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New Musical Theatre Syllabus

In November, AMEB launched a new Musical Theatre syllabus at a media event held at the Victorian Arts Centre, featuring Lisa McCune and performances by Silvie Paladino and Drew Weston, both from Jerry’s Girls. Two students from Stage Left Performing Arts School, who were also cast members in Les Miserables, performed at the event.

In consultation with teachers, performers and academics, the syllabus has been developed for performers in amateur and school musicals, eisteddfod competitors, youth music academies and those preparing to be professional performers. The repertoire comprises songs that students will recognise from the theatre and from movie soundtracks, including lesser-known gems and old favourites.

The syllabus will cater for teachers and students at all stages of development, with examinations from Preliminary through to Diploma level. Alongside a strong focus on musical and vocal development, students will also be required to demonstrate aspects of characterisation and knowledge of the dramatic content of songs they perform according to their grade level, but there will be no dance or drama requirements.

There is a series of supporting publications, including Grade books from Preliminary through to Grade 4; the Technical Work book covering Preliminary through to Grade 8; and a set of recorded accompaniments for Preliminary to Grade 3. The technical work component of the new syllabus will provide a streamlined way to acquire technical skills intimately linked to the repertoire available for each grade.

For more information, go to the Musical Theatre Syllabus website: musical-theatre.ameb.edu.au.

Front cover image: Silvie Paladino, Drew Weston and Lisa McCune at the Musical Theatre syllabus launch in November.

Musical Theatre Syllabus Melbourne Workshop 21 February 2016

On Sunday 21 February 2016, AMEB Victoria will host a free Musical Theatre syllabus workshop for teachers, to be presented by George Torbay. A distinguished conductor, music educator, singing teacher, adjudicator, performer and director, George Torbay assisted with syllabus development and will guide participants through the syllabus in an interactive presentation.

Starting at 10am at a venue in Kew, the morning session will cover Level 1 and the afternoon session will cover Levels 2 and 3. Teachers are invited to send an expression of interest in attending the workshop to: enquiries@ameb.unimelb.edu.au and information about the event will be sent by email in early February.

Rockschool exams

AMEB is now delivering Rockschool exams in Australia. Rockschool is a vibrant, contemporary music program of syllabuses, exams and globally recognised qualifications for guitar, bass, drums, vocals, piano, band-based keyboards and band. Rockschool specialises in music of most popular genres in a range of rock, pop, metal and funk styles.

Rockschool offers comprehensive syllabuses and a range of exam support materials including grade books, companion guides, technical handbooks and backing recordings. These are regularly updated by musicians across the academic, music industry and live performance sectors to ensure the music remains current and authentic.

For more information, go to www.rockschool.com.au.

Revised Musicianship syllabus

A revised version of the Musicianship syllabus appears for the first time in the 2016 Manual of Syllabuses. There have been no changes to Grades 1-6, but Grades 7 and 8 have been removed so that candidates now progress from Grade 6 to the revised Associate and Licentiate diploma syllabuses.

Diploma Theory, Musicianship and Teaching exams on application

Teaching, Musicianship and Theory of Music Diploma exams are now available on application. Candidates will be responsible for arranging the venue and suitable supervision. A Written Diploma exam application form will need to be submitted at least six weeks before the proposed date, detailing the proposed date, time, venue, and supervision arrangements. For more information, go to www.ameb.unimelb.edu.au or consult the Enrolment Handbook.

Syllabus withdrawals

From the beginning of 2016, the Double Bass and Percussion syllabuses [last printed in the 2013 Manual of Syllabuses] will no longer be available for examination, and only the syllabuses printed in the most recent Manual of Syllabuses can be presented for examination.
Teaching music to students with special needs

Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), an umbrella term covering Asperger’s and Autism are often seen as “difficult”, but music can help them gain confidence by developing new skills, and bring with it a new way to communicate.

Melbourne piano teacher, Daphne Proietto appeared on Channel Nine’s 60 Minutes this year, talking about her experience of unlocking autism through music. Awarded the Inspiration Medal in the Pride of Australia awards, Daphne has been teaching children with a range of special needs, including autism, for the past fifteen years. She presented the results of a survey into the benefits of teaching piano to children with autism at the annual ISME Conference in 2010, which showed that children with ASD may derive developmental benefits from learning to play a musical instrument. These include improvements in concentration, coordination, memory, confidence, dexterity, and the ability to listen and follow instructions.

Daphne says: “Teaching special needs children requires patience and advance preparation, but seeing progress in these children is extremely rewarding, especially as the ability to play music may be one of the few sources of joy in their lives.”

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) describes a group of development disorders characterised by impaired social skills, repetitive behaviours, delayed language and cognitive ability, and often, a narrow set of interests. The condition formerly known as Asperger’s is now described as high functioning ASD, and is distinguished from other disorders on the autism spectrum because it does not involve delayed language or impaired cognitive ability.

Every child with ASD is unique, with different characteristics expressing themselves in varying degrees. Parents are the best source of information on how to deal with particular behaviours, what motivates the child, and what situations or stimuli should be avoided. In discussion with the child’s parent, focus on the behaviours rather than the diagnosis and find out what works for the child at school and at home.

Daphne enrols students for exams with AMEB Victoria and finds the experience is very beneficial. AMEB Victoria is committed to providing quality examinations for all candidates, including those with disabilities. We aim to ensure that all candidates have access to the examination process and are able to demonstrate their skills in the examination to the best of their ability. For more information about how to arrange special provisions for candidates with a disability visit: http://ameb.unimelb.edu.au/support/special-needs/.

One of Daphne’s students, a 15 year old boy with autism who recently sat a piano exam said: “Generally, during the AMEB piano exam, I feel that it is interesting, however, its structure is flexible. The examiner was quite nice and she was also organised…. she also (positively) affected my confidence, my self-esteem and my concentration on playing the notes, and without her assistance and Daphne’s love and patience, I would not be doing piano at my current stage today.”

Teaching special needs children is a wide and complex area and AMEB does not advocate or endorse any specific approach to teaching. This article aims to summarise a literature search of current information and teaching tips for children with ASD and ADHD to raise awareness of the strategies available to music teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of autism/Asperger’s</th>
<th>The many ways these characteristics can be apparent.</th>
<th>How you can tailor your approach to teaching to help your ASD student learn music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varying social interaction impairment</td>
<td>ASD is characterised by a lack of empathy which results in the inability to interpret body language or facial expressions; difficulty in following social conventions; and lack of emotional reciprocity, such as speaking and listening in turn, making eye contact and responding to other’s emotions...</td>
<td>• Be prepared for an apparent unwillingness to make eye contact, respond to questions, or wait for you to finish speaking before interrupting or going ahead with a task. • Make sure all your reactions are calm and predictable and try not to take inappropriate behaviour or lack of empathy as a personal insult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying language and communication impairment</td>
<td>In the Asperger’s form of ASD there is often no delay in language or cognitive ability, but language use can be literal and pedantic. Autism is characterised by delayed language and cognitive ability which can mean use of only non-verbal communication and a delay in processing instructions and information.</td>
<td>• Make sure all instructions are clear and concrete. • Avoid open ended questions, figurative speech, humour or sarcasm. • Consider using visual cues to help shorten the processing time needed for instructions and information, such as a picture chart showing which part of the lesson you are in. • Check understanding before moving on to the next instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted or repetitive behaviours and interests</td>
<td>Common features of ASD are excessively narrow, intense or unusual interests; adherence to rigid routines and intolerance of change. Repetitive movements such as hand flapping, toe walking or body rocking are a core characteristic of autism.</td>
<td>• Follow the same routine in every lesson. • Use narrow interests as a motivator or reward, such as the opportunity to play a favourite piece as a reward for good listening. • Prepare students for change well in advance – be that an upcoming recital, change in room set up, or new lesson schedule. • Do not stop repetitive movements; children need these to cope with stressful situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying sensitivity to sensory stimuli and unpredictable behaviour</td>
<td>Features often associated with ASD include sensitivity or aversion to sounds, tactile sensations, smells, and lights. Or, in some cases, a fascination with particular sensory stimuli. In some cases there can also be behaviour disorders such as angry outbursts, loss of concentration or overactivity.</td>
<td>• Set consistent rules for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Be firm but kind and predictable in enforcing these rules and remember a raised voice or disappointed face may not be understood. • Break down tasks into small chunks, and try to include at least one activity away from the instrument, such as hopping out the bass line rhythm, or sitting on the floor for a dice rhythm game. • Find out from the parent if their child reacts to certain stimuli and, if necessary, avoid bright light, wearing perfume or certain colours, or reduce background noise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teaching special needs children is a wide and complex area and AMEB does not advocate or endorse any specific approach to teaching. This article aims to summarise a literature search of current information and teaching tips for children with ASD and ADHD to raise awareness of the strategies available to music teachers.
Teaching music to students with special needs continued

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a condition characterised by inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity. These characteristics can be apparent separately or in combination so, a child diagnosed with ADHD may not necessarily be hyperactive. Many people display the characteristics of ADHD occasionally but a diagnosis is made if the behaviours appear before the age of 7 and are excessive, long-term (more than six months), and pervasive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</th>
<th>The many ways these characteristics can be apparent</th>
<th>How you can tailor your approach to teaching to help your ADHD student learn music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly Inattentive subtype</td>
<td>The inattentive child may have difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities, and may not seem to listen when spoken to directly. Often the child may not follow through on instructions, have difficulties in organising tasks, and be forgetful. There may be a reluctance to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort.</td>
<td>• Break the lesson into small chunks of different activities, and break down new pieces of music as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive subtype</td>
<td>Hyperactivity symptoms This can include fidgeting with hands or feet when required to sit still. Difficulties playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly, constantly on the go, or talking excessively. Excessive, inappropriate running and climbing. Impulsivity symptoms The impulsive child often blurts out answers before questions are completed, and has difficulties awaiting his/her turn. Consequently there may be frequent inappropriate interruptions, intrusions during lessons or butting into conversations.</td>
<td>• Mix up activities so that some are away from the instrument and/or include movement, such as hopping out the bass line rhythm, or sitting on the floor for a dice rhythm game. • Keep instructions short and attainable so that your student experiences success often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined subtype</td>
<td>When both symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity are present, the child may be diagnosed as having the combined subtype of ADHD.</td>
<td>• Check understanding before moving on to the next instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many children with ADHD also have a specific learning disability, which means they have trouble mastering language or certain academic skills, typically reading, writing or maths. ADHD is not in itself a specific learning disability, but because it can interfere with concentration and attention, ADHD can make it doubly hard for a child with learning difficulties to do well in school.

Teaching tips — sources
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