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The AMEB Benchmark

Tens of thousands of young musicians in Victoria have been nurtured by community youth orchestras, ensembles and choirs. For many, specific AMEB grades are given as an entry level guideline.

Melbourne Youth Music (MYM) runs a range of ensembles for musicians from primary school age to tertiary students. MYM publishes AMEB grade guidelines for admission to each ensemble. For example, an equivalent of Grade 2 is required for the John Antill Youth Band; Grade 6 for the Percy Grainger Youth Orchestra; and Grade 8 for the Melbourne Youth Orchestra.

Michelle Forbes from MYM explains: “There are two reasons for the grade guidelines. In practical terms it indicates the repertoire musicians should be able to play, as well as the sight-reading and aural skills needed, but it also indicates the social maturity of the group.”

She continues: “Joining an ensemble is, after all, about making music with like-minded people, so we offer options for young musicians at each stage of their development.”

She says that the junior band programs are very open, where attitude and willingness to learn are more important than technical skill.

In the senior ensembles, however, there are around two applications for each place so those who are best prepared at the November auditions are more likely to be selected.

Music Director of the Melbourne Strings Ensemble (MSE), Fintan Murphy resisted grade guidelines initially, but found that people kept asking what level was required.

MSE has four string groups, and the grade guidelines range from AMEB Grade 3 for the junior ensemble, and from Grade 7 to LMusA for the intermediate, chamber and senior ensembles.

“it’s a testament to the AMEB that it has become a kind of currency; indicating the standard to work towards,” he says.

A lifelong love of music

Students at MSE learn in small groups with a strong focus on technical and ensemble skills, often performing without a conductor.

Fintan says: “We aim to develop musical excellence in a supportive environment. Participation has huge benefits that stay with the musicians for life.”

Many MSE members go on to follow music as a career, and alumni can be found in the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Chamber Orchestra, to name just a few.

One alumna, Josephine Vains says that playing in a junior string ensemble not only guided her later career in music, it also led to lifelong friendships.

Of those who choose not to follow music as a career, Fintan says that many go on to play in community ensembles such as the Doctor’s Orchestra, Chamber Music at Mt Buller or the Stonnington Symphony Orchestra.

Developing musicians

While many organisations have minimum entry levels, plenty more introduce young children to instruments and performance for the first time.

Junior Strings of Banyule (JSB) is the most junior ensemble of Heidelberg Orchestra Inc., and children at Preliminary level are encouraged to join.

Sonia Rogers, the conductor of JSB says: “Junior Strings is a stepping stone to the Robertson Youth Orchestra, which has a minimum entry of AMEB Grade 5. With a number of string tutors we help children to develop and refine their ensemble and technical skills in a fun environment.”

For singers, Victorian Opera’s youth program offers a pathway for children who lack the opportunity to join a choir or perform at school. They have recently introduced a junior choir program alongside their existing junior performance program.

Education Manager, Melissa Stark says that young singers can join one of Victorian Opera’s weekend workshops, which provide a springboard for performing on stage.

“What we’re seeing after each workshop is that participants improve and gain the confidence to audition for our youth opera productions,” she continues.
Review: Professional Development for Piano teachers

More than 300 teachers attended AMEB Victoria’s Professional Development Day for Piano teachers in 2013. The workshops, held around Victoria comprised a morning and afternoon presentation. The first, by Dr Mark McGee, was about encouraging musical development at AMEB Level 2. This was followed by an afternoon presentation by Elissa Milne on building a curriculum for teaching beginner pianists.

These are just a few of the comments we received:

- Fabulous! Just inspirational! I could have listened all day.
- Lots of what Mark said on technique I had found difficult to teach so it will really help.
- Mark’s presentation was thought provoking and helped me remember to re-visit some areas.
- Elissa has such understanding of stimulating early childhood learning, as well as a practical and refreshing approach to teaching.
- Elissa has given me so much to think about and change in how I teach.

Keep an eye on our eNews early next year for details of our 2014 workshop program. If you don’t currently receive our eNews, go to the AMEB Victoria website (www.ameb.unimelb.edu.au) to subscribe.

AMEB launches new Percussion syllabus

AMEB proudly launched its new Percussion syllabus on 5 December at the Sydney Opera House, with a recital by Steve Falk.

This followed a syllabus preview presented by syllabus consultant, David Montgomery in each State. On 22 October, he gave AMEB Victoria percussion teachers a taste of the syllabus repertoire, starting with the new Preliminary level and finishing with the new Certificate of Performance.

Australian percussion teachers now have a unique syllabus that is pedagogically valuable, while offering a synergy between technical requirements and repertoire.

The technical work features a number of custom-composed studies, with Technical Work books forming the cornerstone of the syllabus. In fact, it wasn’t until the technical requirements were established by the syllabus developers, that the criteria for repertoire selection were decided.

Australian composers were then commissioned to write 42 new works for the syllabus leading to diverse and exciting repertoire tailored to today’s percussionists.
New Percussion syllabus
A new AMEB Percussion syllabus will be available for examination in 2014.

New repertoire: The Grade books feature a diverse range of works, carefully selected for their broad appeal and pedagogical value; and include a large number of works by celebrated Australian composers and percussionists. The syllabus features wholly revised Manual Lists for Level 2 that draw on some of the most attractive recent publications for Percussion.

New publications: For the first time, AMEB has produced technical work publications for Percussion, and the syllabus also features Percussion Grade books that begin at Preliminary and extend up to Grade 4.

New repertoire: The Grade books include exciting and challenging repertoire in a range of styles, and the syllabus also features wholly revised Manual lists that draw on some of the most attractive publications for Double Bass.

New publications: Publications available for use with the new Double Bass syllabus include:
- Double Bass Technical Work (2013)
- Double Bass Series 1 Preliminary to Grade 4 (2013)

New examinations: The syllabus also includes two new examinations, Preliminary at the beginning of the syllabus, and Certificate of Performance as the culmination of Level 2, and a bridge to the Associate exam.

New Double Bass syllabus
A new Double Bass syllabus will be available for examination in 2014.

As well as a comprehensive review of the technical work requirements, for the first time this syllabus features AMEB Grade books for Double Bass that begin at Preliminary and extend to Grade 4.

New repertoire: The Grade books include exciting and challenging repertoire in a range of styles, and the syllabus also features wholly revised Manual lists that draw on some of the most attractive publications for Double Bass.

New examinations: The syllabus also includes two new examinations, Preliminary at the beginning of the syllabus and Certificate of Performance as the culmination of Level 2, and a bridge to the Associate exam.

Syllabuses and publications now available from the AMEB Victoria Office
As a special service to our clients, all AMEB syllabuses and publications can now be purchased from the AMEB Victoria Office. The Manual of Syllabuses – Music is available in hard copy format. In addition, digital versions of individual syllabuses or a subject group of syllabuses can be purchased and received in PDF format by email. For more information, go to: www.ameb.unimelb.edu.au

Syllabuses to be withdrawn at the end of 2013
From the beginning of 2014, the following syllabuses will no longer be available for examination:
- Bassoon (last printed in 2011 Manual of Syllabuses)
- Classical Guitar (last printed in 2011 Manual of Syllabuses)
- Violin (last printed in 2011 Manual of Syllabuses)

Once these syllabuses are withdrawn, only the form of these syllabuses printed in the current Manual of Syllabuses can be presented for examination.

Percussion exam arrangements
In 2014, Percussion exams, all conducted by a specialist examiner will be offered in the July and November Special Subject sessions

Alternatively, schools and private studios with 3 or more hours of examining time in Percussion can apply to be an examination centre, which may involve combining with another school or studio.

This arrangement can be made outside the published session dates, subject to the availability of a specialist examiner. For more information, call 9882 3233.