2001 edition*, entitled *Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program, 2005 edition* and can be purchased from local music retailers. Alternatively, until July 31, 2005, students and teachers may purchase the addendum online from The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited at www.frederickharrismusic.com.

In the fall of 2005, RCM Examinations will present a series of workshops on the Piano Pedagogy Certificate Program in cities across Canada. During these three-hour sessions, examiner-clinicians will outline the new requirements for both the *viva voce* and the written examinations, and presentations will include an interactive Elementary Level *viva voce* examination as well as a question and answer period. I invite you to participate in these workshops to learn more about this exciting new program.

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As artists and mentors, we all have our own individual and unique approaches to the challenges encountered in educating young pianists. Although our methods vary, we may all agree that the concept of a progressive, three-level pedagogy curriculum designed to prepare teachers to instruct students at all levels is long overdue, and that this new program will be embraced as a positive step in raising the level of teaching.

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Dr. Lopinski has performed as both soloist and chamber musician in Canada, Europe, and the United States, and she has been active as an adjudicator, examiner, and workshop clinician. She is currently a member of the faculty of The Royal Conservatory of Music (Community School and Glenn Gould School) where she teaches piano, piano pedagogy, music history, and theory. She is a senior member of the College of Examiners of RCM Examinations and from 1996 to 2002 served as Chief Examiner for Theoretical Subjects. She is also a co-author of the three-volume series Exploring Music History recently published by The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited.