Fostering the Development of Expressive Performance Skills: A Gestural Approach within the Reflective, One-to-One Piano Studio

**APPENDICES**

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Appendix 1: Reflective Journal (February–November 2014)

Unedited entries from my Reflective Journal (February–November 2014) are presented below. The black type indicates entries made immediately following the lesson(s). Entries in blue type are summaries that were later added in preparation for thematic analysis of the Reflective Journal.

**A1.1 Andrew (48 Lessons)**

*Lesson 1: 11 February 2014*

This was a very rewarding lesson for me, one in which we explored the possibility of Major versus minor versions of *Jump*. This activity really seemed to spark Andrew’s creative interest. Also of note – the use of gestural changes of direction with J. S. Bach’s *Invention in D Minor*, which we achieved through add-a-note technique. I explained that this combined with different fingering from what he was using would avoid the need for any stretching, where momentum could be used to maximum effect, and a ‘rolling’ through notes feel is desirable.

- Fingering choices that might best avoid stretching – tension – stiff muscles.
- Momentum; rolling through the notes (butter/buttons analogy).
- Gestural direction learnt one note at a time.
- ‘Finding’ the spatial information that you lay the notes on top of.
- Keyboard harmony.

*Lesson 2: 15 February 2014*

A lesson mainly working with Andrew on J. S. Bach’s *Invention in D Minor* and Mozart’s *Sonata in B-flat Major*. We worked quite a bit on the right-hand fingering for *Invention*. I explained and demonstrated how fingering helps us to build not only a strong motor memory but also (when a good one is used) it helps us to deliver an expressive touch, free of lumps and bumps. This would be a good section to demonstrate these aspects and needs further looking at. I liked the way that I corrected his rhythm errors in a scaffolded way with the metronome (MM 60) and explored the idea that ornaments are basically improvisations but not all over place! Andrew found this quite funny when I demonstrated. Fingering that facilitates quick finger action was also an issue in the Mozart. I gave Andrew the *Lady Gaga Fugue* duet that
he could do with Neil. Of course this was very exciting for him, especially the picture on the cover. He read through a bit of the secondo part during the lesson.

- Scaffolding of difficult tasks; learning by doing and giving tools to solve problems.
- Ornaments: ‘Discover’ what they are and linking their function to improvisation.
- Fingering choices based on alignment, freedom, tonal shape and gesture; avoiding sudden or angular movements that may create bumps in the touch; ‘no bones’ analogy.
- Ensemble/duet playing.

*Lesson 3: 18 February 2014*

Today we went slightly off what I thought we would cover, but it turned into a very positive lesson, full of creativity and fun. The lesson started with an almost 20-minute exploration into the mechanics of the grand piano, complete with trying various stick sizes, the role of the hammers, the dampers and pedal, and exploring the role of the iron frame and a pseudo ‘Piano Guys’ improvisation from Andrew and myself. We completed the primary and secondary chords for E Major, which was quite tricky for Andrew. However, immediately after this activity he played an improvised arrangement of the *Gummy Bears* song in E-flat minor. I showed him how he could extend the arrangement by using bass and pedal and syncopated chords, which he loved doing. We also covered A Major and B-flat Major scales, which he picked up the fingering for relatively quickly. Contrary motion of E Major and C Major were explored and we had a ‘race’ in opposite directions for C Major Contrary, which was a great activity. As we won’t be having a second lesson this week due to a birthday party, I asked Andrew to continue refining the fingering and sound for the *Invention in D Minor*. The lesson was an interesting accompaniment to other lessons, as there was still an emphasis on creativity and self-expression, but through supplementary activities rather than directly in the repertoire pieces themselves. I got a thoughtful email from Lyn saying that she really appreciated the lesson and made an interesting reference to ‘each lesson being like a box of chocolates’.

- Flexibility of lesson structure.
- *How does the piano produce sound?*
Complementary activities that might support the development of creativity and self-expression, e.g. scales/keyboard harmony/own arrangement of popular music.

‘Each lesson is like a box of chocolates’.

Lesson 4: 25 February 2014

I really missed teaching Andrew the extra session this week. As usual, he was very responsive and I enjoyed the challenge of trying to keep up with him. He had asked me to bring in the i – iv – V7 – i (minor keys) a couple of weeks ago, so the lesson started there. We explored the natural (folk) minor, the harmonic minor, and also the melodic minor, which he said he had been studying on the violin. I asked him to bring in his violin to play for me sometime. This was mixed with contrary motion of C and E Major, as well as hands-together accuracy for C Major, similar motion. He had a bit of difficulty, but seemed to get there in the end. We also covered the primary and secondary chords for A Major, which was relatively easy for him. I noted that Andrew’s chord knowledge has really improved, even in the last few weeks. The rest of the lesson was spent doing an ear repetition game in G Major, and working through Jump, particularly with regard to rhythmic understanding and accuracy of the off-beat quavers, and the concept of counting 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and one-E-and-A/one-and-A/one-E-and. I asked Andrew to prepare the first two pages for the next lesson – ‘Please study the piece Andrew, as you have already played it through and got a good idea of how it might fit, but with so much syncopation, you will need to slow down and really get to know the ins and outs of the rhythmic detail, as it’s an essential skill to refine as you continue on in your musical development’. Also, I asked to hear the Mozart Sonata and Invention in D Minor next lesson. Not a lot of gestural work in this lesson, but still very creative in nature, mixed with some hard work as well.

Teacher enjoyment and job satisfaction: ‘I enjoyed the challenge of keeping up with him’.

Scales/keyboard harmony: Linking new knowledge to existing knowledge (violin melodic minor scales).

By-ear playing ‘game’.

State and set expectations, giving a clear rationale.
Lesson 5: 1 March 2014

We had a good lesson together, I enjoy teaching Andrew these days, I feel like I can be very creative and go as far afield as the mood allows. Today I brought in my full-size violin for him to try. Lyn said that he had asked if I could teach him violin as well! He really does have a good look about playing the violin – I can tell that if he sticks with it, he will develop into a fine player. In terms of piano, we spent the remainder of the lesson on the first three pages of *Jump*. Andrew had gone from getting the notes and rhythm correct about \( \frac{1}{4} \) of the time to about \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the time, which was good to see. It really is very tricky and I had a few attempts myself, not being able to play it perfectly so it reminded me of how well little Andrew is doing. There was a really exciting moment when all of the timing and notes for pages 1–2 were correct and I was really becoming quite vocal and gesturing all of the syncopated off beats with vigour, which we all found very funny. I could tell that Andrew was really enjoying the experience; I find teaching him to be both challenging and uplifting. We did a very good activity – rhythmic dictation from the piano using the heart beat sheet. It was four bars and in G Major. After he had correctly completed the activity, I asked him to play the melody from memory on the piano, which he did with only minimal help from me – a great idea that he really enjoyed. The challenge ahead will be to achieve a balance between creative activities while steadily working through his repertoire pieces, so that he doesn’t implement untidy habits which he is prone to doing if not supervised along the way.

- Teacher enjoyment due to a flexible agenda: ‘Teaching him is challenging and uplifting’.
- A balance between repertoire and musicianship: Rhythmic dictation/by-ear playing/memory games.
- Validate student’s progress while giving specific direction for improvement.
- Imagining the process of learning from the student’s point of view: ‘What is it like to be you?’
- ‘Expressive’ behaviour from the teacher: Conducting, gesticulating and vocalising.
Lesson 6: 4 March 2014

This lesson had a much more transfer feel to it, and most of the lesson was dedicated to improving specifics contained in Bach’s *Invention in D Minor*, the Mozart *Sonata* and *Jump*. We went through the whole of the right hand of the Bach, and there were some good concepts relating to tonal shaping and building of sequences here. In other words, the use of gesture is not enough, and there is a need to consider the broader harmonic structure and the use of time stretching as well as tonal shape to achieve an expressive result that provides an aural ‘hook’. There were a few wrong notes towards the end that needed to be fixed and re-fingered, and there were some creative moments involving chords with the ending. We got a little side-tracked with the whole creative thing at this point, but it fitted in nicely with the fact that much of Baroque music was embellished and improvised. We turned to the left hand, which had significant problems due to stretchy fingering and reading the bass notes as treble. We only got half way through, but I reminded Andrew to attend to the things that were covered in the lesson in order for the subsequent layer of detail to be worked on next time. I hope that I am not dominating him too much, and we did discuss that I let have him some creative input. I reiterate that my directions regarding expression aren’t really set in stone, as they are *my* creative ideas that he will hopefully benefit from, applying similar concepts to other pieces. We really do make a good team and I think that he very much feels part of that team. For all his strengths and talents, he is somewhat needing direction in terms of what to fix, so this could become problematic if I don’t step in and tell him what to prioritise. I have had this problem with a gifted student before, as there can be an unwritten assumption that they will just ‘know’ what to do. However, Andrew often needs as much guidance as the next student, but in the end, the outcome is just more sophisticated in terms of confidence, energy, expression and tonal interest. Actually a colleague and I discussed this over a coffee earlier in the day as I referred to a student that both of us had taught in the past and I reflected on my inability to ‘organise’ her at that time, as I thought that she would be able to do it herself. During the remainder of the lesson, I heard Andrew’s Mozart *Sonata*. The first part is maturing nicely and he is injecting some of his own ideas into the piece, which is heartening. I complimented him here, and then directed him to slow down the F-Major passagework that modulates to the relative minor of the tonic key, after which Mozart surprises us with G Major! There was some great discussion
regarding cousin keys (a small digression to keyboard harmony here) and how important it is to consider the harmonic underlay when learning the piece, as it truly impacts the direction that the expressive nuance might take. The lesson finished with a bit of *Jump*. The concept of scaffolded learning came up again, as I suggested that Andrew was 11/12ths of the way through now, instead of ¼ or ¾ or 7/8ths. I asked him to fix up a few areas employing hands separately, but also reminded him of his improvements and wished him and his mother a good week. I won’t see them again until next Tuesday, as he has school camp and there won’t be enough time for him to practise before Saturday.

- Transfer learning within a creative framework, e.g. ‘improvising’ an ending to *Invention in D Minor* as per Baroque ideology?
- From a listener’s perspective, there exists a need to consider and ‘illustrate’ the broader harmonic structure, interest and key ‘colour’ through tonal shaping of sequences and time stretching.
- Keyboard harmony: Could awareness and a working knowledge of keys help facilitate discussion and realisation of harmonic interest?
- ‘Team building’: Validate improvement/acknowledge student’s own ideas.
- State expectations, help to prioritise the weekly tasks and encourage application of knowledge and ideas to new situations.
- Scaffolded learning: ‘No need to fix everything at once’.
- ‘What does my student need from me at this time?’

*Lesson 7: 11 March 2014*

This was an extended 90-minute lesson that ended at 9pm, owing to Bryn being absent with an injured finger. I really enjoyed the lesson, as did Andrew. His Mum said, ‘Great lesson!’ on the way out, which made me pleased because of the history we had early last year. They gave me a Piano Guys CD and some chocolate-covered coffee beans from Matthew’s recent trip to Taiwan, which come in very handy. We covered a variety of activities during the lesson, including detailed work on sound, flow and gesture in *Invention*. Andrew seemed to have cultivated a habit of rushing on the downward semiquaver descent and there was significant smudging of the tones since the previous lesson. We worked exclusively on the first page: he had fixed up most of the left hand and put the hands together, which was great to see, but I asked him to pull the hands apart again and ‘study’ the piece carefully, as per my directions
on the iPad video that his Mum takes of every lesson. Fingering again was an issue, not so much as last week though. Unless I write the fingering in, Andrew will come up with his own, which isn’t a bad thing necessarily, but the fingering that I ask is usually aimed at reducing the amount of stretching, allowing for a sweeping gesture that might facilitate a flowing melodic line. Anyway, we reviewed it several times as he has such a good memory and often things ‘stick’ fast and need to be reworked quite a few times before he gets the idea (e.g. the bass C towards the end of the exposition before the cadence in F Major). An interesting collaborative aspect of the lesson was when we were discussing the need to keep the articulatory and tonal detail of the subject uniform when it appears in both hands. I suggested one alternative, Andrew suggested another, and together we came up with something entirely different that was in part a combination of both of these. It was a very sweet moment actually. Andrew is a very pure musician and soul; he really wants to please me and do his best. He was begging to do dictation again, so I suggested that we do the activity on Saturday when we meet again. Another area worth looking at again was the use of double rotation for the link between bars 4 and 5 of the left hand, where the first beat of the bar needs to be slightly louder due to the triple time signature. Rather than pressing, I suggested that this kind of choreography would allow for an expressive result with minimal effort. We have covered strong weak weak with an upward curve in previous lessons, but not in the left hand, so it was good that this was reviewed, rather than assuming that the skill would be automatically transferred. After Invention, we moved to the B Major chords, which Andrew found a bit tricky. He found the actual naming of them easy, as I related it back to Counting Stars, covered earlier in the lesson. We went through the chords together and Andrew sight-read the melodic line. We also covered B Major scale but there is still some trouble with blending of tones when playing at a faster tempo due to tension in the wrist and thumb joint. However, a slow tempo is fine. The lesson finished with revision of Jump. Andrew had really improved page two, so I went through the rhythm for the bottom of page three again and a small segment on page one. He asked me to circle the parts he needed to work on, and to also indicate that page two was correct in order to inform his Dad. It’s heartening to see Andrew so involved, taking responsibility for his own learning at such an early age. I mentioned that teaching him has had a good impact on all my teaching, as I’m more inclined to weave scales, chords, keyboard harmony, improvisation, by-ear playing and dictation into the lessons, alongside repertoire,
more so than in the past. I pride myself on being open to exploring multiple genres and choosing pieces that students will relate to, but I can see that adding in one or two of these activities into the lessons, particularly the longer lessons, has a positive impact on the flow of the lessons themselves. Hopefully the students will acquire further knowledge, enjoyment and a broader education in the process. However, I am reminded of the need to reread my reflections before teaching the next lesson.

- Student satisfaction: ‘Great lesson!’
- ‘He wants to please me and do his best’.
- Lyn videos the lessons, which are reviewed during the week, encouraging student reflection.
- Fingering choices facilitate gestural choreography and reflect the need to avoid stretching, especially for such a small hand.
- Double rotation facilitates fluid changes of direction in elliptical movement, eliminates the need to stretch wide intervals, and aids in the ‘organic’ realisation of expressive tone production, e.g. first beat of the bar is slightly stronger in triple time.
- An advantage of teaching expressive devices and a gestural vocabulary to students is their applicability to a variety of genres; taking advantage of the student’s shifting interests and developing musical identity: What music do they best relate to at that particular time?
- Keyboard harmony and complementary activities appear to enhance the learning environment here, arguably leading to a broader musical education, greater enjoyment and enhanced ‘flow’ of the lesson: ‘He was begging to do dictation’.
- ‘He asked me to circle the parts he needed to work on’: Asking for help reflects growing autonomy, learning responsibility and an awareness of the need to set achievable goals.
- Collaboration: Pooling our ideas and deciding the articulation and tonal shape of *Invention in D Minor* together.
- Reflective practice: ‘I mentioned that teaching him has had a good impact on all my teaching as I’m more inclined to weave scales, chords, keyboard harmony, improvisation, playing by ear and dictation into the lessons, alongside repertoire, even more than I have in the past’.
Lesson 8: 15 March 2014

This was a fairly short lesson when compared with others. We worked on the Mozart Sonata in B-flat Major today – Andrew has finished it all but the last page now. The focus was mainly centred on getting Andrew to play the piece with a uniform triple lilt, as well as polishing aspects of coordination, fluency and sound through the passagework section. Some other interesting aspects of the lesson included expressing the music through the arms rather that extraneous movements of the upper body, as well as the importance of knowing the harmonic structure in order to convey that ‘tension’ and harmonic colour to the listener. We also covered how to make repeated notes interesting and ‘real’ through the use of articulation and tonal nuance, and I suggested that Andrew might use the metronome, dotted minim = 50. I need to make sure at the next lesson to attend to some of the fingering with thirds in the left hand so that he is not practising unnecessary or ineffective movements for too long. However, some areas of the piece are spectacularly mature and glisten with Classical poise. Andrew reminded me (again), that we should do dictation at the next lesson, and also hear Jump and Invention in D Minor. It’s so great that he is actively involved in planning his own learning.

- Important that gesture be functional rather than completely extraneous – how far is too far?
- Keyboard harmony: Supplemental activities appear to facilitate the process of analysing and understanding the underlying harmonic structure within the pieces themselves, important when ‘illustrating’ that structure to the listener.
- Actively planning the next lesson demonstrates growing learning initiative and interest.

Lesson 9: 18 March 2014

Probably the best thing about this lesson was the way that I was able to direct Andrew’s focus from being too excited to a more studious approach with learning Jump, at least for a short time. The idea of making the rhythmic elements more automatic through the use of partial practice with the metronome, chaining small amounts together slowly, and gradually speeding up when ‘comfortable’ seemed to be exactly what he needed. Initially, he played the first part while continuing to look back at me for approval, and to make sure he hadn’t made any mistakes, which isn’t a
good sign in my opinion. I reminded him to give himself more credit, and if he were to slow down and implement a more industrious approach, it would be possible to be even more enthusiastic with the piece down the track. In effect, he will be able to ‘let go’ and let his personality shine even more. I explained that this would no doubt help the audience to appreciate and enjoy the piece too. I was very pleased that I was able to put my point across quite firmly without the need to be too overbearing, as I really want to foster that sense of enjoyment and confidence that he has, even if the piece isn’t totally rhythmically reliable. Nonetheless, we were able to start to implement gestures and textural definition into the first couple of lines, as they are rhythmically secure. The first part of the lesson was spent doing rhythmic dictation, melodic dictation and improvising melodic answers to given ‘questions’ – Andrew just loves doing these activities. We also spent time on Invention, as he had done quite a bit of work preparing it for the lesson. This combined with the coaching at the previous lesson had really made a big difference. The tempo is more stable, the tonal shape is elegant and unforced, and the hands are together through the whole piece now. Andrew asked me why the tempo should be uniform, and I responded by saying that if the tonal shaping interfered with the triple pulse, the listener may get ‘seasick’, which he accepted quite readily. He also asked me why I use a different fingering to the one that he uses, and I explained that my hand is bigger and that the fingering that I suggested for him is so that he doesn’t stretch. I explained that stretching is likely to cause the muscles in the forearm to overwork, causing tension, a lack of physical ease, flow and more than likely lead to a stiff, pokey sound. He really did a good job, so we turned our attention to matching the articulatory detail of the right-hand broken chords with the left hand, and also using double rotation to create tonal shape, a triple lilt and enhanced forward flow, rather than relying purely on finger action. The whole piece is hanging together quite well, so I helped him with some more fingering in the bass towards the middle of page two to ensure a good depth of touch, a ‘connection’ to the sound, the essence of the piece and to the piano itself. Lyn made an interesting comment about Andrew not being as studious as Kelly. I don’t think she was trying to compare the two; just that she knows her son has limitations, and maybe wants me to be aware of these?

- Important to strike a balance between excitement and industriousness: Use the lesson to teach how to partial practise rhythmic detail with the metronome.
- ‘Slow down, implement a more industrious approach, and chain together small amounts until completely comfortable and confident so that you are able to let go and let your personality shine even more’.
- Gestural vocabulary appears easier to implement if notes and rhythm are secure.
- In order to foster a growing sense of enjoyment and confidence, there is a need here to strike a fair balance between being firm and being overbearing when giving directions for improvement.
- Create an environment that allows questions to be asked freely?
- ‘Seasick’ analogy for a uniform pulse.
- Student beginning to recognise types of gesture: e.g. double rotation so as to allow the fingers to ‘roll through the notes’ for enhanced forward flow and ‘a connection to the sound, the piece and the piano itself’.
- Andrew loves doing melodic dictation and improvisation of melodic answers.
- Listen with an open mind to parental feedback regarding child’s ‘learning style’.
- Fingering needs to be chosen so as to avoid stretching, as stretching tends to make the gestural detail more difficult to implement. The muscles in the forearm seem to overwork, causing inordinate tension, a lack of physical ease, fluency and ‘a stiff and pokey sound’.

Lesson 10: 22 March 2014

This lesson felt a bit flat. I’m not sure if it was me, as I had had a couple of less than inspiring lessons earlier in the afternoon, but I think that Andrew was a bit tired compared with his normal self. Apparently he had a sleep before coming; he did look dazed and had a sniffle too. However, we did manage to get on with things. He had managed to correct the first two pages of Jump with almost 100% accuracy, apparently his Mum and Dad told him to keep practising, as they weren’t sure if he was still making mistakes with the timing. Andrew said that they should ‘trust him’. I went through the next four or five bars and helped him to correct the rhythmic detail and set those bars for next Tuesday. The whole thing does sound a bit ‘pokey’ and a bit ‘brainy’ at the moment, but I suggested that he should keep it fairly conservative for the time being, at least until the rhythm settles and then we can start to ‘jump’ a bit more! I heard the Invention in D Minor all through, correcting a few more parts, but
really, he’s about 80% there now. I think he likes the idea of me showing him on a sliding scale where he is ‘at’ with each piece. In fact he asked me to give him a tube to colour for his minutes of practice to win a prize after 40 hours, similar to his violin teacher. I said that I would, so I guess that I will. I did caution him that it would have to be quality practice and not just mindless repetition, and he seemed to think that would be fine. There was an interesting part where use of momentum to the opposite direction of travel seemed to fill out the sound and avoid any stretching, at this might be worth having another look at. He played *Counting Stars* all through, and did a very good job. Lyn said that this didn’t count as practice and suggested that 60 minutes per day probably isn’t really enough, so I suggested 90 minutes – not sure about that target though. We did some aural activities; perfect pitch games and also chord inversions, which he loved. I could definitely feel his sleepiness lift here. I really need to include some kind of creative activity each and every lesson, as it sparks his interest significantly. As we have a mid-semester concert coming up, I asked Andrew to begin learning the *Lady Gaga* duet and to start revising the *Pirates of the Caribbean* duet.

- The lesson felt a bit flat: ‘You win some, you lose some’.
- ‘Trust me’: Demonstrates the student wanting to take more ownership?
- ‘Showing’ student achievement on a sliding scale gives visual awareness of weekly progress.
- Using gesture/double rotation to create momentum to cover large distances rather than stretching or moving suddenly.
- A difficult piece needs to settle rhythmically so that cognitive resources can be directed elsewhere, e.g., gesture, sound and expression.
- Very strong parental interest, involvement and support here, yet realistic of the effort required from everyone.
- Include complementary activities every lesson: ‘We did some aural activities and I could definitely feel his sleepiness lift’.
- Using practice incentives that inspire competition seems particularly effective for Andrew.

*Lesson 11: 25 March 2014*

A really good lesson! I gave Andrew his test tube practice sheet and he was so thrilled, and very enthusiastic. I think he was desperate for the lesson to finish so he
could go home and get started. He was well rested and back to his normal self again tonight, and really had done a very good job preparing for the lesson. It just reminds me that kids are kids and like us, they get tired, they have bad days/weeks, and they often don’t have the skills to mask these as well as the adults in their lives do. In fact, quite a few students have been less than 100% these past few days. Sam, who has been going so well, had a really average lesson earlier today, and this comes after a great interview that we had last Friday night in which he said he felt he was really enjoying the lessons. Andrew and I worked on the *Invention in D Minor*, and I would say that it is ready for a public performance now – it’s around 85–90% secure with wonderful rich tonal detail and some very special moments added by Andrew himself. We worked mainly on voicing and some small anomalies with getting faster in the left hand just before the descending seventh jump. It appeared that Andrew was overstretching and this was affecting the rhythm and tone. Again, there were plenty of examples of directional practice techniques for freedom of execution and tonal shaping, as well as coordination drills for freedom, confidence and sound. The piece really is sounding very polished on the whole. Andrew also has finished the first movement of the Mozart *Sonata in B-flat Major* and, while not perfect, the piece is fluent, uniform and relatively free of mistakes. We chose a few areas to work on during the week. Lyn suggested that he could play the piece on 4 May for the extra concert. I agreed that the piece would probably peak at just the right time. Andrew is already asking me about the next piece, so I was thinking that he could play *Two Little Birds* by Frank Hutchens and the Haydn *Concerto in C Major*, but I will keep having a think about it. He is coming again on Saturday, so I’m really looking forward to doing more with the Mozart then. There were times during the lesson when I was genuinely surprised that such a small soul could have such mature musical understanding and technical facility.

- Andrew was very thrilled to get his practice ‘test tube’.
- People are not perfect, they go through ups and downs and children often don’t have the skills to mask these as well as adults do; end-of-term tiredness is quite common.
- Encourage the student’s ‘special moments’.
- ‘Add-a-note’, directional practice is useful in getting to know how the notes of a passage work in tandem with forming a gesture that ‘fits’ the phrase shape,
leading to enhanced physical freedom, tonal shape and coordination between the hands.

- Don’t try to ‘fix’ everything: set smaller, more achievable goals that ‘add up over time’.

- Andrew is asking for another piece!

Lesson 12: 1 April 2014

We actually didn’t focus much on repertoire today, as most of the lesson was spent writing out Andrew’s own composition, *Far, Far Away*. There was much to be said regarding grouping rules, choice of chords and layout of the score; Andrew is just so inquisitive. I also gave him the music for *Two Little Birds* and the Haydn *Concerto in C Major*, playing each briefly and explaining some of the notation and principles of performance practice with the execution of leaning notes in the Classical period. We also covered some work on how to build dominant seventh chord, arising from his interest with the chords in his own composition. He is coming again on Saturday so I hope to hear some of his repertoire and another dictation/work on his composition then. I suggested that he complete the grouping rules chapter in *Master Your Theory One* in order to review concepts that I explained verbally during the lesson.

- Lesson on composition, keyboard harmony and theory: Andrew is a very inquisitive boy and his parents support the freedom to focus where his interests lie.

Lesson 13: 5 April 2014

This lesson was quite different to others in that we played through the first section of Andrew’s first concerto! It really is a charming little piece and of an appropriate level of difficulty at this stage. There were quite a few good examples where expressive gesture was used to shape repeated notes, two-note slurs and phrase ends. Another aspect was the importance of shaping left-hand notes, rather than letting them ‘come along for the ride’. We did quite a bit of work on the Mozart *Sonata*, mainly relating the piece and its various themes/colours back to opera, and an overall sense of theatre where various characters come in and out of centre stage. This was a great lesson in terms of general knowledge of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, a general sense of historical style, and overall ensemble playing. That said, the lesson is a bit of a blur, as I am writing this reflection on Tuesday when the lesson was last Saturday. In the
future, I have to try and prioritise writing the reflections on the day of the actual lesson. Maybe it might be worth watching this lesson again.

- Ensemble playing is exciting for teacher and student and provides a ‘musical’ atmosphere in which to learn.
- General knowledge and historical perspective are woven into the lessons and not ‘compartmentalised’.
- Opera metaphor: Using visual imagery of ‘characters in sound’ to define the thematic material and musical structure – ‘gestural matching’.
- Using expressive gestural rather than intellectual/emotive approach to shape repeated notes, two-note slurs and expressive tapering of phrase endings.
- Left hand often has more expressive potential than one might consider: Need to see it as its own ‘character’, like a spectator watching the main characters.

Lesson 14: 29 April 2014

Again, I have left writing this way too late! It’s almost midnight and the lessons feel like they are blurring together. This was Andrew’s first lesson of the term. He’s been away in China for a few weeks, so I haven’t seen him for quite a while. He was extremely sweet and enthusiastic during the lesson; totally unaffected by how well his progress is going. We did spend a fair bit of time on the Haydn Concerto, covering the concept of ‘breathing prior to sounding’, not only to shape the tone, but to also give the audience and conductor (me) an indication of when the piece will begin. There was some good material regarding tonal shaping of thirds and ‘voicing’ semiquaver passagework. Andrew’s Mozart Sonata had really come on this week. We chose a few areas to work on, mainly to do with not ‘stopping’ on the notes, particularly when playing softly during the opening bars where ‘rolling’ through the notes is desirable. I gave Andrew many compliments, including ‘I just love listening to your playing!’ which he seemed particularly proud to hear. He then played the Invention in D Minor, which sounded a bit too fast and mechanical, though he did adjust quite well after some coaching. We finished the lesson with Jump, where there were quite a few mistakes during the last two pages. I will help further on Saturday when I see him again. I’ve chosen him to play that piece last in the workshop on Sunday. It’s a great piece; happy and playful; just like Andrew really. There was some good material relating to ‘showing’ the audience/listener the interesting modulation to E flat on page one (using slight flexibility and tonal variety here).
Breathing plays an important role in the implementation of an expressive gestural vocabulary, not only to assist with sound production and tonal shape, but to encourage an embodied experience within the student themselves.

‘Voicing’ and shaping passagework.

Continue to foster a sense of ‘rolling’ through the notes without stopping, particularly when playing softly: ‘The end of one note becomes the beginning of the next’.

‘I just love listening to your playing’: Encouragement and positive reinforcement foster pride.

‘Illustrate’ the harmonic interest to the listener by using tonal variety and a flexible delivery, much like prosody, the rhythm and inflection of spoken language.

Choosing repertoire that ‘fits’ the student, their personality and current interest.

Lesson 15: 3 May 2014

We spent quite a lot of time on *Jump* today. Once again we chose about eight bars to ‘study’, otherwise I think Andrew becomes a bit overwhelmed and ‘switches off’. At Andrew’s request, we played through some of the Haydn *Concerto*. I used a really good metaphor where the right-hand thirds in the opening bars are ‘laughing’. This will be a good example of linking vocal inflection to expressive elements of the Classical style.

- Important to show *how* to practise; learn by doing.
- Laugh analogy for staccato thirds: vocally expressive inflection.

Lesson 16: 6 May 2014

We spent the first part of the lesson doing melodic dictation from a new Russian book that I downloaded – there’s 1000 examples ranging from very easy to complex two-part dictations. Not a lot in terms of repertoire in this lesson, but we did cover scale technique and general conversation regarding competing with oneself to improve one’s own skills. Nonetheless, I suggested that Andrew could be inspired to learn from Wendy’s physical flexibility and Adrian’s perfectionism. There is good material in this lesson regarding pronation of the forearm that can help to ‘swivel’ the thumb under, without any undue stretching or stiffening of the muscles around the thumb and joints in and around the wrist. A highlight was when I asked Andrew to press on the
muscles on the top of my forearm while I demonstrated how they seem to ‘lock’ when ‘turning’ the thumb under in isolation, compared to when I repeated the same movement while pronating the forearm inward from the elbow. These kinds of ‘live’ demonstrations are invaluable, and speak a lot louder than words. For example, ‘keep the scale even’ is quite abstract and the student may not necessarily understand how this might be achieved. A lot of time and frustration may be saved if an analytical approach is adopted, with physical movement gradually refined over time. Clumsy or stiff movements that don’t have the necessary follow through or preparation seem to make expressive tone production more difficult to achieve. There was an interesting postlude at the end of the lesson where we worked on the right-hand passagework at the end of the Mozart Sonata. Using a tennis analogy, I suggested that preparatory and follow-through movements combined by chaining small gestural fragments together are essential to ease of execution and overall confidence and sparkle in the sound, leading to increased tonal nuance and overall expressivity.

- Complementary activities: Melodic dictation.
- A healthy balance between focusing on learning goals and self-improvement (process-oriented learning) and performance goals (product-oriented learning)
- Being inspired by others: What is it about their way of learning and playing that I can learn from?
- Muscle naming/feeling.
- Show instead of tell: ‘Live’ demonstration of how stiff the muscles on the top of my forearm can become when turning the thumb under in isolation, compared to when I repeated the movement while pronating the forearm inward from the elbow/rather than ‘keep the scale even’, which is quite abstract and doesn’t make explicit exactly how the student might achieve this.

Preparatory movement/follow-through movement: tennis/sport analogy – ‘what movements or ‘gestures’ come before and after the racquet hits the ball?’

Lesson 17: 10 May 2014

Today’s lesson was spent developing refinement of Andrew’s tonal nuance in the melodic line of the Haydn Concerto. He had done beautifully with the downward descending thirds that we had worked on in Tuesday’s lesson. In addition to injecting tonal shape and freedom into the Alberti bass, we also worked on trying to ‘free’ his
approach to the left-hand leaps throughout. I don’t think it’s so much an issue of him having a small hand as much as purely reconfiguring the way he spatially approaches the notes. Lyn seemed worried that he wouldn’t be able to work in such detail during his home practice, but Andrew assured me that he would. I think she is concerned that he will become bored of the piece, but he is very close to ‘figuring out’ how to glide over the notes here, instead of stretching. Without this, the essence of the piece may well be missing. However, I do think that it is probably time to start a new pop song; Andrew suggested *Radioactive* and I am very happy to move forward with that suggestion. We also spent time revising the rhythmic elements of the *Jump*. Most of the second-last page is accurate, though I did manage to find a few errors that I helped him to correct. I would like to start looking further at *Two Little Birds* and the *Lady Gaga/Pirates* duet next week, at least to get him up and running in that direction while he finishes the Mozart *Sonata*, the Bach *Invention*, *Jump* and his technical work for the upcoming exam on 1 June.

- Teacher acknowledges completion of set tasks and overall improvement.
- ‘Developing’ tonal nuance rather than ‘telling’.
- Student-selected repertoire; teacher chooses genre?
- Alberti Bass: Developing physical freedom using add-a-note technique to ‘discover’ the spatial information = tonal shape = expression = sounds ‘alive’.
- Student becoming increasingly aware of self-responsibility for completing set tasks between lessons.
- Gliding analogy, as opposed to stretching with the fingers.

Lesson 18: 13 May 2014

As Louie had hurt his wrist, I went a bit over with Mediha and asked Andrew and Lyn to come at 7pm. It hadn’t been the best day, but it was amazing how the afternoon of teaching helped me to forget about it almost completely, at least until finishing time anyway. We got lots done in this lesson; Andrew was desperate to show me his progress on *Radioactive*. He had done a marvellous job in such a short period of time. When he likes something and it clicks with him, his creativity runs deep. I started to show him the chord structure in B minor, but then realised that he was going to be playing it in A minor! However, it wasn’t a waste of time, as we came back to the B-minor version later because he asked me to play it. I explained how the chord structure could be transposed. I showed him how to fill out the chorus with right-hand
chords in root position and inversion, which he was quite quick to realise, and then we did a duet with him playing his version and me improvising my own version based on the chords and motifs from the song itself. It was really inspiring. After that we moved on the Mozart *Sonata*. It was interesting how I narrated the form and harmonic structure while he played. It really seemed to click with him and I don’t recall ever doing an analysis in this way, at least so completely. I have been on Ross Hamilton’s website the last few days, purchasing quite a few analyses for various students. There was an interesting part where expressive movement was used to shape the left-hand melody whilst the right hand plays semiquavers. Another good example of using expressive gesture to shape sound was found in the execution of appoggiaturas, where a slow up movement alleviated tonal roughness, leading to a sense of ‘sighing’. We moved on to the *Pirates* duet, where a good deal of time was spent on correcting rhythmic errors, though we did play it in ensemble initially. I advised Andrew to play the repeated notes with a down/up movement in order to create increasing colour, volume and tone, thereby enhancing the forward drive of the dramatic music. We did briefly look at the analysis of *Two Little Birds*, finding where the ‘cat’ part of the piece appears. At the end of the lesson we worked through a few parts of the Haydn *Concertino in C Major*, which definitely shows significant improvement, especially in the tricky left-hand octave jumps that we had worked on in the previous lesson. There was one spot at the end of the lesson where I encouraged Andrew to feel the side-to-side sweep of the arm in order to project the playful colour and tonal shape of the charming writing – a jam-packed lesson! Andrew had also completed his test tube so now I need to find a prize.

- Teacher satisfaction/in ‘flow’: Easy to forget the outside world.
- Amazing progress with the new piece *Radioactive*: When he likes it, he does well with it.
- Using keyboard harmony to foster own arrangement.
- ‘Improvising’ a duet together.
- Narrating formal analysis as a ‘story’ while the student plays along really seemed to click with him.
- Tonal balance achieved through combining contrasting gestures in each hand, rather than pure verbal description.
- Appoggiaturas: A ‘sighing’ gesture where the down movement is faster than the up movement.

- Student learns that the velocity of down and up movements is chosen depending on whether the effect is to be loud or soft.

- Not every part of every lesson is ‘creative’ or ‘glamorous’: Time was spent here correcting errors in the Pirates duet, so that the fundamentals of notes, fingering and rhythm don’t distract the student when expressive gesture and tonal detail are being developed down the track.

- Question the student: Why shape the music? To provide forward drive that may incite a listener’s excitement.

- Encouraging imagery early in the learning process by linking formal analysis with ‘pictures’, e.g. ‘Where is the cat part of the piece?’

- ‘Feel the side-to-side sweep of the arm in order to project the playful colour and tonal shape of the charming writing’.

- Practice test tube completed.

Lesson 19: 17 May 2014

What did we do today? It’s hard to remember, as this is the last reflection for this set. I didn’t do any writing on Saturday night as we had pizza and then I went to bed early, as it was such a tiring day/week. Andrew showed me his arrangement of Radioactive. I helped him rework some of the notes and showed him a couple of timbral suggestions that might be achieved through expressive gesture. I also heard his chord progressions, and we spent a fair bit of time working on forearm pronation in order to unify the tone in scales. We also reviewed the rhythmic anomalies in the Pirates duet, as both Andrew and Adrian came to the house for a rehearsal last night. Hopefully, if I keep playing the duet with them individually in their lessons, when it comes time for rehearsal, the parts will slide together more fluidly, though it’s going to be a bit of a challenge I think.

- Expressive gesture can be used to foster expressive nuance in a variety of musical genres.

- Keyboard harmony.

- Scales can provide the framework to foster body awareness and basic gesture, e.g. engagement of upper arm muscles encourages a wide elbow and facilitates
forearm pronation, leading to greater tonal uniformity through ‘tilting’ the thumb under the hand.

- Duets can be useful in encouraging self-responsibility for absolute accuracy of notation and rhythm, as their partner is ‘counting on them’.

Lesson 20: 20 May 2014

I’m preparing Andrew for the Intermediate technique exam here at the Conservatorium on Sunday 1 June. We reviewed the requirements, and adjusted the draft schedule that I had emailed earlier that day. With scales and arpeggios, there was plenty to be said regarding pronating the forearm so as to avoid over-stretching the thumb or other fingers, and this really took up the majority of the lesson. I asked him to play the Mozart Sonata K570, leading to me coaching the uniformity of the triple lilt through expressive gesture and conducting. The really big thing was that I just simply asked for what I wanted: ‘stop rushing and play without mistakes’. I think this came as a bit of a surprise to Andrew as I am usually the first to point out everything that a student does well, but since the eisteddfod at Redlands last week, I just have this attitude of ‘well, it’s certainly commendable, but that part or that part or whatever is just careless and needs to be played perfectly’. In the past, I have resisted being so black and white, because I think that kids are kids and don’t have a natural disposition for perfection, but for those who can cope and thrive with such direction, I think that it’s OK. It certainly made a difference to Andrew’s playing almost immediately, because I had stated my expectation and he really wants to please me. He has the ability to do it, and did so with a minimum of fuss. I think that if a piece is going to be truly expressive and confident, then wrong notes beyond a point of an accidental slip just is not going to cut it. I suppose the trick is to know the student, how far along they are, how well you know each other, how far along they are with the piece, how much they are capable of rising to the challenge, and how motivated they are to please. I have been this direct with a few other students over the past few days and it’s remarkable how resilient and capable children are to rise to the challenge.

- ‘We are preparing … today we spent …’ – it really is a team effort.
- Forearm pronation helps to avoid over-stretching of the thumb in scales and arpeggios; the thumb may be less likely to ‘bump’.
- Teacher’s use of expressive gesture/conducting.
- Flexibility of expectation depending on the student and the situation: ‘You need to stop rushing and play without mistakes’.
- ‘In the past, I have resisted being so black and white, because I think that kids are kids and don’t have a natural disposition for perfection, but for those who can cope and thrive with such direction, I think that it’s OK’.
- Is total accuracy from the student, and the self-confidence that might derive from that essential for a performance to be truly expressive, both from the performer and the listener’s point of view?
- ‘I suppose the trick is to know the student, how far along they are, how well you know each other, how far along they are with the piece, how much they are capable of rising to the challenge, and how motivated they are to please … it’s remarkable how resilient and capable children are to rise to the challenge’.

Lesson 21: 24 May 2014

We spent the whole lesson on the Mozart Sonata today. There was a lot of detail to be reworked, but of interest was the concept of using ‘mini circles’ within passagework; not only useful for speed, clarity and ease, but also for expressive tonal shape and a sense of life and vigour. There was an excellent example of add-a-note technique (forte volume) to coordinate the two hands (melody in the left-hand part), and then a repetition of that sequence with the desired tonal balance between registers. This seemed to facilitate expressive melodic projection when Andrew played uninterrupted and at tempo.

- Circles: Elliptical movement of the arms and hands for tonal shape, ease of execution, speed and ‘a sense of life’.
- Knowledge of the choreographic shape of expressive gesture can be achieved through chaining fragments together, building in tonal shape, textural balance and coordination of the hands, one step at a time.

Lesson 22: 31 May 2014

I feel a bit guilty about this lesson; not that it was a bad lesson, but for some reason I am reluctant to give Andrew negative feedback, feeling like it might tarnish his confidence and/or enjoyment. We spent quite a large portion of the lesson on chord progressions, working on detail of pedal. Andrew’s scales and arpeggios were very musical and forward flowing, so we moved on to the Bach Invention in D Minor. To
be honest, I think that he’s just a bit tired of the piece and has lost interest. It seemed as though it had gone backwards in skill, as it sounded rather rushed and mechanical, though still fluent and accurate. Anyway, he had the technical exam the next day so we had to review it, starting with slowing down, and discussing the idea that it is an ‘invention’, where the piece is ‘invented’ by weaving the main melodic idea between the hands. It was actually Andrew who wanted to know why it was called ‘Invention’. This gave a good segue into revisiting elements of tonal shape, balance, rhythmic stability and not ‘showing off’. There were significant problems with coordination and a lack of audibility of the ‘music’, especially in the bass, as it seemed he wasn’t interpreting the piece, but rather just ‘playing’ it, perhaps for the reasons outlined earlier; might be time to move on from this one. However, he was very happy to receive his medal at the beginning of the lesson. We made a deal that if he completes three test tubes, I will award him with a trophy. Incidentally, Angela told me that she gave him a high distinction in the technique exam yesterday, and he will be very happy with that, no doubt. She said that he played very well and that his scales were (noticeably) the most musical of all the students.

- How do I balance being firm and giving ‘negative’ feedback to the student, while still seeking a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for everyone?
- ‘I don’t want to spoil his natural confidence, spontaneity or curiosity’.
- Chord progressions, scales and arpeggios.
- ‘Aim to show and tell, rather than show off’.
- Does a lack of interest = a lack of expression and musical energy?
- External feedback: ‘Andrew’s scales were noticeably the most musical of all the students’.
- Very proud to receive his medal for excellence and his first ever HD!
- Provide incentives that foster friendly competition.
- Taking time to answer student questions, while linking them back to musical expression.

Lesson 23: 3 June 2014

There is excellent material here regarding the correlation between fingering, expressive gesture and sound. It seems that one fingering option facilitates one type of sound, yet another option may well facilitate a more expressively fluid gesture, and therefore a more expressively shaped sound. Within Two Little Birds, there was a
good analogy between expressive gesture and a bird’s wings; it worked really well. Andrew did very well in the technique exam on Sunday; he received a high distinction, which he of course was very excited about. Lyn was also very happy, though she did initially seem quite worried about the frequency of examinations at the Conservatorium, but was relieved when I mentioned they were held once a year. I mentioned that I thought that he was probably a bit tired of the Bach *Invention* and that it was time to move on. We talked about new repertoire and Andrew mentioned something about the music from the movie *Cars* and also he expressed an interest in learning another sonata by Mozart. I am wondering now if he should study Haydn or Beethoven, but I think another Mozart will be the best option at this time. I also mentioned that it seemed like the Haydn *Concertino* with the String Orchestra at the Young Conservatorium showcase concert may go ahead, and that he should start planning for that by learning the other two movements for the end of the year. We also looked at *Radioactive*, though there wasn’t a lot to review, though I did suggest that he ‘glide’ through the melodic treble for a lyrical contrast between that and the stronger chords. The pedal is very good and Andrew’s accuracy almost 100%. We also completed a melodic dictation and then sang the exercise in both letter names and solfège.

- The correlation between fingering, gesture and sound: ‘One fingering will facilitate one type of sound, yet another option may well facilitate a more expressive gesture and therefore a more expressively shaped sound’.
- Analogy that relates directly to the theme of the piece: Comparing gesture to the wings of a bird in *Two Little Birds*.
- Acknowledge that the parent’s experience can shape the child’s experience, e.g. Lyn’s dislike of examinations.
- Student-selected repertoire should be considered.
- ‘Glide through the notes’ for a lyrical contrast.
- Melodic dictation and singing.

*Lesson 24: 7 June 2014*

Andrew had a rehearsal lesson with Adrian last night, which was just terrific. The atmosphere was so conducive to collaboration and fun, yet had a serious undertone. We all went to Southbank afterwards and had some ice-cream; Andrew treated everyone with his own money! During the duet rehearsal, I asked Andrew and Adrian
to play their Haydn Concertos simultaneously – very strange. I gave Andrew his new pieces and we worked on the rhythmic structure and counting for Cars. I introduced him to the new Mozart Sonata K330, and ‘Aria’ from the Goldberg Variations. The main part of the lesson was spent on Two Little Birds, as Andrew expressed an interest in completing it for the Intermediate Concert this Sunday. He has quite a bit of work to do, and I suggested that with about four or five hours’ practice, it will probably be getting close. We looked at the third page and worked on fingering, rhythm and sound.

- Ensemble playing fosters collaboration, socialising and having fun with ‘musical friends’.
- Novelty: Play your pieces at the same time!
- Verbalise expectations and realistic goal setting.

**Lesson 25: 10 June 2014**

I love teaching Andrew; he lifts my mood and refreshes my interest, even though I was feeling a bit tired tonight, probably as a result of a big weekend of piano concerts. I helped him set a goal to learn the first three pages of Cars, the introductory bars he had worked out himself. He said that Matthew had got a bit frustrated with him because he wouldn’t learn any more. Andrew explained that he wanted to ‘try a bit of this and a bit of that’ with his new pieces. I modelled pages 1, 2 and 3 with accurate rhythm at a fluent pace, so I hope that he will implement these directions during his practice at home this week. We then moved on to the Goldberg ‘Aria’, taking him through the first section and giving him directions regarding fingering, preliminary articulations and expressive intent when playing appoggiaturas. Andrew asked me to play it for him, so I did. He really looked very excited, and I feel privileged to be teaching someone with such a zest for learning and a desire to please. It truly is an honour to guide his journey. I heard Two Little Birds and he really had made it his own already. There wasn’t a lot to do here, apart from pointing out some rhythmic inconsistencies, a few suggestions regarding pedalling, some discussion on the function and use of the soft pedal, some adjustment with notes in the final bars and the need to avoid over-exaggerated head placement when executing the final notes. Andrew was trying to touch the keys with his nose I think! We talked about the fact that people can feel it when something is fake as opposed to when it comes from ‘within’.


- Teacher satisfaction: ‘He lifts my mood and refreshes my interest … I feel privileged to be teaching someone with such a zest for learning and a desire to please … It is truly is an honour to guide his journey’.
- Foster goal setting and increasing learning autonomy in a practical and visual way.
- Teacher modelling of performance is exciting for the student.
- ‘Planning’ expressive playing from the outset: Fingerings, identifying preliminary gestures and articulatory detail.
- No ‘fake’ playing; the audience can tell.
- Analogy: Let the birds ‘fly away’ during the final bars; don’t ‘hold the piece in’.

Lesson 26: 14 June 2014

Lyn had sent me a text earlier in the morning asking me to go through the Mozart Sonata with Andrew today. Apparently she and Matthew had decided not to show Andrew his exam report for fear that he would be ‘too proud’, and avoid working hard to improve beyond where he was. Apparently, he is still not partial practising most of the time at home, and he won’t listen to Lyn and Matthew when they try to remind him what he is supposed to be doing. We spent the lesson reviewing the tempo of the Mozart Sonata, as he is starting to ‘show off’ again, instead of ‘show and tell’. We did a lot of partial practice, and I showed Andrew exactly what I wanted him to do and the purpose of doing so. I showed him how to break down larger tasks into manageable chunks that are then linked together. Towards the end of the lesson, I asked Andrew something to the effect of, ‘You do this kind of detailed revision at home, don’t you?’ He looked at me strangely, seeming very guilty. I replied with a surprised and slightly disappointed and disapproving look and tone, and I could see his face change to one of worry and regret; the tears started to well up. I comforted him and said that I was still very proud of him and what he has been able to achieve, but reminded him that he should follow my directions faithfully. It was actually a bit of a surprise, as I really wasn’t annoyed, just a bit surprised to find that he hadn’t been following my lead after all the encouragement that I had given him to do so. Maybe it’s a good thing; he clearly respects me a lot and wants me to think he’s a ‘good boy’ so a little reality check is probably what was required. The previous evening, we had duet rehearsal with Adrian, which went quite well. I asked the boys to adjust the
balance, and we invented a new ending together; they certainly seemed to have a lot of fun. The rehearsal finished with each boy playing their pieces for each other; they certainly were very keen to show each other their skills. No wonder Adrian had been getting ‘just right’ symptoms during the week, as the poor kid was playing his Mozart Sonatina too fast and was missing many of the notes, not to mention the details of expressive shape and articulation. Both boys played beautifully in the Intermediate Piano Concert yesterday afternoon. Adrian’s playing is so focused, exciting and direct, and he had really refined the wind piece and had implemented many of the points of feedback that I gave him at the duet rehearsal. Andrew’s Mozart was so colourful and ‘tactile’. It was just so impressive, as was his arrangement of Radioactive, though Two Little Birds probably needed a bit more preparation.

- Is it possible for encouragement to be overused?
- Lyn and Matthew are to be commended for communicating their intentions to me, and for informing me of the home dynamic and what has been happening during practice sessions. Apparently Andrew is resisting doing partial practice and won’t listen to their suggestions.
- ‘Don’t show off; show and tell’.
- Verbalise expectations with clear demonstration of required tasks: ‘We did a lot of partial practice and I showed Andrew exactly what I wanted him to do and the purpose of doing so. I showed him how to break down larger tasks into manageable chunks that are then linked together’.
- Reality check: ‘Please follow my directions faithfully, but don’t be scared to think for yourself too!’
- ‘Arranging’ the duet and adding new ideas that result from collaboration with peers.
- Provide informal opportunities for peer performance, review and critical reflection.

Lesson 27: 29 June 2014

I asked Lyn if Andrew would like to come for an extra lesson at the Conservatorium and she said he would love to, as he told her that he had been missing me, and the lessons. I told Andrew that I was very proud of what he had achieved and how he had played at the Intermediate Concert. I think that Andrew has really helped me to grow as a teacher, as I’ve become much more open to new ways of doing things. I really
value the input of his parents and I am happy to share the role of mentoring him with them. I also really find it interesting how involved Andrew is in his own learning, and today he was very excited to show me what he had been up to. I wanted to keep chatting, but he wanted to get on with things, so he showed me the first three pages of *Cars*. I helped him organise the rhythm and notes at the bottom of page two, and there was a nice opportunity to teach him about dominant ninth chords, more about first, second, third and fourth inversions, and I also gave him the other two versions of the I-IV-V7-I chord progressions. The lessons flowed easily, where one activity seemed to merge with the next. Before we knew it, 90 minutes had passed. Andrew had learnt the second movement of the Haydn *Concertino*, so I helped him with the overall concept of *Minuet and Trio* in terms of form, instrumentation, mood and harmonic colour. That said, most of the detail in terms of sound and style was already there. I likened the appoggiatura to a wink, an analogy that really seemed to fit the music. He has also started playing the third movement, and while we didn’t get very far, there was some interesting work on expressively shaping the left hand, as well as adjusting fingerings with right-hand semiquavers. We started on the Mozart *Sonata* K330 (first movement), and I can already tell that he will play that piece beautifully. In terms of expressive gesture and tonal nuance, it is obvious that he is transferring a lot of what he has already learnt in the previous two Mozart sonatas. We also covered a harmonic minor scale and also a natural minor, and spoke about the importance of studying scales and arpeggios, even if they aren’t Andrew’s favourite activity. However, I really feel like Lyn should avoid saying too much about what she thinks is best or what she doesn’t think is best, as I really feel that Andrew is too easily influenced by her.

- What opportunities can my student offer *me* to learn?
- Andrew is very enthusiastic about *learning*.
- Keyboard harmony and analysis are embedded into the lessons (these concepts take multiple revisions, e.g. we worked on dominant ninth chords, dominant seventh-chord inversions and I-IV-V7-I chord progressions two days ago (23 January 2015) within another context (*Boogie Rock*).
- ‘Wink’ analogy for appoggiatura.
Andrew seems to be increasingly aware and able to transfer his skills to new situations (a good awareness of the sound, style and gesture within Haydn’s Minuet and Trio and Mozart K330 was already there).

Good example of left-hand shaping and adjusting right-hand fingering in the third movement of the Haydn Concertino.

Andrew is very easily influenced and desperately wants to please.

Lesson 28: 12 July 2014

I invited Andrew, Kelly, Adrian, Neil and Wendy to come to the Conservatorium for extra lessons today. It was just a pleasant way to spend an afternoon and hardly felt like work to me. As usual, Andrew’s lesson flew past, and before I (we) knew it, it was about five minutes to finish. Andrew was very keen to show me how he had been going on the Lady Gaga Fugue, as I had suggested in an email to Lyn and Jane that he and Neil aim to start rehearsing together in about three or four weeks. Andrew has finished most of it and played it very accurately with excellent rhythm and flow. He said that he had been listening to the recordings that I made and that he had been playing along with both parts. I think that this would have helped enormously in his preparation. There was another great example of collaboration, as we discussed, experimented and ultimately ‘decided’ the best articulation for the fugal subject. As usual, we talked about sequential writing, both ascending and descending and how we can use such structural information to ascertain what expression might be used. Andrew had a mixture of wonder and excitement on his face when I demonstrated this, and I could tell that he was really getting into it. He loves to play in ensemble together and I found it enjoyable too; we played most of the piece a couple of times. He hasn’t got much more to do, so I suggested that he apply the articulatory ideas to the rest of the subject entries and we move on to the next activity. I gave him the music for I See Fire by Ed Sheeran, which I had written out for Noah. He really seems to like it too, and asked me if I would play ‘at least four or five pages’ for him, which I did. I also suggested that while he might like to be quite free with the rhythm and notational detail here, there is a need to be a bit more precise when it came to the ‘Aria’ from Bach’s Goldberg Variations, which he played towards the end of the lesson. Most of the notes are there, but the rhythm of the left hand wasn’t accurate. I spent a bit of time going through the first couple of bars of the right hand, and we talked about the slurs that might be stylistically appropriate, but didn’t get too far as
time was up. In between that and the previous piece, we looked at the first movement of Mozart’s K330. Andrew had learnt the first couple of pages and as well as fixing up some notes and rhythm, there was an interesting demonstration of partial practising for notational accuracy, sound and the hands moving in to ‘kiss each other’. Andrew is very switched on and I could tell that he was eager to move on to the next activity and the next as quickly as he got the idea of what to implement during the week. I will see him again tomorrow (Tuesday) night anyway – this was a great lesson that flowed easily.

- Teacher satisfaction: ‘It hardly felt like work to me’.
- Evidence here that mp3 of the Lady Gaga Fugue has been very helpful.
- Andrew likes to hear me play his pieces and loves ensemble playing.
- Evidence and example of collaborating to find the fugal shape: Start him off and give him the responsibility to ‘apply’ a small amount himself.
- It seems that structural and harmonic information really helps to direct expressive ideas, and Andrew seems to respond well to these concepts (‘mixture of wonder and excitement on his face’).
- Within the Mozart Sonata K330, there is a good demonstration of partial practice techniques imbued with gestural choreography and sound.
- Analogy: ‘The hands kiss each other’.

Lesson 29: 15 July 2014

There’s not a great deal of expressive gestural activity here, as the lesson mainly involved rhythmic correction within Aria using chaining and scaffolding.

- Within Aria, there are many good examples of rhythmic correction, one step at a time.

Lesson 30: 19 July 2014

I felt annoyed with Andrew today. We spent the lesson looking at the same sections of Aria, as he won’t partial practise the hands separately or implement details of fingerling and rhythm. It’s a tricky piece, which he chose himself, but he seems too immature to implement what is required. It really shows too, as it is only on the final two staves that the piece started to come alive in an expressive and meaningful way, because he is, in his own words, totally comfortable with the notation and is not worrying whether it is correct or not. However, there was some really good discussion
at the beginning of the lesson regarding Ray Chen’s performance and his ability to merge himself with the violin in such a way that it was very hard to tell where one stopped and the other started. I conveyed to Andrew and Lyn how much the orchestra came to life under Simone Young’s ‘gestural’ and emphatically enthusiastic direction, and how our lessons could be seen as ‘orchestral’ rehearsals, where we will get the most out of them when ‘sectionals’, i.e. partial practice, are taken seriously away from the main rehearsals. The opening four bars or so are quite well known now, so I was able to ‘conduct’ Andrew, leading him to express the direction of the melodic line while supporting harmonic growth and resolution in the bass. I hope that the next lesson is better, as I’m trying really hard to please Andrew and his parents, but I’m feeling like I need something more significant in return, as it’s irritating having to repeat myself.

- The final two staves of *Aria* represent a perfect example of how notational confidence equals greater expressive freedom and meaning.
- Very good quote from Andrew regarding the importance of notational confidence.
- Good example analogy of partial practice: ‘Orchestral sectionals’ before coming back to the main ‘orchestral’ rehearsals (lessons).
- Very good example of ‘finding’ the expressive information through harmonic tension/resolution and conveying that to the student through my expressive behaviour.

*Lesson 31: Tuesday 22 July 2014*

I was feeling a bit apprehensive about how this lesson would pan out to be honest. I realised why I was annoyed with Andrew – I had spent an inordinate amount of time thinking about what he should play for the upcoming competitions, which was then disregarded anyway. I had chosen what I thought he could achieve comfortably, as I wanted minimal stress for him and for me. As it turned out, he had done well with what we had worked through in the previous lesson, and it was interesting that he mentioned again the analogy of ‘sectional practice’ before joining for ‘the main rehearsal’ with the conductor. Anyway, I decided not to worry about what we still had to cover, opting to enjoy working through the first half of the middle section, covering rhythm, ornaments, expressive tonal shape and corresponding gestural patterns with a feeling of ‘discovery’, rather than as a chore in order to ‘finish’ the piece. While there
is still more to do, there is always next lesson and it’s not healthy for anyone to work under too much pressure. At one point towards the end of the lesson, I could see that Andrew was starting to become cognitively overloaded, so I asked him to do some jumping jacks before continuing. It was interesting to note that Lyn said that she had asked him to take a nap before today’s lesson – a very good idea in my opinion. I love a good nap myself, and I had told her so in the previous lesson. Again, it was interesting to note that Andrew seemed most expressive and ‘involved’ in the playing at the beginning and end of the piece, the very places where he is not ‘wasting’ cognitive resources on notes, fingerling and rhythm. We took some time to review the opening bars in terms of fulfilling the listeners’ expectations of the rising melodic line, and avoiding ‘bottoming out’ with the sound. Andrew definitely seemed to have risen to the challenge of the piece this week, after I had said so last time. Most noticeably, the bass line really did seem to have its own personality and wasn’t just acting in a purely functional role as the bottom of the harmonic structure. We ended the lesson with a rehearsal of the piano duet, *Lady Gaga Fugue*, which Andrew really does seem to enjoy. He was obviously proud that he had finished the whole piece. Interestingly, he asked me if I had remembered to instruct Neil to match his articulation of the subject. He really seems to want to do well and try his best, and enjoys it so much when I validate his efforts and praise him for his progress.

- Good evidence that he had taken on board last week’s ‘sectional’ analogy.
- It seems much less stressful for everyone if I just drop *performance* goals and focus on *process/learning/discovery* goals that lead to performance goals in due course.
- Within *Aria*, there are good examples of aligning expressive tonal shape with corresponding gestural choreography.
- A good observation and/or quote (at the beginning and end of *Aria*) regarding the correlation between thorough preparation, confidence and expressive ‘involvement’.
- Good discussion of ‘fulfilling the listener’s expectations’ of the rising melodic line, and the avoidance of ‘bottoming out’ with the sound.
- The bass line did seem to have its own personality in this lesson.
- Andrew feels proud of his achievement and loves it when I validate his progress and efforts to get there.
Lesson 32: 26 July 2014

I feel a lot less uptight these past couple of lessons. I have asked directly for what I want, without fear or tiptoeing around, and yet Lyn hasn’t cancelled Andrew’s lessons because she thought I was being too demanding. It’s such a strange mix of ideologies at play. As far as she has alluded, Lyn was brought up in a very fixed and pressurised way within the Chinese culture, not to question the status quo or to seek control. While I think she is trying to leave that behind, she appears to have some difficulty letting go of that philosophy, often expecting Andrew to quickly attain an unrealistic standard of perfection. Living in Australia, she really wants Andrew to have the freedom to learn, to be his own person, and not to be under too much pressure, but it’s almost to the point where she wants to take too much control of his progress in order to make that happen. Maybe I’m reading too much into it. That said, I have noticed that when I am very tired or feeling a bit fed up, the need for me to take charge is heightened too, so we may clash. Anyway, things seem to be back to normal/functional, and Andrew had done a very good job with Aria – there were only a couple of rhythmic errors, to which we attended. It was interesting to note how Andrew asked to start from the beginning of the section, rather than from the beginning of the piece. It seems like he is really wanting to get the most out of the time together, and direct the lesson to where he feels like he needs the most input from me. It was his suggestion that we start the lesson with Lady Gaga Fugue. I played with him and then helped him to unify the tonal and articulatory detail of the subject ‘limbs’ towards the end of the piece, especially the final stretto. It will be very interesting to see how much of this he took in, as I did direct him to practise this part, but probably not specifically in terms of hands separately with expressive detail; time will tell. There was an interesting part of the lesson where I suggested that to move through the bar, the third and fourth beats often need to be unobtrusive, yet in another bar immediately following, it becomes almost necessary to do the opposite for effect. All of the lessons this week – Andrew, Adrian, Jade, Finn, Kelly and Wendy – were all very good in terms of the project, but in different ways and for different reasons.

- The reflective process has highlighted areas where I need to improve too, e.g. I have noticed that when I am feeling very tired or a bit fed up, the need to feel like I am in charge becomes heightened.
- ‘Pedagogical chameleon’.
- Andrew asked to start from the middle of *Aria*; he seems to want to get as much as he can out of the lesson, and direct it to where he feels he needs my input.

- *Lady Gaga Fugue* has been a valuable learning experience. While it doesn’t have the complexity of a ‘solo’ fugue, it has encouraged Andrew to consider voicing and subject uniformity within an ensemble setting.

- In realising the expressive potential of the score (in this case *Lady Gaga Fugue*) it seems important to always consider the metrical structure and ‘where is the music going?’

Lesson 33: 29 July 2014

This was a really useful lesson in many ways, and I think that it was quite revelatory for Andrew, Lyn and me. Lyn actually said so in an email that I received the following day. In the last few weeks, I have noticed that Andrew’s playing, both in the lessons and on DVD, appears to lack a certain sparkle that he had at the same time last year. He played *Aria*, and while he had fixed up all mistakes relating to rhythm, notation and fingering, there was something not really honest about the way he was playing, almost as if he was being overcautious in order to avoid mistakes, just so that ‘I would be pleased with him’. This may be due to me being quite insistent that he fix the errors in his playing in order to ‘let go’. However, I think that the pendulum may have swung too far in the opposite direction. We talked about this together, and I showed him the iPad recording of him playing Chopin’s *Nocturne in E-Flat Major* this time last year. In that recording, his playing had a certain naivety, and he was fully involved in ‘creating’ the sound with his entire body in a way that he seems to have somewhat lost. After I encouraged him to, he seemed to relax, getting back into the groove and ‘owning’ the piece. I feel as though I may have contributed to quashing his spontaneity, and reminded him that the best part about Andrew’s playing was Andrew. I suggested that while I might be able to offer further feedback, it was time to let go of *practising* the piece and time to *perform* it. The change to the overall sound and expressive intensity of his playing transformed almost immediately, and it seemed to help when I asked him to play the meditative opening in complete darkness. There were a few other expressive devices such as ‘cannibal phrasing’, which I found from the *Art of Piano Pedagogy* Facebook page, which deals with the importance of taking time to ‘speak’, as the meaning to a phrase can change without
appropriate prosody, e.g. ‘Let’s go eat, Heather …’ can sound like ‘Let’s go eat Heather’ if there isn’t the necessary flexibility with the delivery. I applied this idea to the top A in the treble on the last line with great effect, and Andrew thought it very clever, though he did seem to be confused as to what a cannibal was. We also worked on ‘revealing’ or ‘narrating’ the modulatory interest so that the listener ‘gets’ the piece. This idea culminated in me ‘narrating’ the harmonic structure of the piece as I played through the chords, highlighted the harmonic intensity inherent in the writing, along with ‘expressive conducting’ as Andrew played at the second piano. He also played *Radioactive*, and we spoke of illustrating every note of the piece with that bit of ‘Andrew’ that he does so well, that which makes his playing unique.

- It seems that in an effort to get everything ‘perfect’ so that we can ‘let go’ enough to be expressive, Andrew has become overcautious to the point where he can’t ‘let go’ and a healthier balance must be struck; ‘there was something not really honest about the way he was playing, almost as if he was being overcautious in order not to make mistakes’.
- The iPad was used to facilitate reflective thought, where Andrew might see that his playing could benefit from a bit more ‘sparkle’ and spontaneity. In a recording from last year, he appeared to demonstrate greater involvement in ‘creating’ the sound with his entire body.
- There is good discussion regarding the need to ‘own’ the piece; thinking for himself a little more and aim to ‘perform’ the piece rather than ‘practising’ (it would be very good to compare a snippet of *before* and *after*, as the overall sound and expressive intensity of his playing seemed to transform immediately).
- Playing in the dark?
- ‘Cannibal phrasing’: Analogy learnt from social media that demonstrates the importance of taking time to ‘speak’, lest the meaning of the phrase changes (good example in the top A within the final line of *Aria*).
- Good example here where I encouraged Andrew to ‘narrate’ the modulatory interest, so that the listener ‘gets’ what the music is trying to say.
- A very good example of me demonstrating the expressive potential of the harmonic outline via the second piano and then continuing on to convey these ideas to Andrew through expressive ‘conducting’ and gesticulation.
Lesson 34: 2 August 2014

This was a good lesson, but I can’t help but think that we are spending too much time ‘perfecting’ one piece. I seem to be constantly worried that I am not doing the right thing by Andrew, for fear of being judged by Lyn. Anyway, Andrew played *Aria* from memory – ‘a head full of brains’ I think I said. Before ‘slipping out of performance mode and back into analysing mode’, the lesson really revolved around making sure that the melodic line is always ‘going somewhere’, avoiding building expressive intensity, only to then have it fall away unintentionally. There was, as always, talk regarding the harmonic structure, and the need to take this into account when considering the bigger expressive picture and the associated melodic treatment within each hand. I asked Andrew to play with ‘pin-prick’ intensity in fingertips, even when the music is soft, and to also ‘tighten up’ the ornaments in the left hand, as they were sounding a little too wonky in my opinion. He definitely seems to have taken my advice regarding playing a little more like Andrew, as the music seems to grow out of him, rather than sounding like a pre-rehearsed reproduction of what he has been taught. Andrew sent me a return email referring to himself as ‘my best student!!!!’ and me as ‘the best teacher in the whole world!!!!!’ I gave him a ‘Dragons 2’ toy for doing well lately, which of course he was happy with.

- Good demonstration here of Andrew now playing *Aria* from memory.
- Good examples in this lesson of making sure that the melodic line is always ‘going somewhere’, and the necessity of avoiding building intensity, only to have it drop away unintentionally.
- Analogy: ‘pin-prick’ clarity within the fingertips.
- It seems important to remind Andrew of the difference between performance mode and practising mode.
- There is a good example here of conversation which reflects on the harmonic interest to help direct the expressive potential of the melodic material, and further highlights the importance of including keyboard harmony from the earliest stages of instruction.
- It seems important to encourage Andrew to be himself first and foremost, where the music is able to ‘grow out of you’, rather than sounding like an
exact reproduction of what one has been taught. It’s a tricky balance to achieve.

Lesson 35: 5 August 2014

A good lesson, though for a variety of reasons, I am writing this reflection six days later. One – my computer passed out after I took it to the shop and they turned it off, as it tends to avoid rebooting afterwards. Two – I was sick on Wednesday and Thursday and just too tired. Three – the week got away from me after attending all the eisteddfods and driving to the Gold Coast three times in four days! However, I do remember that in this lesson, we didn’t work on Aria, just the K570. The main problem with the piece is that it shifts in and out of tempo at whim, or whenever an easy moment strikes. I can’t remember much more than that unfortunately, but I do know that Andrew played extremely well at the eisteddfod, gaining two first places on Friday for Aria and Radioactive. He looked so proud and the reports from the adjudicator will be good triangulation in terms of evidence of expressive playing. It was interesting talking to Lyn, as she said that she had been ‘forcing’ Andrew to follow my lead, otherwise there wasn’t much point in learning ‘from me’ if he was always going to do his own thing. Apparently she said that he often says, ‘It sounds better like this’ or similar and avoids partial practising. You wouldn’t know it, as he played really well and his arrangement of Radioactive is so interesting. Mimia said that he really stands out and ‘the sound!’ I also received a very thoughtful email from Matthew and some lovely photos. They mentioned to me that they and Andrew felt that ‘the sparkle’ was missing when he played the Mozart with the metronome, and I replied that it was a good observation, and that the metronome is only there as a tool to help organise the pulse. Music often is flexible and bars are never completely uniform in time, but the problem was that Andrew’s were too distinctly different and that review is necessary.

- There is good evidence of triangulation here: Two first places for Aria and Radioactive, and ‘the sound!’
- The ongoing challenge will be balancing ‘perfection’ achieved through partial practising and a sense of spontaneity.
- Lyn said that Andrew often says, ‘but it sounds better like this’. Is he trying to avoid working hard, or is his creative independence being stifled?
Lesson 36: Saturday, 9 August 2014

This was an interesting lesson in terms of partial practising to ‘find where the beats are’. Andrew has all the expressiveness of the piece in place and he knows it well, but there is a lack of consistency in the faster passages due to some slight technical anomalies, especially with trills and cadential points. He also tends to speed up during the slower sections. There is an interesting use of add-a-beat technique with gestural freedom in the direction of travel, which seems to help Andrew fit the notes around the beats and not the other way around. I hope this will be of use, as he is playing this piece on Thursday at the Brisbane Eisteddfod, adjudicated by Diane Selmon.

- Expressive gesture and partial practice techniques seem to improve overall coordination and facility in the Mozart Sonata K570.

Lesson 37: 12 August 2014

This was a really good lesson – we started with the first variation of the Goldberg Variations, as Andrew was asking me whether it would be best to play Bach or the Mozart Sonata K570 for the Queensland Piano Competition in about six weeks’ time. I’m not really sure what the answer is, but anyway, we started work with the first variation. Andrew had already learnt most of the first page, so I first helped him with fingering towards the bottom of page one. I asked him to write the fingering in as I tried it out on the second piano; a good example of collaboration, yet I was still leading. He asked me why I was re-fingering some parts, and I explained that due to its ability to induce sweeping ascending and descending gestures, and avoiding an open, ‘outstretched’ hand, the new fingering would likely help with the expressive tonal shape. We then moved to playing the right hand with Andrew’s new metronome, going slowly and surely trying out the new fingering. When I started playing along with Andrew, he started making mistakes, so I stopped and let him do it alone. With the opening bars of the left hand, there is good material regarding the analogy of a bouncing ball that moves up and down without stopping, as he was playing the staccato with a stiff elbow and a too quick upward movement, resulting in an unnatural and pokey sound. I think in the end we went through most of the first page with both hands, and he genuinely seemed excited by the new challenge ahead. I actually asked him a couple of times, and he said so. We moved to a bit of the Lady Gaga Fugue and discussed the articulation relating to a part where he and Neil should
be doing the same thing. It was interesting here how I instructed Andrew to move up slowly for soft staccato and down quickly for loud tenuto. Despite a bit of difficulty, he had success, but it was good how notes were removed and we focused solely on the expressive gestural movements. Lastly I asked him to play the Mozart, as he has a competition on Thursday. He had done extremely well with applying a uniform MM = 135 throughout the piece; it has really settled. However, that’s just the problem, as it has lost a lot of its sparkle. It sounded a bit melodically flat, especially in the opening, so I asked him to play with increased forward flow, ‘perform’ it a little more and use expressive gesture to roll through the notes. Andrew played through to the end of the exposition and it really came to life again, and he was able to keep to the overall time. Unfortunately, that part of the lesson wasn’t captured on film, as the memory card ran out.

- A good example here of getting Andrew actively involved with the ‘re-fingering’ process so that he might grow to understand that ‘not all fingerings are created equal’; the main goal being the avoidance of an outstretched hand, ultimately helping with expressive tonal shape through supple gestural sweep in both directions.
- Analogy: ‘Bouncing ball’ in the left hand of Goldberg Variation 1 (‘He was playing the staccato with a stiff elbow and a too quick upward movement, resulting in an unnatural and pokey sound’).

- Good examples here of helping Andrew to correlate how his movements were creating the sound and then working within that concept, first in the Bach and then in Lady Gaga Fugue, e.g. moving up slowly for soft staccato and down quickly for loud tenuto, first focusing on gestural information without notes.
- It seems important to emphasise performance mentality, not just practising, i.e. take some risks.

Lesson 38: 16 August 2014

This lesson definitely had a different feel to it. Andrew had success at the Brisbane Eisteddfod on Thursday, winning first place for the nine years solo with the Mozart Sonata. I took a recording on my iPhone for future reference, but he did play very well, and Diane Selmon commented on his ‘refined playing’. While the playing could have had a more triple lilt in the opening and a little more expressive intensity in the development, he really nailed all passagework, and I don’t think I can recall any
breakdowns or even a minor slip or two; very polished. Last night Andrew had a duet rehearsal with Neil and that was very interesting in terms of getting both boys to mimic each other’s movements in order to mimic each other’s articulation. Today in the lesson, Andrew played the first *Goldberg variation* – he has put the first page hands together. I instructed him to start practising rather than continuing to play it through, as that has already been achieved. This is exactly the point where he can make rapid progress if he is smart, and I went through the opening bars, and he decided how he would like to articulate the main idea. From there we ‘planned’ the expressive detail of the right hand, in terms of the growing intensity of the ascending scales, but mostly we worked on the left hand, as it does have quite a lot more detail in terms of articulation, different types of staccato and the triple metre to consider. We were working on the hands together, but it became obvious that it was too much for him to manage, so I directed him to ‘practise’ the hands separately, listening to himself, observing the fingering and ‘teaching himself’. Andrew asked me, ‘How do you teach yourself?’ I answered, ‘Well, you go through each bar, checking for accuracy of notes and rhythm, consistency of fingering and articulation, and experimenting and then implementing expressive tonal shape’. At one point I asked Andrew to try to be expressive even when learning notes, but that backfired, as he then started ‘performing’ instead of practising, looking down at his hands. He also asked me whether it was better to play two pieces in the Queensland Piano Competition, or to play the Mozart again. I told him not to be concerned, as he had already picked up three first prizes, and that he should play the Mozart to the best of his ability, while moving on with these newer pieces. I said, ‘perform what you can already play, and practise what you are learning … focus on enjoying the process of learning, not always the end product’. In terms of the expressive gestural vocabulary, the way that I instructed him to play the left hand of the opening bars was very much based on principles of movement that provide the desired acoustical effects first, before explaining why they might be suitable within the context at hand, i.e. start with the bigger picture before moving to detail.

- **Good triangulation here:** First prize for Mozart at the Brisbane Eisteddfod (see iPhone recording).
- **Within Lady Gaga Fugue**, there is a great example of how mimicking another player’s gestural movements aids in realising the same articulatory detail.
- This lesson represents good material where I encourage Andrew to take greater creative ownership by making expressive decisions together.
- There is a good example of using expressive gesture to achieve different types of staccato to highlight the triple metre within the left hand of the Goldberg Variation 1.
- A good discussion where the idea of ‘teaching yourself’ is unpacked with Andrew.
- Process- versus product-oriented goals: ‘focus on enjoying the process of learning, not always on the end product’.
- Good example of using expressive gesture to achieve expressive effect rather verbal direction.

Lesson 39: Tuesday, 19 August 2014

This stands out as being a great lesson, for many different reasons, but the most important one being that it was great fun, for Andrew, Lyn and me. There was a really positive atmosphere and it was mainly because I felt so excited that Andrew had made incredible progress, as he had practised efficiently as directed. They came in five minutes early because Luie and Charles were sick, and one of the first things Andrew said to me was, ‘I’ve got the first page of Variation 1 hands together!’ Internally, I just rolled my eyes because that usually means that he can play it but with many mistakes, incorrect fingerings and minimal tonal control. However, I was really surprised when he played it because it was obvious that he knew exactly what he was doing. All aspects of the previous lesson had been implemented and as I told him, he had even gone further and put in his own special touches – I referred to them as ‘Andrewisms’. When I pointed out that I loved his idea of the slight increase in intensity of F# F#, and G G in the bass, he seemed really chuffed, saying that he hadn’t noticed doing so. I then extrapolated on this idea and suggested that he increase the tone for the next A7 bar too – a great example of collaboration in music making. I also showed Andrew how he could point out the seventh (G) of the A7 chord by using add-a-note technique to ‘find’ the gestural trajectory, thereby enhancing the expressive tonal shape. I reminded him that it was important not to tilt the wrist upwards in an attempt to be expressive, but rather move the elbow out and loosen the muscles in and around the wrist so that the sound ‘rings’. This was followed by ‘resolving’ the F# in the next bar, both harmonically and in terms of tonal
shape, before moving to blend all other notes into a single downward musical and physical gesture for the descending D Major scale. As I pointed out to Andrew (and then practised with him), stretching inhibits rolling through the notes. I suggested that we must practise and think of the small distances and direction of travel between notes, so that momentum can be maintained and the melodic line realised. I mentioned that trying to preserve an open hand shape is very taxing, and that it was like the clowns that you put the ping-pong balls in at the Ekka, saying, ‘It’s neither efficient nor comfortable to keep your mouth open all of the time’. The lesson took a slight detour at that point as we were talking about the Piano Duo Festival Opening concert at St Peters on Saturday night, and how it would be a good opportunity to hear the complete *Planets* Suite on two pianos. Andrew was very excited, so I showed him how to play the ostinato of *Mars*. I asked him to write two bars of the rhythm, which lead to a discussion and exploration of Major = 1 3 5, minor = 1 flat3 5, diminished = 1 flat3 flat5, augmented = 1 3 #5, as well as chord qualities of dominant seventh, diminished seventh, minor seventh, Major seventh half diminished seventh and Major/minor seventh. We then went back to the *Goldberg Variation 1*. As I sat at the second piano and played, I asked Andrew to notate the fingering for page two, directing him to practise the hands separately for the next lesson on Saturday. He also showed some interest in Chopin after I looked at his practice test tube as he had traced Chopin’s portrait. I took a photo on my iPad, as it was really good. We talked a bit about a possible Chopin piece for him, and the *Nocturne* Op. 55 No. 1 seemed to be a mutual favourite, but I think his hand span is too small.

- Within the *Goldberg Variation 1*, there is evidence of expressive gestural implementation when compared to the previous lesson, *plus* his own ideas too (‘Andrewisms’).
- In terms of harmonic tension and resolution, there is a good example of acknowledging Andrew’s ideas and then extrapolating on that (label the chords and explain why).
- Photo of practice test tube/Chopin picture.
- Good example of encouraging ownership through notating the fingering for himself.
- Good excerpt that explains why stretching inhibits fluidity and momentum (clown analogy).
- Good example of combining gestural choreography and expressive tonal shape with principles of alignment, ‘tonal ring’ and muscular freedom.
- Keyboard harmony activities that grew out of Planets concert (chord qualities for triads and sevenths).

Lesson 40: Tuesday, 26 August 2014

Wow! Forty lessons so far this year – it’s unbelievable how time flies. We didn’t catch up last Saturday, and I cancelled the rehearsals on Friday night. It was just that I had had a very bad day, it was cold, it was rainy and I needed to stay indoors and have some time to myself. However, within a week, Andrew had finished Variation 1 of the Goldberg Variations to quite a high standard of accuracy and expressive detail. It seems as though his practice is becoming increasingly efficient. There is a really good section of the lesson where I helped him ‘develop’ the expressive intent towards the end of the piece where it was sounding rather ‘notey’. Once again, the analogy of the ball bouncing through the bar to ‘emphasise’ the third beat and uphold the triplet really made sense to him. We reworked the left hand here, as it didn’t really sound like the melody that it could be, despite it being ‘just broken chords’. It was really interesting to point out that as one hand had crescendo, the other had decrescendo and vice versa. I hadn’t really thought about it before, as I like to just see what happens and let the music direct what the expressive detail might be. Andrew is becoming increasingly responsible for writing directions in the score, and I encourage him to do so. I also asked him to review the left hand for the end of page one as it is starting to either sound ‘accurate and pokey’, or ‘expressive and floppy’ with missing notes. We also worked on the first two pages of the Mozart Sonata K330. There are moments in there where I am reminding of his raw talent for expressing the innocence of the music in a childlike way. I directed him to work on just a couple of spots, one of which was the arpeggiated right hand in the opening bars. We reworked the fingering, ‘drilled’ it for total confidence, so that the sound could be the focus, and a ‘feathering’ effect towards the top notes might be achieved. I also ‘reminded’ Andrew how Adrian might approach the same passage in terms of partial practice, just to remind him that others are doing the same and to continue to foster that sense of community and healthy competition. At the end of the lesson, I introduced Andrew to Schumann’s From Foreign Lands and People, as he had asked me for it the week before. According to Matthew, Andrew played the right-hand melody by ear during the week.
The span of the Chopin *Nocturne* is just too big, but I did suggest that Andrew could learn the easy *Waltz in A Minor* or the *Minute Waltz*, though that is probably on the larger side too. The *Planets* concert was terrific and I introduced Andrew to some of the musicians afterwards.

- Is his partial practice efficient due to strong parental supervision? (In retrospect – yes).
- Bouncing ball analogy.
- Good evidence of Andrew’s growing responsibility as he writes ideas into the score.
- Within the Mozart’s broken chords, ‘feathering’ analogy was useful, but only after becoming more spatially aware of the intervallic relationships between the notes, i.e. familiarity with the ‘nuts and bolts’ assists with the uptake of expressive gesture. In Andrew’s case, the process is relatively quick.
- It seems important to attend concerts and listen to a lot of music.

*Lesson 41: 2 September 2014*

What a difference a week makes. We had a really good lesson with a more casual feel, compared to the last couple of times we’ve met. I’m writing this the day after the City Hall concert where Andrew and Neil played *Lady Gaga Fugue*. They did a fantastic job and it was an inspiring day, but I imagine it will take a couple of days to recover. I organised to meet Andrew and Neil and their families last Friday night for our last rehearsal, and from the beginning I could see that Andrew was very tired and appeared disengaged. I said that the piece was a bit of a mess and that Andrew was behind the beat most of the time and playing slowly, Neil was playing too loudly and quite unenthused as well. Anyway, about 10 minutes into the rehearsal, I remembered that Lyn had sent me an email asking if they could skip the Saturday lesson, explaining that, ‘they had all had a full-on week’. When I rang the night after and spoke to Matthew, he said that Andrew had a science project and it was proving quite stressful to finish. I must have been quite abrupt at first, but then patted Andrew on the shoulder and said, ‘it’s ok, I can see you are a bit sleepy and you’ve had a big week’, meaning ‘you are only trying your best under the circumstances’. Lyn became quite hostile and said, ‘he had tennis this morning and had to get up at 6am – he’s tired and just needs sleep!’ I felt really unappreciated thereafter, not to mention completely castrated and unable to do my job in helping them to improve what was
really quite a mess. After returning from outside, I heard the piece again and then just moved on to *Pirates*, as there was little point in saying anything more. I was really annoyed and couldn’t look at Lyn again for the rest of the lesson. After coming home and talking to Shaeed and thinking about it further, I called Lyn on Saturday night, only to find out that she was in bed ‘sick’. I sent Lyn a text saying that, as she had suggested in her email the day before, if they wanted to arrive half way through so Andrew doesn’t become too tired, it was fine. I had rung Jane to double-check, as there was talk of meeting at 2 pm for another rehearsal beforehand. Matthew rang me straight back, explained the big week that the family had had. I saw Lyn the next day and she said, ‘Sorry about Friday night’, and I said, ‘It’s OK’. The boys did much better in the rehearsal and the masterclass, and I rang Lyn the next day and apologised if I came across abrupt, and I certainly didn’t want a misunderstanding spoil the rapport that we had built over the last two years. She said, ‘No, I’m the one who should be sorry’, and I can imagine that she felt a bit guilty for over-reacting, especially when I work very hard to provide extra opportunities for Andrew. I explained to Lyn, that when I teach Neil, I tend to use quite a different teaching style to what I use with Andrew – it tends to be much more direct, assertive and domineering, to the point of being controlling, as if I don’t, Neil tends not to listen or take what I say seriously. I then usually follow these directions with something like, ‘but you are still doing well – around 85%’, which I know Neil responds very well to. However, when I am coaching both Neil and Andrew together, it may be that more of that style filters through than the one that I use with Andrew. She really got it and I could tell that she felt relieved. While it might be a bit late now, to cut a long story short, this scenario really demonstrates the need for open communication and transparency on everyone’s part, as misunderstandings or conflicts inevitably arise, and how we deal with them so that everyone is left feeling valued is what really counts. Anyway, the lesson last night was a bit of a regrouping session. It started with me asking Andrew to play various Major and minor chords in root position, first inversion and second inversion, before moving on to augmented, diminished, sixth chords, seventh chords, third inversion, chords that have two names, e.g. C6 in third inversion and Emin7 in root position, 12-bar blues bass around sixth chords, and improvising the treble. We also talked about repertoire and Andrew expressed interest in the next couple of *Goldberg Variations*. He asked me to sight-read a few of them, which I did, and I also played *Nocturne* by Grieg, which he liked. He also seemed to
like *Boogie Rock* and *Willie Wagglestick’s Walkabout*, so I will look into those options. He may have another lesson this Saturday, depending on whether he does enough practice to earn the ‘reward’ of an extra lesson, as Lyn put it.

- City Hall was a major highlight!
- It seems important to remember that we are all human beings, just trying to do our best and open communication and the ability to be a ‘pedagogical chameleon’ is key – ‘misunderstandings and conflicts inevitably arise, and how we deal with them so that everyone is left feeling valued is what really counts’.
- Keyboard harmony: Triads/inversions/improvisation.
- It seems that choosing repertoire ‘with’ the student is best here.

**Lesson 42: 6 September 2014**

What a successful week we have all had, with the Australian Piano Duo Festival closing on Saturday night. I was so proud of Neil, Adrian, Andrew and Khoa, and I really glad that they all had the opportunity to play at City Hall. It certainly will be a day to remember. Matthew came with Andrew today – I’m touched that they gave me a lovely birthday bear and some other treats. We worked mainly on the fingering for the outside sections of Schumann’s *From Foreign Lands and People*, as Andrew had learnt all of the notes and had even added pedal. This lesson really reminded me that fingering needs to be tried out, with options presented to the student. Experimentation should ensue, and then solutions written in. At Andrew’s request, we also worked on the left hand of page one, two thirds of the way down. Andrew mentioned that he was having trouble as the fingering ‘doesn’t fit me’, and we found a solution, and I gave him direction as to how to increase the speed at which he could assimilate it, all the while still retaining a sense of forward drive, confidence and expressive tonal shape. I think that he intends to play *Aria* and *Variation 1* at the competition next week. This Tuesday he won’t be attending, as there is a string ensemble concert at school. This was a great lesson, with a real congenial vibe and plenty of positivity. I will need to get a copy of Andrew’s practice journal that he has started this week; apparently Matthew said that he just loves it and it is certainly not a chore for him, so ‘why not?’

*Hi, Mark*
We can go to the extra Saturday lesson with you but we can’t go to the Tuesday lesson because we need to participate in a strings ensemble concert in my school.

At the moment, I haven’t got time to look on the Goldberg Variations, but can you study variations no.2, no.3, no.4, no.5, no.6, no.7 and no.8 for me please?

I have been doing my practice journal. So far, I’ve been doing my journal for a day now. I really enjoy writing down what I practised!

See you on Saturday!

Cheers,

Andrew

Hi Andrew!

Awesome news regarding the practice journal – I am very interested to see how that goes. I will copy the Goldberg Variations as you say.

See you tomorrow

Best Wishes

Mark

Dear, Mark

Thank you!!!!

You are awesome!!!!!

- Within Foreign Lands and People, there is a good segment that demonstrates experimentation and discussion of fingering, and how it might impact on gestural ease: ‘The fingering doesn’t fit me’.
- A good example here of processes that help to assimilate fingering whilst aiming for expressive shape, forward flow and overall confidence.
- There is evidence of burgeoning student reflection, via Andrew’s practice journal, ‘I really enjoy writing down what I practised!’
- Andrew’s comes with a clear idea of what he wants me to help him with, e.g. left-hand fingering, page one of Foreign Lands and People.
Matthew came again with Andrew today. It’s really nice to see him once a week too, as there is a different atmosphere, not better or worse, just different. Today I helped Andrew with his competition piece(s) – the Bach Aria and Variation 1. While I didn’t actually hear Aria, we did work on Variation 1. There appeared to be some stretching when executing the arpeggios, and a general lack of ‘smile’ in the playing. I didn’t really start ‘fixing’ anything; I said to Andrew that he would do well to ‘illustrate’ the piece to the listener by rolling playfully through the notes, and by being himself. I suggested that he inject his smiley personality into each and every note within both treble and bass, rather than being in a hurry to receive feedback on what went ‘wrong’ or whether or not the piece is ‘perfect’ yet. It seemed like, as Matthew suggested, that he needed a bit of inspiration, and I guess that’s a big part of what a lesson might be – inspiration to carry on in what is otherwise a bit of a lonely hard slog. The rest of the lesson we worked on expressive tone production/technique for the left-hand broken chords in the Schumann. As I have said previously, it’s very hard to separate the gestural component of expressive tone production with the gestural component of being able to physically play the notes – the two seem to be indissolubly linked, where one is really dependent on the other. Andrew came extremely well prepared for the lesson. He had implemented all fingering, and it certainly made for a very easy transition to the next ‘stage’ of learning the piece, that of implementing gestural choreography that might facilitate expressive tone. There was quite a lot of talk regarding turning the muscles ‘off’ for a free fall and then turning the muscles ‘on’ during the follow-through movement, giving the three notes of the broken chords a loud to soft effect. Of course, there was the need to take the notes ‘out’ of the movement so that it alone could be studied, before aiming to combine correct notes with the pre-rehearsed kinaesthetic sensation. Studying the movement that gives the acoustical effect first, then layering the notes ‘across’ that movement does seem to provide the mental scaffolding required to combine the two more easily. Andrew wants to do a duet of Mars for the upcoming Intermediate Concert!

- The learning triangle between Lyn, Andrew and me appears to have come to an end, as now Matthew attends the lessons, and it’s quite a different ‘vibe’.
- There appeared to be some stretching within the arpeggios of Goldberg Variation 1, causing a general lack of ‘smile’ in the playing; ‘just be yourself,
and inject his smiley personality into each and every note within the treble and bass, rather than being in a hurry to receive feedback on what went ‘wrong’ or whether or not the piece is ‘perfect’ yet.

- Matthew suggested that Andrew just need ‘a bit of inspiration’ (from me) and it got me thinking, what is the lesson anyway? While it can be emotionally exhausting to always be encouraging with the students, but within each lesson it may be pertinent to ask, ‘I wonder what it’s like to be you?’

- In this lesson, the indissoluble link between gesture, expressive tone production and even basic facility is really obvious within the left hand of the Schumann.

- There is a good example of taking the notes ‘out’ so that the gestural information could be learnt, prior to combining notes and kinaesthetic sensation together, i.e. studying the movement that might facilitate the acoustical effect first, then layering the notes ‘across’ that movement seems to provide the mental and physical scaffolding required to combine the two with greater ease.

- Using gestural choreography as a gateway to expressive tone seems a very natural process, and it really suits Andrew.

Lesson 44: 16 September 2014

I have realised a week too late that I didn’t write anything here. Anyway, I will do my best to recollect the lesson. Again Lyn didn’t attend, and she later sent me an email saying that she doesn’t feel well and isn’t coping with daily life quite so well at present, to the point that she isn’t able to help Andrew with his progress, and that ‘he has to grow up fast’. Nonetheless, Matthew came to the lesson, and is a great support. Andrew expressed interest in learning James Bond with Neil, so I gave him the music and we analysed the chords, their inversions and played some aural games involving chord quality, inversions and pitch. As this was his last lesson before the competition on Saturday, I heard him play Aria and Variation 1 from the Goldberg Variations.

The thing that really strikes me about Andrew’s playing is that it never seems quite the same on each reading, as it sounds as if he is creating the music fresh each time. As I reminded him, it’s a very special quality that he should never lose. He did, however, need some revision with aspects of the arpeggiated chords and fingering with the first variation, and I reminded Andrew to ‘talk to me’ and ‘tell me what the
piece is all about’. He received a HC at the competition, and though I wasn’t there, Mimia said that ‘he played that piece with his entire soul’ and, in her opinion, deserved second place, which Adrian was awarded. She described Andrew as ‘a treasure’. Her student Jeremy received first place.

- Good example of using the *James Bond* duet as an enjoyable analysis activity and aural games (chord quality, inversions and pitch).
- Performance analogy: ‘Talk to me … tell me what the piece is all about’.

Lesson 45: 7 October 2014

You are so sweet sending me flowers, Mark! It’s a beautiful bunch and brings Spring to our dining table. Thanks thinking of us … Really appreciated …

I feel sorry for Andrew, not being able to give him my support or company. He is getting pretty loose on everything at the moment, hopefully sooner he will realise he will have to pick them up. Leaving him alone like this sounds not fair but it’s a kind of test on us, and I hope I will get through it soonest.

Have a good break and take care,

With thanks

Lyn

I'm really pleased that you liked them Lyn, I hope that they cheered you up. Please say hello to Andrew for me!

I am missing you guys

Mark

Dear Mark

I’ve been practising the Mozart K330 and I worked out the whole piece with a few hiccups. I partial practised it and I marked all the hiccups in a pink sticky note so I can partial practise it. Mum is still sick but she is getting better, thanks for the flowers, they really cheered Mum up. I even drew a picture of it!

I’ve been looking forward to the lessons. I already miss you very much.

Dear Andrew
Thank you for letting me know what you’ve been up to and I can’t wait to help you with it further. You are a special boy and I’m sending a big cyber-hug to you and your Mum. See you next Tuesday!

Miss you!

Mark

As I write this I realise that I haven’t seen Andrew for quite some time, though we have been in touch via email over the school holiday break. Lyn is still unwell, with what I’m not sure. She sent me a rather sad email to say that she feels sorry for Andrew, as she is not able to offer him company or support at the moment. She also said that he has become quite ‘loose’ with his practice. I really wanted to go over there and see them, but I sent flowers – just returning the favour and kindness that Lyn had shown me earlier last year when I was sick. Both Andrew and Lyn sent me lovely emails thanking me for my support. Andrew’s email was particularly endearing as he mentioned that the flowers had cheered his Mum up so much that he drew a picture of them. Anyway, Matthew got back a few days ago and he was back at the lesson with Andrew tonight, the first day of Term 3. We spent the whole lesson on Mozart Sonata K330, with the exception of some chord work. The chord work involved revising Major, minor, diminished chords, seventh chords, sixth chords and some aural games. I also gave him a handout of all triads, sixth and seventh chords in C D E F G A B, and another sheet ‘How to read a chord chart’. I set him the C and D groups, but his Dad said that he had to memorise them all. I don’t think that Matthew realises how well Andrew is doing, as he was complaining that Andrew couldn’t recognise the chords and their inversions in the Mozart ‘instantly’, though he did get them after about 5–10 seconds! Andrew can play the entire first movement of the Mozart Sonata, and he has picked up the style quite well already. Apparently he has listened to the CD ‘a few times’ and that has clearly helped. He puts his heart into the playing, and I can see that he just loves to play the piano. He also loves it when I praise him for a job well done, though his Dad was quick to jump in and say that there are still so many mistakes, which I tried to dilute a little, especially as this was the first time I had heard the whole thing. Andrew asked me if he could play it for the end-of-year concert and I suggested that if we went through it together and he fulfilled the short-term goals that I set for him, I didn’t see it as being a problem. I suggested that there were about 50 things to ‘fix up’, so we got to work straight away. Big
‘little’ things like fingering, chord analysis, keyboard geography, correct notes and articulation needed review, but he has the overall concept of sound and expressive tonal shape already in place. One thing that I don’t think that we have covered before is the idea of ‘tonal smile’ where I placed a smiley face on the parts of the music where I wanted him to do a down/up gesture. There was another good analogy for inducing a sense of opening the sound up without rushing during the ascending broken chords – ‘I’m just a little butterfly’ – I also drew a butterfly in the score to help Andrew remember to take his time and let the music ‘fly’. I put some sticky arrows on the parts of the piece where I wanted Andrew to partial practise and I also introduced him to the idea of ‘randomised’ practice, where he might practise one highlighted area for five or 10 minutes before moving to a different section, and so on and so forth. This comes from an article that I was reading recently that suggested that this may be a much more effective method for deep learning to occur, rather than always starting the piece from the beginning and sorting things out ‘on the fly’. It’s likely that Andrew will only come once a week until the end of the year, so that they can ‘help Mum through this patch’.

- Keyboard harmony: Triads, sixth chords, seventh chords and aural games.
- Matthew’s expectations are too high in my opinion, i.e. Andrew can’t recognise the chords and inversions within the Mozart instantaneously; he takes a while to work them out.
- Andrew just loves to play: He puts his heart into it, and has a strong desire to please.
- ‘Tonal smile’ analogy for two-note slur and down/up gesture.
- Butterfly analogy for ‘opening’ the sound without the need to rush within Mozart’s ascending broken chords, page one.
- It really helps things to move along if specific goals and practice targets are set using sticky notes on the score and recording the lesson on the iPad.
- A good segment in this lesson where I ‘introduce’ Andrew to the idea of randomised partial practice.

Lesson 46: 14 October 2014

Andrew stayed for a double lesson tonight because Bryn was away sick with a headache, or maybe a lack of practice. Apparently Matthew brought Andrew to the Conservatorium early because he can’t really practise at home at the moment because
the sound of the piano is making his Mum feel sick. Anyway, the first thing that pops out of Andrew’s mouth is that Lyn is pregnant. I was really happy for them all, and very excited that they had shared their good news with me. Andrew and I spent the lesson on the Mozart Sonata K330. I can’t recall a lot of detail, but the indissoluble link between expressive gesture, sound and freedom of technical execution was very stark in the opening motif. It appeared that Andrew was gripping inside his wrist in an effort to be musically intense, and this seemed to result in a tight sound, inaccurate rhythm and a ‘frantic’ delivery. Actually, most of the exposition sounded exactly that, frantic. After some experimentation with body movement, expressive gesture and touch, we were able to make the necessary adjustments. Andrew had quite clearly implemented what I had asked and we were ready for another ‘round’ of detail and polish. Ideas of stretching the time slightly for a more vocalised effect came to bear, as did forward tilt of the trunk to enhance the crescendo when delivering repeated notes. We also started to explore the concept of chord voicing at the end of the piece, and extended this idea further when we moved on to Foreign Lands and People. The idea of letting go of the muscles in and around the wrist on impact while directing slightly more ‘energy’ towards the top note did seem to really help Andrew achieve more ‘ring’ in the sound, as did the idea of double rotary movement from B to high G in the treble. I used the analogy of a tennis swing with great effect here. As usual, all of this was interspersed with questions regarding the harmonic and formal structure of the Mozart, chord qualities, by-ear playing and musical history.

- There is a good example during the opening bars and the exposition of K330 where articulation and expressive sound are achieved through expressive gesture.
- Good example of discussion in the opening bars of K330 of the need to avoid ‘gripping inside the wrist’ in an effort to be musically intense. This seemed to result in a tight sound, inaccurate rhythm and a ‘frantic’ delivery.
- ‘Are we ready for another ‘round’ of detail and polish Andrew?’
- Within the Mozart, there is a good example of using time stretching to reflect the vocal nature of the writing (prosody/time to speak).
- During the repeated notes of the Mozart, there is a good example of using forward tilt of the trunk from the hips to enhance crescendo and a ‘connection’ to the notes.
- Within the Schumann, there is a good example of using double rotary movement to achieve greater ‘ring’ in the sound, whilst using the analogy of a tennis swing.
- Keyboard harmony and playing by ear.
- It seems that harmonic and formal analysis are key to ‘finding’ the expressive information, and being aware of such properties within the score is a skill that might best be forged early.

Lesson 47: 21 October 2014

No reflections written.

Lesson 48: 28 October 2014

Andrew came with Matthew again tonight. There is definitely a different feel to the lesson when he is present. I feel like I can be honest with Andrew about what he has done well and what he could do better. This was his last lesson before the concert on Sunday, so I asked him to play his whole program, but not before we did some chord games, both he and I taking turns. We worked on *Aria* in terms of improving his ability to project a dense sound as opposed to a watery sound. I used the watercolours/oil painting analogy that Jenni had suggested in the Young Beginner Piano masterclass on Saturday. Esther Lee, the adjudicator for the QPC this year, had suggested that Andrew should aim to hold the longer notes in the left hand for their entire duration. While this is not possible in some instances due to the small size of his hand, we did rework the two bars leading into the modulation to D Major, adjusting fingering and using double rotary gesture to facilitate greater ring and volume in the interval between B and high G. My former teacher Leah Horwitz used to say, ‘Feel the stretch’. Of course these days I tend to avoid terms such as ‘stretch’, as I don’t literally want to encourage physical discomfort. The amount of space that Andrew gives between *Aria* and Variation 1 is so mature, and when I told him so, he looked so immensely proud. He said that he particularly enjoys it when I give him a pat on the back for a job well done. The tempo of the Variation sits spot on and I can really hear that Andrew is not rushing and is taking the time to ‘tell the story’ behind every note and every harmonic change. It’s so satisfying to hear him play like that. The Schuman piece wasn’t as successful, as he needed to ‘hear’ and project the long melodic line. He was trying to be ‘musical’ with the broken chords, and implementing so much
rubato that it was interrupting the phrase structure and believability of his overall intent. As Andrew said, it does seem to help him a lot when I ‘conduct’ the expressive stretch, the balance between registers and the overall intensity of the harmony. My aim is that he will internalise this, implement it and in the future, draw from it. Lastly, the Mozart Sonata K330 – he has done some beautiful work with it. There were about five or six spots that I asked him to practise, how he should do this, and why he should do this. The sudden dynamic changes are working well, his commitment to delivering the music in an honest and involved way has improved, particularly the final bars of the development.

- Keyboard harmony activities.
- There is a good segment with Aria dealing with increasing the density of the sound: Using ‘watercolours versus oils’ analogy for a thicker texture.
- To enhance the vibrancy of the modulation to D Major within Aria, there is a good example of using double rotary gesture to facilitate crescendo and greater tonal ‘ring’,
- Andrew loves it when I praise him for a job well done.
- I probably shouldn’t have ‘reworked’ this at such a late stage before the performance, but I felt pressured from Matthew to do so, according to the adjudicator’s feedback in the Bach and what I heard in the Schumann (too much rubato was interrupting the phrase structure and the believability of his overall expressive intent).
- There is a good example of Andrew saying that he finds it useful when I ‘conduct’ him. It might be good to compare the Schumann before and after such processes.

Lesson 49: 8 November 2014

Andrew was due to come on Tuesday this week, but I wasn’t well so I asked if they could come on the Saturday. Since I have seen them, we had the Intermediate Concert in which Andrew played beautifully. However, I received an email from Lyn in which she suggested that Andrew may not be returning to the Young Con next year due to financial constraints with the new baby coming and that Andrew will need to complete Grade 5 violin in the next couple of years so that he can enter Brisbane State High, as they may have to move out of the catchment due to their apartment being too small. Of course I was very disappointed to hear that, but she did ask me if I would
teach Andrew at my home. My first reaction was that the Young Con has been such a
good environment for Andrew and he has come so far, and to take him out just
seemed like such a silly thing to do. While I could teach him at home, I just don’t feel
as though I could offer him the same type of lesson, as I don’t feel inspired when I
teach at home. Additionally, my contract states that I can’t teach a student for 12
months after they have left the Conservatorium. I decided to ring Lyn and discuss it
with her rather than talking through email. She had a cough and seemed so exhausted
even trying to keep up the conversation. I explained that I felt it would be best to keep
Andrew learning at the Conservatorium, as he really needs as little change as possible
with all of the upheaval at home. Especially so now that Lyn no longer helps him, as
she has neither the interest nor the desire to do so. Apparently she can’t stand the
noise of the piano and Matthew has been bringing Andrew to the Conservatorium to
practise. At the lesson today, Matthew said that Andrew seems to have neither the
focus nor the energy that he does when he practises at home. Matthew sent me an
extremely verbose email after I spoke to Lyn at length on the phone. Matthew and
Lyn are concerned that Andrew can’t keep up with the standard of the Young Con and
they are starting to think that the environment is too competitive and that Andrew is
losing some of the passion that he had two years ago. Apparently this came about
because Andrew said that he ‘came last’ in the concert, and didn’t want to stay for
photos. Matthew seems to think it’s because Andrew is comparing himself to others.
As I explained to Andrew, he may be starting to feel nervous performing in front of
other people, and that this is a biochemical reaction, not his fault, and certainly not
because he isn’t good at playing. It seems that his parents have not spoken to him
about this before, and that this was the first time he was hearing it. I spent quite a bit
of the lesson talking to Matthew and Andrew about the issues that have been raised in
the emails, but Matthew seemed more concerned about carrying on with the lesson
and not ‘wasting’ any time. They are clearly very smart people, and the level of
Matthew’s English and his ability to tease apart very minute issues regarding his son
and this situation is admirable, but it is almost to the point of being rather obsessive
with the tiniest of details. Matthew said that he has noticed that Andrew has become
very interested in violin in the last two weeks, and has improved greatly with very
little input from Lyn or Matthew, but what I think that he fails to realise is that
Andrew is a very sensitive boy with a great deal of maturity for his age, and he
desperately wants to please his parents, and that what they think and feel will be
reflected in his attitude, behaviour and overall outlook. Of course he has lost a little of that drive with his piano and it has been redirected to violin, because his mother is no longer interested or capable of giving him the encouragement that he craves. Matthew can be quite obstinate about completing work to the highest standard and will argue with Andrew so that he complies. Further, Andrew now feels that the family’s financial worries are his problem and that he must ‘get good’ at violin as quickly as possible so that he can go to Brisbane State High as his parents have planned. Having said all of this, apparently Lyn and Matthew have decided to trust Andrew to practise the piano and violin with minimal guidance next year and he has ‘agreed’, but I truly think that Andrew will go along with whatever his parents tell him to do. When we did finally get around to playing, Andrew showed me the first half of *Goldberg Variation 2*, and I helped him with a few fingerings as we had hardly any time left.

**A1.2 Jade (32 Lessons)**

*Lesson 1: 15 February 2014*

Jade seems to really have turned a corner over the holidays. She attended a summer school on scholarship as a member of her choir. According to her, there was a lot of part-singing, theory and reading music involved, and it couldn’t have come at a better time in terms of building her self-confidence, an area in need of development. We spent the lesson going through her new piece, *Spanish Donkey Driver*. We started to touch on the expressive gestural aspects of the left-hand ‘quasi guitar’, and these gestures really seemed to help her garner a triple feel without the need to fully explain the strong–weak–weak concept beforehand. As it turns out, all three of her exam pieces are in triple time. We read through the right hand and I emphasised the need to be sure of the notes and fingerings so that there was the freedom to explore the gestural choreography, and a sense of flexibility in the delivery. I explained that this improvisatory aspect of the piece would become more important in the coming weeks. I also stressed the need to be fully prepared for lessons so that we might have the opportunity for keyboard harmony and chord activities. Today we covered the primary and secondary chords in C Major. I asked her to concentrate on *Spanish Donkey Driver* and *Festival Rondo* for homework.

- Complementary activities in and out of the lesson may help to increase knowledge base and overall confidence.
- Guitar analogy.
- Using gesture to gain immediate access to desired sound and a triple lilt, rather than ‘intellectualising or emoting’.
- There is a real need here to be confident with notes and fingering so that there is cognitive space for expressive gestural detail can be implemented.
- Keyboard harmony.

Lesson 2: 22 February 2014

A really positive lesson, as many aspects of confidence, expression and musical imagination were cultivated and discussed. Jade had learnt the whole of Spanish Donkey Driver during the week, for which she earned considerable praise. She actually played it well, complete with melodic shape, good tonal balance between hands and appropriate pedal. We worked mainly on how to shape the left hand using expressive gesture in order to create a strong, weak, weak feel, and to induce a sense of forward flow and ‘connection’ i.e. embodied performance. Additionally, we further refined the phrase shape using gesture, which proved fruitful. Jade also played some scales, and they are promising, as her hand is so facile and open. Jade really is a natural piano player, and the fact that her confidence is improving means that this natural talent can hopefully be developed and brought forward to its fullest. We also started to study the right-hand rhythmic detail of Festival Rondo, and I reminded Jade that getting to know the notes, rhythm and fingering as thoroughly as possible would be crucial to developing a connection to the piece that is honest, real and confident. We also did a couple of sight-reading examples, in which foundations of perusal and stability of pulse were reviewed.

- A positive learning environment that promotes confidence, expression and musical imagination seems important.
- Acknowledge and praise completed tasks, learning autonomy and the ability to transfer known skills to new situation.
- Embodied playing: ‘Becoming’ the left-hand chords and using expressive gesture to illustrate the tonal shape and forward-flowing triple lilt to the listener, i.e. expressive gesture can facilitate functional and aesthetic aspects of the performance.
- Overall gestural choreography consists of smaller gestural fragments chained together.
- Confidence and a deeper connection to the piece may be developed through a thorough knowledge of notes, rhythm and fingering, gained through effective practice techniques.

Lesson 3: 1 March 2014

A good lesson overall, though it feels like Jade has withdrawn a little. However, *Festival Rondo* does present many more difficulties than *Spanish Donkey Driver*, and I may need to carefully guide her through the challenges without expecting too much just yet. I was really pleased to find that she had written what she wanted to cover during the lesson in her homework diary. That’s definitely a huge step for Jade, seemingly wanting to take greater ownership of her progress. We went through the left hand of page one, which was full of finger pedalling and overlapping of tones in order to achieve an instrumental texture. Detailed aspects of fingering, sound and texture were applied, and I reminded her that she need not ‘play’ through the left hand, rather taking time to study each bar in turn. I asked her to concentrate on the first page with hands separately in order to implement fingering, sound and rhythm. We started to touch on aspects of instrumental colour inherent within the writing, in keeping with the original orchestral version, which I had sent her a link to on YouTube. The right-hand rhythm had really improved, so in order to induce forward flow, we set to work on aspects of touch and expressive gesture towards the end of the first section. Aspects of directional movement and add-a-note technique were also covered in a quick and concise manner. This section of the lesson demonstrates how to build cadences with expressive intensity linked to movement of the arms and trunk, rather than using volume alone.

- Burgeoning learning autonomy and ownership are present: ‘She had written in her homework diary what she wanted to cover in the lesson’.
- Self-confidence can wax and wane; it’s not something that is ‘fixed’ from one week to the next and may need ongoing nurture.
- Realistic expectations: ‘What does my student need from me right now?’
- Important to reiterate that the need to partial practise is not a sign of weakness or lack of talent.
- Aspects of sound, fingering and texture are inextricably linked here, and these foundations are ideally set down during the early stages.
- Orchestral colour analogy (solo versus tutti).
- Self-directed learning via YouTube.
- Good knowledge of musical rudiments may afford an easier uptake of expressive gesture and nuance.
- Points of structural and harmonic significance can be ‘taught’ and rationalised, i.e. tonal shape can enhance forward drive, harmonic intensity and a sense of ‘arrival’, all linked to a majestic and regal ‘sound picture’ of ‘The Queen’.
- Musical intensity can be built into the music through movement of the arms and trunk.
- The spatial information contained within the expressive gestural shape can be learnt through ‘add-a-note technique’ in the direction of travel, one note at a time in a scaffolded manner.

Lesson 4: 15 March 2014

This wasn’t the most productive of lessons, as Jade had been on camp, and I hadn’t seen her the previous week due to sickness. Nonetheless, I was determined to make the lesson a positive experience by lowering my expectations in order to capitalise on her newly found confidence. We mainly worked on Festival Rondo with hands separately. We reviewed the left hand, where expressive gesture might soften the third beat of the bar, enhancing colour, forward flow and a majestic triple lilt. Jade is still not confident with the fingering of the right hand, particularly towards the end of page one, and this is hindering her ability to roll through the notes fluidly, stalling her ability to focus on expressive gesture, phrasing and overall sense of growing intensity. I asked her to ‘nail’ the fingering this week so that she could move through to the next learning phase as soon as possible. We revised some scales, and started to look at the notes of Elfin Dance. Here we worked through chaining two-note slurs in order to align elbow, forearm and finger, important to generating an expressive lilt and laying foundations for facility.

- Important to adjust expectations occasionally.
- ‘Forward and up’ gesture seems to help soften the third beat of the bar, enhancing shape, forward flow and a majestic triple lilt.
- A lack of practice appears to be hindering her ability to confidently ‘roll’ through the notes, stalling the uptake of gestural choreography and expressive tonal shape: ‘Nail the fingering so that you can move past the notes’.
Lesson 5: 22 March 2014

The lesson started well enough, and there was some great linking of chords with the actual notation for Grieg’s *Elfin Dance*. I suggested to Jade that she might like to think of the music as being the soundtrack to a fantasy story set in a Norwegian forest. I played a little section of *Puck* to show her some similarities between each piece. There was some excellent discussion regarding ‘borrowed’ chords, where their use results in greater harmonic complexity than a pop song, often containing the primary and secondary chords of the key plus one or two secondary chords. I demonstrated this concept with the chorus of *Let it Go*. This came about after doing the primary and secondary chords for G Major. We talked a little about the circle of fifths, and I used that information to link harmonic structure with expressive detail in *Festival Rondo*. Thereafter, I started to get a bit frustrated with Jade, as I was hearing the right hand of page one with the same fingering errors as previous weeks. I reminded her that confidence isn’t something that ‘appears’, and that she really needs to try harder, as her progress has stalled. In terms of tonal shaping, there was some good detail within the F Major section, though it was more of a review, as we have worked on this in recent lessons. I can feel her slipping away again and I’m not having it. She asked me at the end of the lesson what scales she should do, and I explained to her that she had already taken an extra 10 minutes of my time and that if she expected to progress this year and cover all the material necessary for an exam, she should certainly come better prepared in the future. Not the greatest lesson unfortunately.

- How does the notation ‘fit’ into the overarching harmony? It seems being aware of the harmonic language is very important in the early stages of learning a piece, as such harmonic and structural information are directly linked to the music’s expressive potential.

- Imagery: ‘Soundtrack to a fantasy story in the Norwegian forest’.

- Linking new knowledge with prior knowledge: ‘From the known to the unknown’.

"Digest” the fingering, moving it from mind to body: Chain the notes together in pairs, checking for alignment of elbow, forearm and finger at each stage. These small fragments can then be linked together, creating the overarching gestural choreography of each phrase.

How does the notation ‘fit’ into the overarching harmony? It seems being aware of the harmonic language is very important in the early stages of learning a piece, as such harmonic and structural information are directly linked to the music’s expressive potential.
- She seems to forget what to do quite easily – is working memory important?
- Confidence is built into the piece one note at time.
- Using keyboard harmony activities, e.g. circle of fifths/primary and secondary chords of the key, to help the student link harmonic and structure detail with expressive tone colour.
- State expectations clearly.

Lesson 6: 5 April 2014

This was a much better lesson, productive on the whole, and ending with everyone feeling positive about moving in the right direction. I have to remember that while Jade’s main issue is confidence, she is often tired, which leads to a lacklustre attitude where her pieces end up sounding quite uninspired and uninvolved. Despite my best efforts, there isn’t much I can really do about this. That said, I’ve recently noticed that she has come to lessons with some good questions regarding rhythm and fingering. It seems that she may want to take a more proactive role in her learning. We looked briefly at the last section of Festival Rondo, and that seemed to give her the answers that she was looking for. Much of the lesson was spent doing scaffolded drills to build confidence, depth of touch, tonal shape and freedom of execution, while avoiding twisting or stretching. Jade has a very good grasp of expressive gesture and movement generally, but she does tend to over-extend her right-hand second finger if using fingers 4 and 5. As mentioned earlier, her main challenges lie with self-confidence, and the speed at which she can learn the notes. We spent time reviewing the left hand, mainly revising fingering and geography, while starting to build the tonal shape that will be important to a sense of ‘fantasy’ and forward drive in weeks to come. I taught her E-flat Major scale and gave her a new piece, Czerny’s Study in C Major, Op. 299, No. 2. Julia had mentioned at a previous lesson when we were talking about Tristan learning a small piece by Czerny. I think she will probably end up using this as one of her extra pieces for the Grade 4 exam. I gave Jade a six-CD set of all aural tests from Preliminary to Grade 8.

- Is a lack of self-confidence related to an inability to be expressive?
- Burgeoning proactiveness: She is starting to ask more questions, so I must remember to provide a safe environment where she feels those questions can be asked without fear of reproach.
- It’s important to start to implement expressive concepts early on when learning a new piece, e.g. using scaffolded drills to build confidence, depth of touch, tonal shape and freedom of execution, while avoiding twisting or stretching.

Lesson 7: 8 April 2014

Jade came prepared for her lesson, and stayed for about 90 minutes, three times the length of her usual lesson. Once again, my aim was to focus on ‘confidence’ and how the lesson environment, tasks undertaken during the lesson and preparation during practice, can all enhance this aspect of performance and playing. There was also some talk regarding visualisation, which it seemed we had not touched on before. We started with Eflin Dance; Jade had really improved and seemed to know the notes much better than last Saturday. It would be interesting to note how this lesson provided review of concepts covered last Saturday and in previous lessons. In terms of rotation and directional practice, this is an ideal example really. Similarly, the left-hand melodic idea in B Major would provide similar material. There was some good work regarding where to position of the fingers on the keys so as to avoid twisting, maximising ease of rotation and therefore successful execution at a faster tempo. Festival Rondo showed improvement, perhaps due to work that we had completed in previous lessons allowing another ‘layer’ of gesture, sound and majesty to be added. I made a CD of the orchestral version for Jade to take home and we listened to a bit of it towards the end of the lesson, a nice way to tie things together. There were really good examples of using different speeds of descent to create crescendo within the left hand, and the importance of highlighting cadences for a more satisfying aural experience. I asked Jade to finish putting the piece together, but also to continue to practise the hands separately, with greater sensitivity to aspects that we had covered in the lesson. The last part of the lesson was spent starting the left hand of the Czerny, and learning A, E, B-flat and E-flat Chromatic Scales. Very good lesson!

- Prepared and unprepared lessons cost the same, but the overall value of the latter is often compromised.
- Confidence can be enhanced through the lesson environment, the way that tasks are undertaken during the lesson, and thorough preparation between lessons.
- Some concepts can take considerable review, where information is ‘reworked’ and ‘rediscovered’ over time, especially those that involve motor complexity, which may be inhibited by a lack of confidence.

- Good intellect and sound musicianship don’t always equate to good motor skills or the organisational ability and self-efficacy necessary to build them systematically. Time taken to develop these skills in the early years may pay dividends down the track.

- Visualisation: How does my body look and how do I sound when I play this passage?

- The ‘add-a-note technique’ at performance tempo can help to build a student’s awareness of the three-dimensional aspects of directional movement, and enhance their ability to ‘digest’ the up/down/and lateral gestural combinations necessary for the realisation of expressive tonal shape.

- Listening to the original orchestral recording, rather than just talking about it

- Fingering: Where do the fingers sit on the keys so as to avoid twisting while maximising ease of rotation, both essential for successful execution at performance tempo?

- Highlighting the harmonic structure via cadential intensity may induce a more satisfying aural experience for those listening.

- Octaves can be shaped with crescendo and decrescendo through the realisation of different speeds of vertical descent into the keys.

- Where each hand has contrasting gestural choreography, separate hands practice should be maintained for as long as necessary.

Lesson 8: 26 April 2014

We worked on Elfin Dance, and while it is starting to sound more fluent, the last few bars are rhythmically unstable. There is no expressive tonal shape there, perhaps due to a lack of confidence and poor practice. However, Jade had done really well with Spanish Donkey Driver and Festival Rondo. There was some interesting work regarding ‘riding’ the piano like a donkey, using the breath to ‘take the reins’, giving the piece dramatic impetus and colour. I asked Jade to play the piece from memory, and she did a great job. We moved on to Festival Rondo – I can’t remember the exact terminology that was used, but I do know that this lesson contains valuable language and useful explanation regarding cognitive loading, automatic motor movements and
spar mental space that can be used for interpretation, expressive nuance and overall communication of musical character. We talked about ‘opening’ the piece up with expressive gesture and freedom of the forearms and wrists. There was a very interesting part where Jade played while standing. I encouraged Jade to use the very tips of the fingers rather than keeping the hand flat and parallel with the floor, as this seemed to impede her ability to roll through the notes and therefore shape the sound. It was one of those lessons where a lot of groundwork had been covered in previous weeks, concepts had been understood, implemented and revised over time, and a lot of home practice allowed everything to come together successfully – a good lesson.

- Reasoning with the student: ‘If the rudiments of notes, rhythm and fingering are confident, expressive gesture starts to become more automatic, and there is spare cognitive space to align these with expressive nuance, sound and communication of the musical character’.
- Does a lack of confidence equate to a lack of expressive spirit?
- Analogy: ‘riding the piano/riding the donkey’, ‘take the reins’, ‘opening up the piece like a present’.
- Using the breath in combination with gesture for preparatory movement.
- ‘Showing’ the listener the changing harmonic colour.
- Pressing on the wrists appears to impede her ability to stay on the tips of the fingers and thumb, necessary for the effective rotary movement that will help her roll through the notes – ‘Can you stand and play?’
- A lot of groundwork has to be covered initially: ‘Don’t try to fix everything at once’.

Lesson 9: 3 May 2014

Things are really coming together for Jade. In terms of the volume of work completed, there is excellent improvement when compared to last year. Within Elfin Dance, Jade really seems to understand the inherent triple lilt, and her playing actually sounds like elves dancing. During the lesson, I reminded her how far she had come with these three pieces, and that while tomorrow’s performance workshop may have a few bumpy moments, she is more than ready to give the pieces a go. That way, she can see what goes well, and ascertain where further improvements can be made. As usual, we chose just one or two spots to ‘fix’. She had really improved the overall fluidity of Elfin Dance, and the ending was much better than last week. We worked
mainly on rhythmic/coordination drills for the B minor bars where the melodic line shifts to the left hand. There is good material here in terms of tonal balance, tonal shape, scaffolding, directional practice and how to coordinate something that is uncoordinated, all one step at a time. As I reminded Jade, it’s feeling confident and comfortable with the mechanics of playing that allows the expressive features of the piece to ‘open up’ and rise to the surface. I suggested that rotary movements of the forearm were perhaps even more fundamental to the higher stages of piano playing than finger movements themselves. This seemed to come as quite a surprise to Jade’s nana, Joanne, who has been coming to lessons these past two weeks. Apparently Joanne has been helping with the practice at home lately, which certainly has contributed to Jade’s success. Jade also played Festival Rondo, and while there is still work to do in terms of further refining the sound and pace of some areas, it has settled and is confident overall. I asked Jade to practise ‘just one more thing’ between now and tomorrow’s performance, namely the end of the da capo, where she was having some trouble articulating the notes due to a stagnant movement of the wrist. In terms of anti-clockwise elliptical movement, the clock analogy is relatively new, and may prove to be very useful.

- Feeling comfortable and confident with the mechanics of playing seems to allow her to ‘open up’ and allow her expressive abilities to ‘rise to the surface’.
- Jade does seem to become overwhelmed with the volume of material, and needs constant support to push ahead and do ‘just one more thing’.
- Clock analogy for anti-clockwise elliptical movement.
- ‘Add-a-note technique’ can be useful for ‘digesting’ the expressive gestural shape and directional movement that is unique to each hand, all the while consolidating coordination, tonal shape and textural definition, one step at a time.
- Perhaps more so than finger technique, the rotary movement that a student learns as part of their expressive gestural vocabulary may be critical to the successful execution of advanced repertoire, and therefore requires implementation in the early years.
- Family support seems to expedite the learning process.
- Using expressive gesture in combination with active fingers seems to give Jade the momentum needed to clearly articulate the notes.
Lesson 10: 10 May 2014

Considering Jade had really been trying hard of late, we were able to reflect on how far she had come and ponder the challenges ahead. That said, we spent a good deal of time in the lesson working through scales, arpeggios and the associated body position for these. We also started working on a piece by Einaudi. In general, Jade did seem genuinely excited and pleased with herself. Indeed, I don’t recall seeing her this confident before; she was quite relaxed and chatty, and seemed comfortable with moving forward.

- Not every lesson is so reflective, but it’s important to make time for these moments.
- Basic technical exercises, e.g. scales and arpeggios, may be seen as opportunities to prime the entire body, increasing the student’s awareness of the whole playing ‘apparatus’.

Lesson 11: 15 May 2014

Jade came to the house for an extra lesson today, and it proved profitable. We reviewed Major scales, and I asked Jade to prepare two octaves with hands together. She was having difficulty with the standard notation, so I asked her to use the pictorial notation, finding it much more manageable. She also studied harmonic minors and ‘discovered’ the three different minors – natural, harmonic and melodic. I told Jade and Julia the story about ‘Harry Harmonic’ and ‘Melody Melodic’, which they found funny. I referred to the circle of fifths and discussed relative Majors and minors. The last five minutes of the lesson was spent reworking some of the fingerings in Diverine. I suggested a certain fingerling that would help the left-hand figure sit in the middle of the hand, thereby enabling the hand to rotate freely around a pivot point. We also found that, when translated, the title means ‘to become’ or ‘becoming’. Jade and I discussed what this might mean and how that might affect the way the piece is played. The translation also provided an audio file of how to say the Italian, which will prove very useful for me.

- Pictorial notation of scales is advantageous here.
- Linking scale information with narrative and visual imagery.
- Studying scales and arpeggios within a wider harmonic context, as part of a ‘keyboard harmony toolkit’.
- Choice of fingering enhances rotary freedom, expressive gesture, and therefore tonal quality.

Lesson 12: 17 May 2014

Most of this lesson was spent on working on notes for scales, chromatics and scales in contrary motion. I demonstrated the required touch and tempo for the exam, and Jade seemed rather worried. We also talked briefly about plans for the upcoming weeks. I asked Jade to learn the right hand of Czerny’s Study in C, and I demonstrated a little of Diverine. The next step over the next two weeks will be to review her recital pieces, moving them to the next level.

- Not every lesson will deal directly with expressive playing, as basic mechanics, keyboard harmony, goal setting and ‘live’ demonstration are important ‘lessons’ in and of themselves.

Lesson 13: 24 May 2014

After reviewing a lot of scales and arpeggios, we reviewed the pieces that Jade will play in the upcoming recital. We worked on Spanish Donkey Driver, rediscovering rubato, tone colour and trying for some ‘special moments’. When using flexibility in the time and an increase in volume for the repeated notes, I suggested an analogy of the donkey ‘sighing’. Considering Festival Rondo is such a dignified piece, Jade was not making a lot of sound, so I suggested that she use double rotation to generate a bolder tone for the opening D minor chord, right hand. Jade was having issues with keeping her fingers braced at the distal joint and seems inclined to let the knuckles collapse, particularly with the right-hand fingers 4 and 5. Unfortunately, this resulted in the tone sounding rather thin. Consequently, there is good material here in terms of helping the student ‘brace’ one part of the playing apparatus while being flexible with another. I made the comment that in such a regal piece, if ‘Queen Jade’ didn’t take charge and demonstrate her ‘authority’, she would likely be assassinated and her rivals would take the throne – she seemed to enjoy the drama!

- ‘Rediscovery’ rather than repetition: sometimes it takes a few cycles for new concepts to sink in, especially in the early years.
- Analogy: donkey ‘sighing’ for metrical flexibility and tonal shape of repeated notes/‘special moments’.
- Drama analogy: ‘Queen Jade’ to increase tone and show ‘authority’.
Double rotary movement appears to generate increased volume without the need for pressing or undue harshness.

Lesson 14: 28 May 2014

Jade came to the house today, as her brother Tristan was at school camp. The concert is next weekend so that is our present focus. The lesson was spent refining technical, gestural and expressive aspects of *Elfin Dance*, which appears to have regressed in terms of security of notes and overall confidence. More and more, I’m realising that Jade doesn’t have strong self-confidence, and if she thinks that a few sections aren’t very good, she tends to feel defeated and ‘gives up’ altogether. Consequently, the playing sounds very flat and uninspired even though she is doing a lot better than she thinks she is. It was a really good lesson in terms of combining aspects of coordination, note accuracy, rhythm and clarity of fingering work with expressive gesture and sound – all are just six different sides of the same cube, each combining to produce a musical ‘gift’ box. I’m increasingly aware of how ‘taking a breath’ before beginning each musical gesture facilitates motor fluency and expressive tonal shape, i.e. physical gesture facilitates musical gesture, both in terms of execution and expressive nuance. Jade seems unwilling to take a risk, and appears to get ‘stuck’ in the notes, perhaps because of a confidence issue. Of course she is becoming more aware that without taking a physical ‘leap’, the execution of the notes may not necessarily be assured, further hindering her confidence. Towards the end of the lesson, I reiterated that we are a team and that she could not let me down. She laughed when I said that I wouldn’t accept her becoming a ‘shrinking violet’. Perhaps she may feel less alone if I am there, cheering her on and wanting her to take a risk. As I said, even if everything doesn’t go exactly to plan, the piece is still fluent and a perfect performance isn’t realistic anyway. I tried to reason with her that at the end of the day, there will always be other opportunities, and it is pointless to self-sabotage.

- ‘All or nothing’ thinking and a fixed mindset seem to diminish her confidence and inhibit her physically, causing the playing to sound flat, uninspired and inexpressive.

- Practice strategies that focus on small sections are ideal, especially when combining confidence, coordination, note accuracy, rhythm, finger clarity, expressive gesture and sound.
- ‘Taking a breath’ with preparatory movement before beginning each musical gesture seems to generate momentum, facilitating motor fluency and expressive tonal shape, i.e. physical gesture facilitates musical gesture, both in terms of execution and expressive nuance.

- Confidence issues seem to hinder her ability to involve the arms more in the playing, and she appears to get ‘stuck’ in the notes due to not being able to take risks.

- As the repertoire becomes more difficult, it becomes even more important to be confident enough to ‘leap’ into it, using gesture to facilitate not only the music’s expressive aspects, but also its physical execution; the two seem to be indissolubly linked and interdependent.

- We are a team and unwitting sabotage isn’t an option. Take a risk and don’t worry – ‘I will catch you’.

- Not every piece needs completion to a ‘perfect performance standard’, as valuable learning can still occur and be reapplied to later experiences.

Lesson 15: 31 May 2014

I gave Jade an ‘Award of Excellence’ medal for her great progress so far this year. She has pushed herself beyond what I thought she was capable of in a relatively short space of time. While the next challenge is to refine the pieces to a very high level; this of course has a lot to do with individual confidence and commitment to energising the pieces, both during practice, but also at lessons and in performance. I’m not really sure that she realises *Elfin Dance* is a virtuoso piece, and must be approached with that mindset. It’s fast, spirited and quite extroverted, though compact and deceptively difficult. I hadn’t really noticed before, but Jade does seem to have a few challenges ‘invigorating’ her motor system. Not that she is clumsy, but her reaction time is on the slower side. With beautiful arms and a velvet touch, she is good playing slow, expressive pieces, but finds the faster pieces tricky, especially with coordination between the hands. Nonetheless, there is promise there. When scaffolding the trickier bars, especially those that contain rotary movement, Jade can execute them successfully at performance tempo, but those windows of speed, fluency and confidence are fairly small at the moment. Hopefully with time, patience and a lot of partial practising, she will have more progress to look forward to.
- Her medal recognises and validates the efforts made to date, strengthens the learning partnership and indirectly states expectations for achievement.
- Playing expressively seems to depend a great deal on confidence and commitment to ‘energising’ the pieces during practice, during lessons and in performance.
- Reaction speed and ‘invigorating the motor system’ appears to be an area in need of development. It seems important to give pieces that interest the student, highlight their strengths, and quietly develop their weaknesses.

Lesson 16: 7 June 2014

This was Jade’s last lesson before her performance at the recital the following day. I am always reluctant to alter anything so soon before a performance, as I feel that it’s just too late to be fixing anything, and may inhibit confidence. Motor skills need time to be processed, though general directions about interpretation might be ok if they can be reasonably easily achieved. The main thing with Jade is getting her to toughen up and play with conviction, as she tends to withdraw into her shell and play everything very timidly, despite how much progress she might have made over previous weeks. I got quite annoyed with her and suggested that she not sabotage herself. Joanne said that, ‘she is quite good at that’. She started with Eflin Dance, then played Festival Rondo and Spanish Donkey Driver. While she played well, the problem was that she played all her pieces with the same languid touch and approach. It seems that Jade is using too much gesture and arm movement and not enough fingers, and this is causing her to over-rotate, disrupting the rhythm and clarity of the notation. However, she performed in the concert yesterday with remarkable poise and conviction, and while not perfect, she was able to communicate the style of each piece clearly and seemed connected physically and mentally to what she was doing. I explained to her the previous day that she couldn’t play the piano with her brain, as it’s just a ‘soggy lump of goo’ that would likely sit stationary on the piano stool. To produce a convincing performance, full of life and colour, one must convey such characteristics through the arms, fingers and body, as these are the only physical properties of the person that make contact with the keys, and no amount of intellect can replace such physical dependency.

- Last-minute instruction is not really of use, especially if it involves the motoric aspects of playing.
- How much of her confidence issues relate to social anxiety?
- A balance between expressive gesture and finger articulation needs refinement here.
- ‘Brains don’t play the piano – bodies do!’
- *To produce a convincing performance, full of life and colour, one must put such characteristics into one’s movement at the piano, through the arms, fingers and body, as these are the only physical properties of the person that contact the keys, and no amount of intellect can replace such physical dependency.*

*Lesson 17: 19 July 2014*

I could sense a different attitude from Jade today, where there seemed to be an air of seriousness and ‘getting on with the job’ that wasn’t there before. During the holidays Jade had learnt Alkan’s *La Vision*, and she played through the entire score. While still shaky, there was definitely a sense of ownership there, and I could tell that she really likes the piece. I thought that it would suit her and it seems like a wise decision to substitute this piece for *Elfin Dance*. The main focus of the lesson was really to start ‘practising’ the piece, as she had finished the ‘learning’ stage. I reminded her that the choices she made in the next couple of weeks would either ensure further improvement, or stagnation and ‘last-minute’ stress. I asked Jade which bars she felt most unsure of, so we focused on these. It happened to be those few bars where the rhythm is syncopated, so I worked with her and the metronome to get these bars feeling more comfortable rhythmically. We found fingering that would facilitate this, and then layered the expressive gestural detail over the top. All the while I was asking Jade why this fingering might be a good choice and why an alternative might not be as effective, so that was good to see that she is starting to understand that fingering influences gestural ease, which in turn might facilitate expressive nuance. There were a few clef errors and missing accidentals, but overall she had done a good job to get the piece playable independently. Jade seemed pleased with herself and her growing autonomy. I asked Jade to focus on implementing the rhythmic detail, fingering, gesture and sound in each bar in a systematic way using lots of repetition, so that the piece improves quickly, hands separately for the most part.

- *She* likes the piece, *she* is in charge of her progress, and *she* can do it.
- A good example in the syncopated section of La Vision of reviewing rhythm, fingering and expressive gestural detail simultaneously, as she had already prepared the notes.

- Within La Vision, there is a good example of exploring fingering options in order to facilitate a particular gesture/expressive effect. Through questioning, Jade seems to be developing greater understanding of the causal link between fingering, gesture and expressive tonal shape.

- It seems important to set specific goals, using the lesson to work through how to meet them.

Lesson 18: 24 July 2014

It was a short lesson at home today, as Jade’s brother had a rugby commitment to attend. With La Vision, we followed up on what was covered in the previous lesson. I referred to the piece being a ‘sound picture’ where the pianist creates ‘a vision in sound’ for the listener. We worked on the tonal properties of the left-hand bass and chords, and I asked Jade to ‘illustrate’ the rests by using wide ellipses that visually prepare the following bar. I asked her not to ‘stop’ before getting there and I remember using the analogy of walking. Also of interest here is the idea of ‘texturising’ the piece into melody (most), bass (middle) and chords (least). I asked Jade to make the chords sound ‘velvety’ and asked her to feel the upholstery of my chair. We analysed the chords so that in future lessons, I can draw her attention to the underlying harmonic structure, for both expressive sensibility and for playing from memory. I asked Jade to write in some fingering for the treble, and we discussed and experimented with different options. My aim was to help her understand why some options might be more suitable than others, in terms of the underlying gesture and tonal shape. We finished the lesson with a few scales, which were clearly in need of review. I asked Jade to take responsibility for that which we had covered in previous lessons, so that we might have time for additional coaching dealing with aspects of her exam preparation that are yet been covered.

- ‘Sound picture’ analogy: The pianist creates a ‘vision in sound’ for the listener.
- ‘Keep walking’ analogy and ‘illustrating the rests’ using elliptical movements in the left hand.
- ‘Texturising’ the sound using ‘velvety’ chords (Jade felt the velvet chair).
- For greater understanding and projection of the inherent harmonic interest, it seems useful to analyse chords and harmonic structures ‘as we go’, i.e. harmonic tension and repose points to expressive tension and repose.
- Writing in the fingering for the student may save valuable lesson time, but is asking them to do it for themselves a simple way to encourage greater learning autonomy?
- A good example here of discussion and experimentation that aligns fingering decisions with the intended expressive gesture and sound.

Lesson 19: 26 July 2014

Despite there being no playing of repertoire, this was still a great lesson. Perhaps I’m feeling more positive, as Jade seems to be taking a more active role in her progress. We spent the whole 30-minute lesson on arpeggios and contrary motion, trying to pull them up to the next level, both in terms of notational confidence and control of sound. Through reflection, I have realised that scales and arpeggios are probably more important than I have given them credit. While they are challenging to teach and play well, they really do provide a foundation for an embodied way of playing. Support of the feet and core, position of the trunk and head, upper arm poise, forearm and elbow pronation, flexibility of the wrist and curvature of the fingers are all important to the development of effective balance at the instrument, and therefore a good basic sound.

- With Jade, scales and arpeggios are proving to be an effective gateway to a more embodied style of playing, particularly when studied with a four-octave compass.

Lesson 20: 9 August 2014

Awful lesson! Jade was at the school fete last week, missed her lesson to be there, got sick and hadn’t made any progress at all. She couldn’t even play her Major scales with hands separately. She said that she had been practising arpeggios, which weren’t a great deal better. Jade really makes things difficult for herself, and her confidence suffers. She just seems to switch off and not prioritise her practice. La Vision hadn’t improved, but at least it hadn’t regressed altogether. Sections that we spent time on in the previous lesson hadn’t been reviewed, and the piece sounds as if it is still in the note-learning stage; I was quite exasperated. Anyway, we set the metronome and I guided her through the first line with hands separately, ‘practising not playing’ each
hand, reviewing fingering, sound and rhythm, followed by hands together of the same. We also did line 2 and then I asked Jade to continue with the same idea, line by line until improvement became evident. As I had said to Wendy today, coming to the lesson unprepared without having reviewed what was covered previously was really just a waste of money; money that her mother had to work hard for so as to provide Jade with this opportunity.

- Interestingly, Jade seems to follow a pattern of three ‘good’ weeks and then a couple of slack ones, where home practice is either lacklustre or absent, causing her progress to stall and her confidence to dwindle. It seems that expressive gesture is not easily assimilated when note learning is the main focus.
- Good example of reviewing fingering, sound and rhythm in *La Vision*.

*Lesson 21: 16 August 2014*

Another awful lesson unfortunately. Jade came with Julia, and she too seemed particularly disappointed with Jade’s lack of energy and commitment. Apparently Jade has been practising, and she seems to have improved with A and E Major scales, but not much else unfortunately. She doesn’t seem to have a great capacity to confidently retain information, and we spent the whole lesson relearning the harmonic and melodic minors. *La Vision* wasn’t much better either, though the first two lines that were covered last lesson had improved. Maybe I’m just aiming too high and my expectations are too great here? I’m starting to question whether an exam was such a good idea, but I did think that Jade would rise to the challenge, as was suggested in her interview. I’m feeling concerned that she doesn’t seem to have the time and resilience to cope with the amount of work required.

- Jade seems to get ‘tired’ quite easily and it could be that playing expressively really needs an energetic and committed approach above all else.
- The first two lines of *La Vision* have shown improvement and it would be good to use these as comparatives with the previous lesson(s).
- Perhaps Jade doesn’t have the time and resilience to cope with the amount of work that the Fourth Grade exam entails?
Lesson 22: 23 August 2014

A very good lesson today – hooray! We had an extended lesson because Noah was away, which meant that we made some good progress. Jade seemed to come with a focus, a list of questions, and a ‘can do’ attitude. The whole lesson was spent reviewing scales and other technical work, but it centred on several ‘steps’ that I asked Jade to write out in her practice diary. Similar to Finn and other students this week, I think that they may not be natural organisers and need something explicit to follow; otherwise, they become weighed down, misdirected and apathetic. In a nutshell, I asked her to write down a step-by-step plan to get the newer scales up to speed, while still concentrating on body awareness, accuracy and sound. We also made a plan for La Vision. I asked Jade how line 1 was; how line 2 was; how line 3 was, etc. I suggested that she keep a practice log and get one line at a time ‘perfect’ in terms of accuracy, fluency, comfort and total confidence, and to be like ‘a dog with a bone’, i.e. doing each line until it’s ‘done’. I explained that as there are only nine lines in the entire piece, the entire project is manageable, if, she starts with just one thing, then two things, then three, etc. However, ‘if you don’t do anything, you won’t get anywhere’. I suggested that she doesn’t ‘need’ another lesson from me until she has completed all work from today, and whether it takes 10 minutes or 10 hours, that’s really up to her.

- Jade’s energy and attitude seem to be on the way up again. She came to the lesson with a renewed focus and a ‘can do’ attitude.
- Jade requires greater coaching with organisation and goal setting, and asking her to write her own systematic procedural notes and keeping a practice log will hopefully help her to maintain focus, lest she becomes paralysed into inaction.
- Can tenacity or ‘grit’ be taught?
- Good evidence of encouraging her to build a mindset that sees the glass as ‘half full’ and to just ‘keep pushing forwards’.

Lesson 23: 30 August 2014

This lesson was productive, and again it centred on Jade’s technical work and overall goal setting. She is clearly moving in the right direction, as her scales certainly sound a lot better and she is becoming much more confident with the notes. This means that
we can focus greater attention on body awareness, sound and concepts dealing with uniformity of touch, forearm pronation and thumb position, all of which correlate with principles of expressive gesture found in her pieces. We started the lesson with good conversation regarding Jade’s many recent accomplishments as a published writer, singer and ‘all-rounder’ which was good, as it reminded me of the importance of teaching the ‘whole’ child, though I was slightly concerned that she may have less time to practise. That said, she is moving forwards and that’s the main thing at this point. We worked on aural tests and she was particularly strong here. That led into the scales, chromatics, contrary motion and arpeggios, which were all covered before it was time to say goodbye for another week. Jade wrote her own directions for practice in her notebook and I encouraged her to keep a journal of her own progress that she can then reflect on later in the year.

- Helping Jade to set and achieve weekly goals is important, as it means that notation (in this case technical work) is imbued with confidence, and makes cognitive resources available for other aspects of playing.
- It seems important that I continue to see Jade as a person and not just a project.
- While it takes time, asking Jade to write out her own goals for the week will hopefully prove a worthwhile exercise long term.

Lesson 24: 13 September 2014

This was a really good lesson. We’re on the downhill run to the end of the year, and it feels as if Jade’s progress is gathering momentum. We started the lesson looking at the Czerny Study. She had learnt all of the notes and I helped her review a few fingerings from the middle towards the end. As I said to her, ‘excellent – now that you have learnt the notes, get on with partial practising and you will finish the piece quite quickly.’ I asked her to partial practise the final two bars, putting on the metronome and ‘adding’ more notes and chords as her confidence grew. The work covered here and later in the lesson in terms of ‘scales and arpeggios from the hat’ and segments of La Vision seem to fit the ‘randomised’ partial practice strategies that I read about this morning; see article transcript below. It’s something that I do frequently, but of course it’s good to be reminded that other people are thinking along the same lines, and that there is research that supports such an approach. It seems that feeling confident with the material due to specific practice techniques is a huge part of feeling comfortable to be expressive. Further, not feeling cognitively ‘weighed down’ by the notes seems to
be a very important factor in being able to deliver the piece in a holistic, gestural capacity. Before the lesson came to a close, I heard Jade play *La Vision*. She knows the notes better now, and there is a lot of good playing there, full of, in Julia’s words, ‘cloud-like’ lilt to the bar. Following the randomised practice idea, we chose one or two areas to ‘fix’ this week, enhancing confidence, comfort, expressive touch, expressive sound and expressive gesture in the process.

- What practice techniques bolster confidence and the freedom to be expressive?
- Being open to ‘new’ concepts such as ‘randomised’ partial practice is important, and social media is certainly a useful way to connect with such ideas.
- Randomised partial practice: In *La Vision*, ‘we chose one of two areas to ‘fix’ this week, following the randomised practice idea, enhancing confidence, comfort, expressive touch, expressive sound and expressive gesture in the process’.
- A good example of ‘reconstructing’ the final bars of the Czerny, literally using the metronome and adding more material in a sequential manner, building confidence a step at a time.
- ‘It seems that feeling confident with the material due to specific practice techniques is a huge part of feeling comfortable to be expressive. Further, not being cognitively ‘weighed down’ by the notes seems to be a very important factor in being able to deliver the piece in a holistic, gestural capacity’.

*Lesson 25: 20 September 2014*

This lesson was so awful that I can’t even bring myself to write about it.

*NA*

*Lesson 26: 8 October 2014*

I had a spare half hour, so I asked Julia to bring Jade over to the house for the first of two lessons this week. It was a positive lesson – we worked through arpeggios and contrary motion in detail. It really struck me how useful arpeggios are for coaching general principles of ‘technique’ not often associated with technique. For example, strong solid feet, a forward pelvic tilt, preparatory ‘momentum building’ movement of the arms and ‘energising’ the arpeggios by the student are all applicable to Jade, who does tend to sit quite statically if not prompted. These factors did seem to help Jade
build a sense of connection to the notes and a life-like quality to the sound, which Julia quickly identified. We also covered contrary motion scales; Jade has all but three of them at tempo with a pleasing degree of confidence overall. I used the mop to reinforce the forward tilt from the hips during the outer extremes in contrary motion scales, necessary for alignment of elbows and hands, pronation of the forearms and uniformity of the touch.

- Arpeggios with a four-octave compass appear to be an excellent way to prepare Jade for playing with the entire body simultaneously. ‘It really struck me how useful arpeggios are for coaching general principles of ‘technique’ not often associated with technique. For example, strong solid feet, a forward pelvic tilt, preparatory ‘momentum building’ movement of the arms and ‘energising’ the arpeggios by the student are all applicable to Jade, who does tend to sit quite statically if not prompted’.
- It’s pleasing to hear positive feedback from Julia here.
- Good example of using the mop prop for teaching the pelvic tilt, necessary for alignment of elbows and hands, pronation of the forearms and uniformity of the touch in contrary motion scales.

Lesson 27: 9 October 2014

Jade came for her second lesson this week, as her brother Tristan is away. We spent most of the lesson covering the remaining technical work not covered in the previous lesson, namely staccato scales, chromatics, Major and harmonic minor scales and melodic minor scales. While there has certainly been a great deal of improvement generally, Jade still has quite a way to go in terms of increasing the tempo, memorising fingering and generally aiming to improve her confidence. It does seem as though she is getting the idea that you have to ‘hustle’, like you might on a basketball team. In other words, ‘you can’t expect to win the game if you’re not giving it everything you’ve got. You have to get in there, and get your hands dirty, be tenacious and be prepared to make a few mistakes’. This pep talk seemed to make a difference to the sound, and the way she involved her whole body in the playing. Along with Jade, I’ve been saying to a few students this week that scales and arpeggios are really just mini pieces, and that they require the same amount of energy and attention. They really are opportunities to further develop tone and touch, and an overall connection between the instrument and oneself. Towards the end of the lesson,
I asked Jade to play a bit of *La Vision*, and while accurate, with pleasing texture and pedal, there was the same sense of ‘metronomic’ non-commitment demonstrated earlier in the lesson. As before, I asked Jade to ‘hustle’, reasoning that while the piece is soft and ‘relaxing’, the musician’s job is to work hard at generating an expressive and beautiful ‘vision’ that the listener might enjoy. She certainly got the idea, especially after I asked her to play the chords as one sweeping gesture with a sense of space before proceeding to the next bar. I was excited to hear her say, ‘So it’s just like the stretching in *Donkey Driver*’. As I reflect on the lesson, I realise that while one can have the best pedagogical ideas and continue to encourage the student to play expressively, the student ultimately needs to be energised and excited by ‘storytelling in the spotlight’, and some people may find this easier than others. Of course, I refer here to expressive ‘performance’, but that is not to say that students aren’t feeling a sense of ‘self-expression’ through their playing anyway, and that the piano serves as an important creative outlet for them, it just depends on which perspective is taken.

- ‘Hustle’ analogy: ‘Give it all you’ve got!’
- There seems to be a fear of failure that holds Jade back from ‘giving it all she’s got’ (metronomic non-commitment).
- While she finds them a bit ‘boring’, scales and arpeggios still present good opportunities to further develop tone, touch and an embodied connection to the instrument, i.e. ‘technique’.
- What’s in it for the listener?
- ‘As I reflect on the lesson, I realise that while one can have the best pedagogical ideas and continue to encourage the student to play expressively, the student ultimately needs to be energised and excited by ‘storytelling in the spotlight’, and some people may find this easier than others’.
- No doubt the lessons are still of benefit, and encouraging Jade to play expressively may encourage her to be a bit more ‘self-expressive’ and help her further develop as a person.
- While her playing might not always match what I perceive to be ‘expressive’, it may be that Jade already feels a sense of self-expression, with the piano serving as an important creative outlet during her adolescent years.
Lesson 28: 16 October 2014

Tristan came back from school camp sick, so Jade made her way over to the house for an extra lesson. We actually didn’t do a lot of playing, if any, but used the time to further discuss her general knowledge for the exam. We covered the three list pieces in detail, mainly linking the titles of the pieces, the keys, form, modulations and historical framework with the expressive characteristics that we have already studied through the year. It was interesting because Jade said that she and Julia had been talking in the car on the way over and were thinking it was probably time to review the general knowledge requirements, as she wasn’t feeling too confident in this area.

- Even though chord names and harmonic analysis aren’t ‘required’ in the early grades, maybe it ought to be, as it seems an important part in developing the player’s ability to project (through tension and release) the inherent expressiveness of the harmonic structure.

Lesson 29: 23 October 2014

Both Jade and Tristan have been sick, so I wasn’t sure how Jade’s practice would be. However, she seemed in good spirits and was playing well overall. I asked her to play La Vision and she really is doing quite a good job. A few slight hesitations here and there, but she has clearly done her homework and the piece sounds quite beautiful. Jade has a lovely basic sound, but needs to be reminded to partial practise those tricky spots where the ‘neurons aren’t firing as quick as they could be’ with a confident, almost “perfectionistic” attitude’. We did some work on voicing of the bass in the final bars using double rotation, reviewed the balance between bass and the ‘pristine’ chords, and reviewed use of the sustain pedal, though it isn’t a real priority for this examination level. I also heard her play Festival Rondo, but it seemed too fast and rather ‘frantic’. As mentioned, Jade has a lovely touch and a good awareness of the interplay between expressive gesture and tonal nuance, but her fingers sometimes lack the clarity to complement that. However, there is a really good section in the lesson where she ‘gets it’ and the rhythmic sparkle, finger clarity and tonal shape all come together. It’s there, and we need more of it. Jade is playing La Vision at tomorrow’s masterclass, and I feel confident that she will do well.
- Jade has a lovely basic sound, but drawing her ‘out of her shell’ will be the main focus in time to come, as will building her resilience against fear of failure.
- There is a good example with the final bars of *La Vision*, where double rotary movement is used to enhance the expressive tonal shape of the left hand.
- Jade has quite a good working knowledge of the interplay between expressive gesture and tonal nuance, but sometimes she lacks finger clarity.

Lesson 30: 25 October 2014

Jade came for a lesson before she was due to play in the Young Beginner Piano masterclass with Jenni Flemming, so we focused on her technical work. She did seem to be going quite well overall, apart from the need to review the melodic minors for total confidence under pressure, the need to tilt the trunk forwards from the hips in order to avoid inaudible and/or non-uniform black notes in contrary motion, and the need to play louder while remembering to laterally adjust the upper body when executing arpeggios. We also covered aural tests and sight-reading, and while they were both satisfactory, I reminded Jade that as she matures and moves up to the Intermediate program with ‘the big kids’, the need for efficient practice becomes paramount, as this will us to cover additional areas such as these in more regularly. I heard the Czerny *Study*, and again, where the music needs to be its loudest and most confident, she struggles to find the correct notes and the intensity of the piece quickly evaporates. There seemed to be a common thread with Jade and a few of the other students in the masterclass: ‘To really convey the increasingly intense harmonic language and the widening of registers with conviction, confidence and expressive intensity, we really need to be able to just ‘go for it’. The question is: How do we then garner such confidence in order to be able to just ‘let go’. The answer: To continue to partial practise those tricky spots with an expressive and confident attitude until the notation, geographical negotiations and expressive gestural choreography are programmed as part of the emotional, intellectual and motor memory, and can be delivered automatically while under performance stress, in a physically free and mentally unstrained manner’. Jenni made use of many analogies in the class, but the one that stands out particularly is the idea of density of sound as colour, much like the contrast between watercolour and oils, which I was able to use with Wendy the following day.
Text from Julia late yesterday evening:

*Hi Mark, Thank you for all that you have done for Jade. The two experiences this weekend have been such good learning for her. Just checking whether you wanted to see Jade again before her exam? She has a school function on Thursday evening but she is available any other afternoon if you would like? Thanks again, Julia.*

Jade’s audition for the Intermediate program went well, and along with Angela, I used the opportunity to offer her some feedback regarding the need to increase her practice time and lesson length, so that she would have more time to ‘nut it out’, and not be in a rush to finish tasks. I suggested that true confidence is something that grows in its own time, and one must be cognisant of the way that one’s self learns, and if that means taking your time to feel physically and mentally comfortable with the material at hand, then so be it.

- Where the music needs to be its loudest, most exciting and most confident, she struggles to find the correct notes, and the expressive intensity quickly evaporates – Why?

- How do we garner the confidence in order to able to ‘let go’? ‘To continue to partial practise those tricky spots with an expressive and confident attitude until the notation, geographical negotiations and expressive gestural choreography are programmed as part of the emotional, intellectual and motor memory, and can be delivered automatically while under performance stress, in a physically free and mentally unrestrained manner’.

- Maybe it’s best to see her piano playing as a vehicle that continues to grow her self-confidence and self-expression it its own time, rather than see it as proof of her ‘deficits’ in these areas that need to be improved?

- Watercolours/oils: Sound as colour/density analogy.

- Perhaps gentle discussion with the student allows them the opportunity to increase their self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, and gives them cause to adjust their learning strategies and goals the best way they can.

*Lesson 31: 1 November 2014*

This was a good lesson, as we discussed how things might pan out in the future for Jade. It was interesting talking to Jade’s violin teacher, as she mentioned that she had similar challenges in invigorating Jade’s physicality, sustaining her interest, and
encouraging her to take more risks with her playing. She said that they have temporarily suspended violin examinations, as the mental space and commitment to practise is not there at present. Jade sight-read a couple of Christmas carols, and the first study from Czerny’s Opus 299. Apparently, the exam went really well. Jade said that she felt well prepared for the experience and that the examiner put her at ease, which of course I was pleased to hear. I will continue to think over what pieces to give her next, but in the meantime, I asked her to continue rehearsing for the concert next weekend, and to continue with the tasks that we covered today.

- Interesting triangulation with Jade’s violin teacher: Similar challenges with invigorating Jade’s physicality and encouraging her to take more risks with her playing.

Lesson 32: 8 November 2014

This was the last official lesson for Jade this year and the final for the data collection period. It is also the final lesson before her performance at the Young Beginner Piano End-of-Year Concert and her last before she moves to the Intermediate program. We actually didn’t do too much on the two pieces for tomorrow, and instead I guided her to sight-read the treble of Let it Go, Do You Want to Build a Snowman and also copied an arrangement of Imagine in G Major, as I think that that key will suit her voice. About five minutes before the end of the lesson, she played La Vision and Study in C, and I reminded Jade to make eye contact with the audience, to smile, and to be energetic, especially in the study. I demonstrated on the second piano how she could ‘put her nose over the notes’, so that her body weight and ‘soul’ unify with the piece. She does have a tendency to lean backwards and play with outstretched arms, distancing herself from the piece and losing musical intensity in the process. She rose to the challenge in the recital and, with a little bit of prompting from me in the front row, she smiled and played energetically with a good amount of confidence. Interestingly, a colleague who was sitting beside me at the concert said that whenever she sees Jade, even when not playing the piano, she feels very sleepy because of her physically ‘slow’ manner.

- ‘Put your back into it!’ i.e. Tilt forwards and unify yourself with the piano.
- The next phase of Jade’s learning will be more sing and play, and sight-reading.
A1.3 Finn (30 Lessons)

Lesson 1: 15 February 2014

A good lesson; with both Finn and Sarah leaving feeling very positive. While Finn had some difficulty with achieving a rounded hand shape, he is getting the idea of leading with the fifth finger rather than the thumb. I explained that a good hand position is essential to a good sound, and he seemed to make some very good analogies of his own. A lot of chord work was covered, both in terms of keyboard harmony activities, the Chopin Nocturne and also his new piece, All of Me, which will be a self-accompanied vocal solo. I mentioned that a good hand shape is not only helpful for a good sound but also is visually pleasing and well help him ‘sell lots more records’, which made him laugh. I asked him to start looking at the right hand of Jinker Ride so that he might have a balance between chords and playing single notes. I reiterated to Finn, ‘If you do nothing, you get nowhere – if you do something you get somewhere’.

- Finn said that he felt this was a positive lesson.
- Finn shows genuine interest in ‘finding his own way’. He likes to reflect on what I have said, and then paraphrase it in his own words.
- Keyboard harmony.
- He still has difficulty with a basic hand shape. Instead of ‘leading’ with the fifth finger, he tends to ‘grab’ with the thumb and consequently, he twists his wrist, accumulates inordinate tension in the forearm, and sounds ‘clumsy’.
- Finn needs to be constantly reminded that talent is overrated, and set tasks must be completed between lessons in order for skills to improve.

Lesson 2: 22 February 2014

As the student following Finn was away this week, this was quite a long lesson compared to usual, around 75 minutes. We started with primary and secondary chords in D Major. Two octave scales in both hands were covered in detail, where aspects of sound, clarity, distal joint strength and overall position of the body were emphasised. There was very good material in Nocturne in E-flat Major, where we began to explore an easing of the tempo at the ends of phrases. I showed Finn how combining a slight decrescendo with a forward movement of the wrist can create an aural and visual representation of expression, through which your own personal ‘feeling’ can be
conveyed. Finn was very responsive throughout, except at one point where he began to lose concentration. I asked him to do some jumping jacks. We also did an interesting aural game in G Major, playing some easy melodies by ear, which he absolutely loved. We also looked at the chords for *All of Me*, covering postural aspects that may help with the overall sound and visual look of the playing. At the beginning of the lesson, I asked him to reflect on how video recording the lesson and watching it back during the week might have helped him, and it was interesting to hear his ideas and reflections. Another aspect was the idea of developing a kinaesthetic image of oneself and one’s body when playing and how when practising, it is good to cultivate that kind of thinking.

- Keyboard harmony and scales are multi-functional: They assist with broader knowledge which can provide a springboard for discussion regarding the expressive potential of harmonic tension, and they act as vehicles to enhance body awareness, technique and sound production.
- Forward and up movement of the wrist at the ends of phrases facilitates decrescendo, providing an audiovisual ‘code’ that the listener will perceive as being ‘expressive’ and musically satisfying.
- Maintaining concentration is an issue here, so providing ‘alternative’ teaching moments is key, e.g. playing melodies by ear seemed to refresh his focus.
- Developing a kinaesthetic image of oneself: ‘Body mapping’.
- Finn says that video recording the lesson and watching it again helped him remember what to practise.

*Lesson 3: 8 March 2014*

The way that Finn understood the articulatory information within *Jinker Ride* through the use of the ‘hand-over-hand technique’ was ‘pure gold’. Accompanied by Finn’s usual paraphrasing of information, this was such an excellent example of student reflection in action. We also worked on A Major scale and primary/secondary chords and then related them back to the circle of fifths. This fits in very well with the chords of *All of Me* which Finn sang while I improvised an accompaniment over the chords. Following this, we worked a bit on Finn’s hand shape using the ‘ladybug’. It seemed more useful than the many verbal explanations that I have used in the past. This is definitely one of those lessons when I can see things coming together. Foundations have been laid over many years, and fundamentals have been prepared. Finn seems
able to cope more readily with the expressive detail that has’nt been possible due to physical and developmental maturity, rather than a lack of musicality. We mapped out a bit of a plan for a self-accompanied solo of All of Me and I asked him to continue to practise the Chopin Nocturne, which he said had been going well this week. I also asked him to continue learning the notes of Jinker Ride, preparing any questions that he wanted answered. I reminded Finn that pieces can often be seen to be in one of three stages: stage 1 being mapping out the notes of the piece; stage 2 being fluency with notes and fingering; and stage 3 being exploring the expressive gesticulations that might best assist with tonal shape, dynamics, musical character and expression.

- ‘Hand-over-hand technique’ was very useful for Finn to understand the direct correlation between speed of gestural ascent/descent, and the tone/articulatory quality of the resultant sound.
- Allow sufficient time and space for student to paraphrase ideas and instructions.
- Keyboard harmony/scales/sing and play.
- Use of props, e.g. ladybug hand shaper.
- Rather than being ‘unmusical’, the expressive potential of gesture may not be accessible for some students in their early years, perhaps due to the rate of their physical and developmental maturation.
- For whatever reason, some students need constant and ongoing coaching with goal setting, procedural learning, scaffolding of practice techniques and layering of musical detail.

Lesson 4: 15 March 2014

This was a painfully detailed lesson but really worth it, considering where Finn was at the end of last year. We’re starting to complete the required choreography with each phrase of Nocturne now, including double rotary movement, forward lift for phrase ends, and left-hand triple lilt. It is still very slow going, and I do worry that he might be too much for him. I did caution Finn to keep up his practice no matter what, especially in terms of revising notes and fingering and not committing the piece to ‘memory’ prematurely. He has come so far with the piece and knows it quite well, apart from the last page where inappropriate fingering and wrong notes are impeding any real progress. We did work a lot on the last couple of bars, where there is a need to switch the muscles off on one side of the hand (the thumb) while still feeling strong
and elastic on the other (fifth finger). This is a very hard concept for Finn to grasp, but I do think he is getting the idea, slowly but surely. With regard to the chromatic chords before the return of the main theme, we turned our attention to clarity of the pedal and remembering to ‘lead’ with the fifth finger so as to avoid twisting of the hand and wrist, which ultimately makes playing clumsy and uncomfortable. Finn tends to over-extend fingers 2, 3 and 4 when they are not in use, and this is causing substantial tension within his forearm. This forearm tension seems to disrupt his hand position and impedes his ability to play expressively, as he is unable to subtly manipulate his hands and arms to effect tonal nuance.

- Sometimes it’s more constructive to compare where a student was and how far they have come, than to make assumptions about where they should be: Is the glass half empty or half full?
- Expressive gestural choreography can be an entry point to reproducing the qualities of expressive tone production, e.g. a forward lift of the wrist on the final note of a phrase can help to produce a decrescendo, and double rotary movement helps to create a crescendo without the need for ‘pressing’ or ‘pushing’.
- Teaching an explicit gestural vocabulary is especially important here, as Finn, even after 4 years of lessons, still seems quite unaware of how the physical aspects of playing correlate with tone production.
- A gentle triple lilt within the left-hand quavers can be enhanced through double rotary movement.
- The gestural vocabulary is really an extension of basic technique, e.g. ‘Lead with the outside of the hand to prevent twisting and incoordination’.
- Over-extension of the fingers appears to over-activate the muscles in the forearms, causing rigidity and impeding gestural freedom.
- Some muscles need to ‘switch off’ while others need to ‘switch on’: The optimal balance between tension and release that is in constant flux needs ongoing coaching here.
- Confidence with the notation and fingering is essential in order to move towards expressive gestural implementation.
Lesson 5: 22 March 2014

Finn’s progress has stalled somewhat, perhaps due to school exams. I feel frustrated with his lack of time management skills, as he was able to find time to play on the iPad and time for study, but not for piano practice. The lesson started with Nocturne, and while it does show some slight improvement, the tone is unbalanced and the melodic line lacks shape when the hands are together. This may be due to Finn finding it challenging to coordinate the expressive gestural choreography for the right hand while keeping the left hand subdued and clear (his fingers overlap). I explained that while he is talented, the physical side of playing is something that needs discipline, and it is absolutely crucial that he practise faithfully in order to retain the colour, shape, clarity and articulatory detail present when the hands are played separately. He also inclined to play non-legato in both hands when using the sustain pedal. Nonetheless, while progress is achingly slow, it is still there I guess. Despite not having practised, he had retained the notes, fingering and gestural/articulatory detail for the first half-page of Jinker Ride, which was positive. I instructed him to finish learning the right hand for page one and also the left hand, as we need to keep moving with learning notes and not just stagnate which is historically what usually happens. I was determined not to let the lesson turn into a train wreck, so we moved on to the primary and secondary chords for E Major, referencing the circle of fifths, filling in the chord names and playing the scale in both hands. Finn is really quite good at this activity and I reminded him so. It was a good way to end what could have been a wasted lesson.

- Finn needs to be encouraged to see that practice might be best seen as the process of combining notation with the development of motor skill, and moving that combination from the short- to the long-term memory.
- Time management is an issue, especially as this is his first year of high school.
- Progress with the uptake of gestural concepts is steady, achieved through setting smaller, more achievable goals.
- Finn has considerable difficulty combining different gestures in each hand, so separate hands is a must, but for whatever reason, it is still something that he is not inclined to do.
- Keyboard harmony finishes the lesson positively.
Can learning another instrument (percussion) affect the technique/gestural uptake of another?

Lesson 6: 5 April 2014

I see glimpses of Finn developing into a polished and expressive player, and I think that it will happen eventually. I was really pleased to see that he had retained much of the gestural work and associate nuance for page one of Jinker Ride. He had looked at the left hand for page one, so I helped him with some fingering and corrected some misreadings. That said, he is still very slow to learn notes, and seems to do only a very bare minimum of practice, and sometimes, depending on his schedule, not even that. I asked him to learn both hands for page two this week, so we will see how he goes.

With regard to the Nocturne, there is still a blockage between hands separately and hands together, and especially so when he adds the sustain pedal. The problem is that when Finn does practise, he ‘forgets’ to play hands separately. There is still a tendency to play everything non-legato, which of course means that he cannot roll between the notes in order to create subtle changes of timbral nuance and tonal shape. He needs much more detailed and consistent practice, which he has hasn’t had, due to his school exams and me being away last Saturday. Finn just doesn’t seem to be able to regulate his own progress at an age where it might be assumed that he could be reasonably expected to do so. We revised the link between phrasing, gesture and tone for the right hand of page one, and did some review of the tonal detail of the left hand too. I feel that as well a lack of practice, playing a digital piano at home is really hindering his progress. A good part of the lesson was when I showed him some of the chords for Say Something, and I linked it back to our recent activities with keyboard harmony. It seemed to really interest Finn, and it gave us something positive to focus on.

- He is very slow to learn notes and this of course slows gestural implementation.
- Finn needs weekly goals on what to ‘learn’.
- He has difficulty regulating his own practice and progress, even though he is at an age where he would be reasonably expected to do so.
- He needs substantial revision of work already covered – does he need two lessons a week to stay on track?
- Is practising on a digital piano hindering his progress with the implementation of expressive gesture and associated tone production?
- He ‘defaults’ to non-legato, meaning that expressive gesture is of little use, as he cannot ‘roll’ between the notes in order to create subtle changes of timbre and tonal shape.
- Keyboard harmony is his strength, and the first part of the lesson is spent doing so, in context of Say Something, all without the score.

Lesson 7: 10 April 2014

It’s the first week of the school holidays, so Finn came to the house for a lesson today. His brother came as well, but he and Sarah went for a drive to the park. It was a productive lesson, and demonstrates that groundwork in the earlier years can pay off if the student ‘sticks around for long enough’. While still slow, things have definitely moved forward, even in the short space of time since Saturday. We started with some excellent work on Czerny’s Study in C Major, Op. 299 No. 2. While I hadn’t planned to do so, we ended up analysing the scales as modes, and this provided a good focus that didn’t revolve too much around expression and expressive gesture. Finn definitely seemed to enjoy learning what I was teaching, being engaged and interested the whole lesson. We covered some very good visualisation exercises involving the mind/body connection to the tip of the fifth finger of the left hand, culminating with the whole C Major scale ascending and descending. Finn learnt both hands to the middle of the page and I set this for home ‘study’. We then moved to Jinker Ride. I had asked Finn to prepare page two, so I heard it and together we made corrections to the fingering and phrasing. A really golden moment was when Finn was drawing in the phrase markings with yellow highlighter and I asked him to lift his arm to draw the next phrase, much the same as when we are actually playing. He really got the idea! When I asked him to play page one hands together, he had great difficulty realising the differing gestures within each hand simultaneously, so I asked him to ‘leave out’ the movements and concentrate on the correct notes and fingering. Sarah and his brother came back about this point and he started to become very distracted, more so than what might be considered typical. I asked him to play the right hand of Nocturne, which had pleasing tonal shape and phrasing. I adjusted some of the fingering on page two and also played the left hand along with him. As he was leaving, Sarah started talking about emotion being a part of the music, which I was
pleased to hear. I gave them a copy of a mash-up CD containing expressive pieces that I had made for another student last year. I hope that Finn can practise and get the most benefit from the concepts covered, especially those to do with visualisation and ‘feeling’ for the notes, as opposed to just ‘thinking’ them.

- There is a need to balance progress with enjoyment of the lessons and a love of learning, because if the student perceives himself as inadequate and non-efficacious to the point that he quits, there is no further opportunity to continue skill development.

- Flexible lesson agenda: ‘What does my student need from me at this time?’

- He is interested in and enjoys acquiring knowledge during the lessons, which is not necessarily what I might perceive to be ‘important’ at this time. Just because it doesn’t fit my agenda, doesn’t mean it’s not a valid learning pathway for the student.

- Kinaesthetic visualisation: mind/body connection ‘right to the tip of the fifth finger’.

- Practice is a process where notes are physically ‘felt’ rather than ‘thought’.

- Ensemble playing.

- Highlighting phrases: Letting the student ‘take the lead’.

- Gave CD of ‘expressive’ piano music for him to listen to.

- At this stage, Finn cannot cope with learning expressive gesture along with notation and fingering. The notation and fingering must be intact before moving further.

Lesson 8: 26 April 2014

Finn had lost the music for Jinker Ride and hadn’t practised much of Nocturne as far as I could tell. It may be that he was really stressed about losing the music, and was worried about whether I would be annoyed with him. This of course would affect his memory and general progress, and he may not be able to focus on anything else. I’m starting to realise that his working memory isn’t the strongest, and for deep learning to occur within pieces that are beyond an elementary level, he needs much more consistent rehearsal and revision. I’m not able to be there all the time, and it is ultimately his responsibility to practise. He doesn’t have the cognitive resources available to focus on more than a few things at a time, and needs a high degree of automation in order to explore the expressive properties of the music in more than just
a superficial way. While the lesson could have been a waste of time, I did ask him to review each and every bar with:

1. Block left-hand chords
2. Right hand with correct fingering, notes, clear legato and an expressive sound
3. Right hand (as above) with left-hand block chords
4. Hands together as written.

I reminded Finn that everyone has to follow these steps, and not to do so isn’t satisfactory. I am really quite frustrated with his lack of motivation and time management, as he isn’t reliably able to fulfil the tasks that I set for him. I think he just gets himself so worried and is paralysed into inaction. We have a couple of good lessons, then he is sick, has too much homework, or decides to have a ‘holiday’ and we are back to square one. If he really wants to play more advanced pieces, he is going to have to learn to do more advanced practice.

- Finn seems to find processing multiple concepts simultaneously challenging, so there is a need to have notation and fingering to a large extent automated, before gesture and the expressive properties of the music can be explored.
- Finn needs clear expectations and written instructions regarding his weekly goals.
- He is sometimes so worried about not knowing what to do or where to start that he becomes paralysed into inaction.

Lesson 9: 3 May 2014

A big improvement – it could have gone either way really. Finn seems to have been diligently working through *Nocturne*, and is back on track. Actually the whole piece is quite accurate and fluent, except for the last page. I asked Finn how he made such progress, and he indicated that he had practised an hour a day most of the week. We worked through a few bars of gestural detail, particularly with regard to injecting tonal shape into left-hand broken chords using the ‘clock’ analogy, this time with numbers indicating points of distance and speed, depending on which ‘o’clock’ we are at. There was good discussion regarding combing expressive gestural choreography for both hands, moving the arm through the phrases without ‘stopping’, and also the importance of not ceasing the practice regime for more than a day or two. I suggested that it’s like fitness – for every week that you stop practising the piece,
you go three weeks backwards in terms of overall progress. Finn is starting to make a lovely natural sounding melodic phrase now, and I asked him to practise and really get to know the first two lines of the last page now, mainly so that he is not just thinking of notes as he plays, but so that the hands can ‘draw’ the shapes that lie *between* the notes. It was a really good lesson – another feature was the need to add pedal as ‘the icing on the cake’ as Finn put it. I reminded him that the pedal was just an extra step, not one that negates what the hands are already doing. George had brought tickets for the soccer, so Finn won’t be attending the performance workshop tomorrow, probably for the best. I reminded Finn to get on with learning *Jinker Ride* – ‘Just do it!’ I think he’s starting to catch on, not only in terms of sound, expression and accuracy, but also work ethic. Very good material here in terms of shaping a melodic line by using rotary movement, an ‘in breath’ and ‘rolling between the notes’, as well as chaining smaller gestural fragments together to make one long line possible.

- Practice is blending notational ‘fitness’ with muscular awareness.
- ‘Nike’ work ethic: ‘Just do it!’
- Why practise? The notes need a high level of automation so that the hands can begin to ‘draw the shapes that lie between the notes’.
- Clock analogy: clockwise or counterclockwise elliptical movement for expressive tonal shape of left-hand broken chords.
- ‘Involve your arms in the playing’ and keep the playing ‘breathing’ by using fluid, non-stop movement.
- A single gesture is functional in its own right, while also acting as preparation for the following gesture.
- Rotary movement, double rotary movement and ‘rolling’ through the notes seems to help him ‘learn’ how to shape a melody expressively.
- Learning expressive gesture, one note at a time is helpful here, as is chaining smaller fragments together to make one long melodic line.
- Student’s own analogy: The pedal is ‘the icing on the cake’.

*Lesson 10: 10 May 2014*

Finn said that he had had ‘a big week’ and hadn’t practised *Jinker Ride*, but had reviewed *Nocturne*. While it wasn’t completely finished, it certainly hadn’t regressed, and areas that we had worked on previously seemed stable, though the balance
between registers and the overall shape of the melodic line still need further refinement. Finn is articulating the left hand clearly now, with the right-hand fingerling reliable and phrasing intact. I helped him to review principles of constructing an expressively shaped melodic line using gesture and acoustical analysis, before adding the right and left hands back together. The last three chords provide good pedagogical demonstrations of voicing, use of the breath, tilting of the pelvis and overall gestural activity of the arms. I also helped him ‘find’ the direction and tonal shape of the melodic line on the last page by using the ‘add-a-note technique’, and there were many good examples of double rotation, useful in generating momentum to emphasise ‘appoggiaturas’ without actually breaking the melodic line in the process. A good lesson overall.

- It appears that it is certainly possible to ‘teach’ expressive melodic shape through expressive gesture and acoustical analysis, and it is a viable adjunct to using metaphor, imagery, felt emotion, demonstration or ‘osmosis’.
- The whole body creates the sound: The preparatory in-breath, the gestural activity of the arms, the tactile feeling of the fingertips and the pelvic tilt all contribute to the involvement of the upper body in tone production.
- Double rotary movement facilitates the creation of momentum that can be using to assist with crescendo.
- ‘Add-a-note technique’ is helpful in ‘discovering’ both the physical contour and the associated tonal shape of a phrase.

Lesson 11: 17 May 2014

I’m not sure if my expectations are too high – Shaeed did seem to think so when I was talking with him about Finn’s lesson yesterday morning. I mentioned that I really don’t enjoy teaching sometimes. It seems that you give so much and either you get very little back, your suggestions are ignored or you get the feeling that it’s your fault that there’s so much to learn. It’s honestly not my fault that people have busy lives, and when someone offers you their free time to help their child I think that it’s always polite to recognise this. Anyway, we had another one of those lessons where it seems that Finn had forgotten most of what we had worked on the previous lesson, especially frustrating as we were coming close to ‘finishing’ the piece. As Sarah said in passing towards the end of the lesson ‘body awareness?’ That is absolutely a major drawback to teaching expression via a gestural approach, and I really need to question
whether the pieces that Finn is studying are appropriate. I think that he really needs to be learning more about pop, singing, accompanying, keyboard harmony and music theory. I think that I need to change direction next semester, and leave the idea that he will play ‘expressively’ behind for a time. Perhaps it is better to capitalise on his strengths? His ability to coordinate contrasting gestural patterns and layers of sound may well mature in time. As Shaeed said, I don’t want him to hate music or quit, particularly as he has musical aspirations for the future, but maybe I’m trying to mould him into something that he is not. I did send Sarah a message asking her if she could bring Finn over for an extra lesson on Thursday but it wasn’t possible. I think that I need to give Finn two lessons a week, the same as I do for Andrew, but for different reasons. Finn is very sensitive and I’m not sure he can take much more of being told that he is not improving when maybe he could well improve at something else more appropriate. After teaching Scarlett today, I realise more and more that some children have motor weaknesses, making the facilitation of an expressive gestural vocabulary very difficult, time-consuming, laborious, or just not appropriate for their development early on.

- The reflective process is beneficial for venting negative feelings and for rethinking teaching objectives.
- Body awareness activities are crucial here.
- Should I be giving Finn two lessons a week?
- Should I be trying to ‘mould’ him into something that he is not, or should I aim for a healthier balance between what he enjoys and is good at, and those goals that would facilitate *my* idea of musical expressivity? Perhaps he already feels as though he *is* expressing himself by learning more about popular music, singing, accompanying, keyboard harmony and music theory?
- *What does my student need from me at this time?*
- A potential downside to a gestural approach: Some children may have a slight weakness with motor skill, making the facilitation of an expressive gestural vocabulary either very difficult, time-consuming, laborious, or just not entirely appropriate for their development in the early years.
- Combining contrasting gestural patterns and layers of sound is a real challenge here.
- It would be ideal if the student had access to information at the time of the lesson that illustrated muscle activity. Perhaps Kathleen Reily’s research on biofeedback would be useful in such cases? Could it speed up the learning process?

- There are good examples here of exercises both at the piano and away from the piano where one set of muscles turns off as the other turns on and vice versa. Would they be useful for other students?

Lesson 12: 24 May 2014

I had a good think about what how I might approach the lesson today. I almost rang Sarah during the week, but I decided that it was best just to change track and see how it went. We started the lesson going over the chords and associated theory/scales of Say Something and All of Me. I really think that that is where Finn’s talent and interest lies and that is where I should be directing his ‘expression’, rather than solely focusing on traditional repertoire. As it turns out, Finn has filled out 35 hours of his practice test tube. I was shocked! I just wonder when all this practice has been happening, as I would have expected much more ‘progress’ from this amount of time. I need to accept that different aspects of playing take time, and trying to fit my agenda on to the student is not always what’s best. While he is nowhere near where I thought that he ‘should’ be by this time, I have decided to meet Finn where he is, and lower my expectation. A recurring theme of this lesson and others this week – ‘Don’t just intellectualise, motorise and then emotionalise’. That is to say, it’s not enough to ‘think’ through the pieces and say, ‘Yes I realise that I need to play a B flat there’. Rather, it seems essential that such changes be rehearsed until automated, so that the mind can then focus on more creative aspects of the piece. It seemed to come up in Noah’s lesson too, and Scarlet’s lesson the following day. It is especially essential where the student may have a slight weakness with motor planning, yet is essentially bright and creative on the whole.

- He has been practising, it’s just that progress is slower than I had anticipated. Am I expecting too much here?

- Keyboard harmony and scales.

- Practice incentives.
‘I need to accept that different aspects of playing take time, and trying to fit my agenda on to the student is not always what’s best … I need to meet him where he is’.

‘Don’t just intellectualise, motorise and then emotionalise’: It’s not enough to just think what needs to happen, skills need to be rehearsed until automated and committed to the long-term motor memory before cognitive resources can be directed to more ‘creative’ aspects of the piece.

Lesson 13: 31 May 2014

Now this is the kind of lesson that we should be having weekly – Finn (and I) are starting to move in the right direction now. I presented him with his medal and he was just so thrilled; Sarah was crying. I was genuinely proud of Finn and very pleased that he has found some new confidence, as it felt like I was slowly destroying it. Finn played me his arrangement of All of Me, and he had retained much of what we had done, and even went further than I expected. He was genuinely enjoying what we were doing and so was I. Finn responds well to demonstration and chord shapes, so this activity is perfect. We then worked on Nocturne, as the recital is next weekend. He has made steady progress, but there are still many errors and no definitive climax on the final page, exactly where the piece should be at its most accurate, confident and expressive. It was good to go through each of these bars in detail, working through sound, expressive gesture and tonal shape in a systematic way, and I made sure that Finn was well aware of my expectations for the following week. We returned to the start of the piece, and I helped him review the legato connection and tonal shape of the long melodic lines, all the time relating it to the spoken word or a singing voice, and what might make ‘sense’. The physical aspects of playing are not easy for him, but we are getting there. It may be that studying this type of piece is really a very long-term project for him, and in between there is so much keyboard harmony and theory that we can cover to ‘fill in the blanks’. I am feeling much more positive about this now.

Finn’s medal tangibly acknowledges the efforts he has made, the progress he has attained, and serves to validate my belief in him.

When he is interested, he learns quickly and demonstrates increased autonomy.

Practical demonstration and imitation are assimilated more easily than the printed score.
- Make expectations clear: perhaps get Finn to write them down?
- Systematic layering of notes, sound, gesture and tonal shape to small amounts at a time work well here.
- Wrong notes = lack of expressive climax and audience interest?
- Why play with legato/tonal shape? … So that the melodic line reflects the rhythm and inflection of the spoken or sung word (prosody).

Lesson 14: 7 June 2014

Awesome lesson! This is one of most inspired lessons that Finn has had this year, maybe ever. He had practised Nocturne, implementing natural rubato, excellent fluency, good tone colour and clear pedal. We played together and that seemed to help him ‘rediscover’ the structure of the piece and moments of special expressive significance. Actually I did this with Mediha with her Nocturne earlier in the week. She really seemed to have an ‘a-ha’ moment and was visibly and physically affected, letting out a contented sigh after finishing the final notes. Within the accompaniment of All of Me, there is a good demonstration of using elliptical movement to procure expressive sound, albeit in a ‘contemporary’ context. I used an interesting analogy regarding shaping the sound, referring to a person making pottery on a pottery wheel. As you lean in and out, changing the pressure of the stroke, the shape changes, and the same could be said when shaping the sound that emits from the piano. ‘As pianists, we mould the sound in subtle, yet meaningful ways’. Finn played really well in the concert. Despite his initial nervousness before the concert started, he played accurately overall, with good connection to the piece, the piano and the audience. I feel glad that I pushed him to achieve a higher standard, but also relieved that I had the foresight to back off a little in order to give him the space to learn and achieve what I was asking.

- Ensemble playing is both enjoyable and seems to help him ‘rediscover’ points of structural and expressive significance – ‘special moments’.
- Two pianos are so important in the teaching space.
- He does get there in the end.
- There exists a need to strike a careful balance between expectation and the ‘space’ to learn. Too much pressure seems counterproductive with Finn.
‘I feel glad that I pushed him to achieve a higher standard, but also relieved that I had the foresight to back off a little in order to give him the space to learn and achieve what I was asking’.

The expressive gestural vocabulary is transferable to a contemporary context, strengthening its viability, e.g. elliptical movement to shape the tone of broken chords in the right-hand accompaniment of *All of Me*.

Pottery wheel analogy: ‘We as pianists mould the sound in subtle, yet meaningful ways’.

*Lesson 15: 14 June 2014*

We didn’t actually do a lot of ‘piano’ today, it seemed more like a mentoring session more than anything, and Sarah actually said as much as they were leaving. Finn was clearly feeling proud that he had played well last weekend. He told me after the concert that he had a goal to move to the Intermediate program by the end of year. In the lesson, I reiterated that all talent in the world won’t be of any use without those consistent blocks of time where notes are learnt and the ‘mechanics’ of piano playing are organised and implemented, ready to be shaped and moulded into music. Sarah came in saying that she feels Finn has the desire to be a successful musician, but not necessarily the drive. I agreed, reminding Finn that it’s possible for drive to be ‘learnt’ too. I asked him to come to the Intermediate Concert yesterday, asking him afterwards if he found it inspiring. He agreed, and expressed an interest in some of the pieces, particularly the Mozart Concerto that I played with Kelly. Anyway, today was the last lesson of Semester One, so I asked Finn to continue with *Jinker Ride, All of Me, Say Something* and Czerny’s *Study in C Major* during the holiday break.

- Finn needs to be reminded that tenacity is a mindset that can be learnt.
- Talent won’t override the need to sort out the ‘mechanics’ of the piece through discipline and organised practice routine, i.e. ‘Talent is overrated’.
- It’s important here to make time to sit and talk together, to plan future goals, and to brainstorm: ‘How do we learn?’
- He is feeling very proud of all he has achieved this semester.

*Lesson 16: 19 July 2014*

Finn had come with the entire piece of *Say Something* completed with good pedalling, a good basic sound and commendable fluency. It’s really pleasing to see his ability to
complete tasks with more independence continue to grow. That said the rest of the
lesson was intensive and a bit frustrating. Finn needs to improve his finger shape, and
the way that he ‘holds’ his hands and arms. He finds it challenging to take personal
responsibility for this, perhaps due to a body awareness issue. We reviewed some of
the factors that might facilitate the ability to ‘caress’ the keys, and then transferred
those concepts back into Say Something. Feeling for the bottom of the keys, using
expressive gesture to facilitate varying weight distribution, creating a ‘vocal’ line that
has direction, inflection and purpose, and maintaining clear legato were our focus
areas. Finn’s main issue stems from ‘leaning’ on the keys, when it would be better to
use the muscles in the upper arms to ‘hover’ over them, improving his ability to touch
the keys in more subtle ways. So as to avoid any twisting or misalignment of the arms
and fingers, we reviewed pentascales in each hand, working towards achieving clear
finger work, deactivation of unnecessary tension and the ability to create a uniform
touch.

- **Growing autonomy:** For the most part, he has learnt the notes of *Say
  Something* independently.
- **He appears to have issues with body awareness, and this seems to inhibit
  technical development and the uptake of expressive gestural information.**
- **Good demonstration of exploring factors that facilitate Finn’s ability to
  ‘caress’ the keys, as he does tend to lean on them, impeding his ability to
touch them in more subtle ways.**
- **When combined with expressive gesture, employing greater activation of the
  upper arms so as to ‘hover’ above them seems to facilitate his ability to vary
  the velocity of key descent, thereby enhancing tonal shape with repeated notes
  and creating a ‘vocal’ line that has direction, expressive inflection and purpose.**
- **Good demonstration of using a simple five-finger exercise to review tonal
  control through the awareness of joint alignment and upper arm
  activation/forearm deactivation.**

*Lesson 17: 26 July 2014*

What a great lesson this was. George was there and really seemed to understand and
support how I was working with Finn. Finn seemed very pleased with himself too,
and it was obvious that last week’s lesson had paid dividends within a very short
amount of time. The idea that the upper arm muscles are ‘tense’ and support a
looseness of the lower arms from the elbow down really made sense to George. He had spoken to Finn regarding a fitness regime that included upper arm exercises and rowing to build up an awareness of the deltoid muscles. I did caution them however about joining the rowing team, as from previous experience, it can negatively impact a student due to the early starts and consequent lack of enough sleep. However, the fact that I have George on board will make a big difference, especially as he said something to the effect of, ‘as a non-musician, I can really hear the difference in the sound when those gestures are used to generate the sound’. There was discussion between Finn, George and me about the ‘McGurk effect’, where the way something looks can affect the way that it is aurally perceived. Actually, I did mention that to quite a few students this week. George said that he felt the use of gestures to generate the expressive tone made the overall result seem more ‘organic’, where Finn’s playing seemed intrinsic, as opposed to being manufactured. All of this talk came from working on *Say Something*, but the whole lesson was excellent, as it contains useful examples that are supported by George. Using the iPad to illustrate postural concepts proved a useful reflective tool for Finn, hopefully encouraging him to generate a kinaesthetic ‘picture’ of his whole body in the process.

- Parental involvement, understanding and support are critical. George knows that I want the best for Finn, and I think he can see where I’m coming from. George has been encouraging Finn to develop his upper arm strength and awareness through using the rowing machine and strength exercises.
- Finn seems pleased with himself. He *knows* that he is getting the hang of what I am asking for.
- Upper arms are ‘tense’ and support a looseness from the elbows down.
- George quote: ‘As a non-musician, I can really hear the difference in the sound when those gestures are used’.
- Viewing and discussion of the ‘McGurk effect’: The way that something looks is important to how it is aurally perceived, i.e. gestures serve a dual role in music performance.
- George quote: ‘I feel that those gestures made Finn’s playing seem more *organic*’.
- Using the iPad seemed to encourage Finn to be reflective and aware of his body when he plays, generating a visual and kinaesthetic ‘map’ of how he interacts with the piano.

Lesson 18: 2 August 2014

This is a terrific lesson. It was almost as if Finn’s proprioceptive awareness had crystallised ‘overnight’. Of course it’s been a long road, and a lot of effort, but I feel that Finn has improved beyond what I thought was possible in the short term. To me, he looks quite a different player, both in the way that he holds himself and his arms, and the ease and fluidity of his approach to the keyboard. He’d done a good job learning three lines of Study in C, so we started to incorporate body movement, expressive gesture, and a forward tilt of the trunk to invigorate the tone into the opening bars. It was very promising, with the music flowing out of him naturally. Reviewing the five-finger exercises has made a huge difference to Finn’s ability to execute the left-hand scales, as he is no longer ‘leaning’ on the keys, and seems to better sense where his body stops and where the key bed starts. This seems key to activating tonal nuance in the melodic material, and the general tonal uniformity required in scales. We moved on to Say Something, and there was a very good section of the lesson where Finn seemed to ‘unlock’ tonal width by using the off/on principle of the upper arm muscles. This allowed him to descend into the keys with increasing or decreasing weight of the forearm, thereby widening the expressive tonal shape within the ‘vocal’ part, reflective of how it might be sung. As it’s Finn’s intention to build an accompaniment from the score to play as he sings, we covered some preliminary keyboard harmony. Towards the end of the lesson, we watched Finn playing at the end of last year on the iPad. His playing has much more control and tonal depth, and I think that he could see it too.

- It seems that after a number of years, Finn’s proprioceptive awareness is beginning to reveal itself, and he is becoming more aware of where his body ends and where the keys begin. The avoidance of ‘leaning’ on the keyboard is key to developing tonal nuance here.
- A good example here of using pelvic tilt to invigorate the sound, where notes ‘flow out of the body’.
- A good example here of ‘unlocking’ tonal width by using an on/off principle with the upper arm muscles. This seems to allow him to descend into the keys.
with increasing or decreasing weight of the forearm, thereby widening expressive tonal shape within the ‘vocal’ line.

- Looking back at a performance this time a year ago encourages critical reflection and promotes pride in his overall progress.
- Keyboard harmony, theory, arrangement and aural development are embedded within the learning process.

Lesson 19: 9 August 2014

This was a very short lesson, only about 20 minutes or so. I had to leave early to drive down to the Gold Coast to hear Wendy play, so Finn is coming for another lesson on Wednesday instead. However, we were able to look at concepts relating to chords and fingering of chords within *Under the Sea*. Finn sings the piece in his school choir, and wanted to learn more about the piano accompaniment. He also expressed interest in wanting to know ‘more jazz chords’, which I was pleased to hear. It’s really good to see him starting to direct the learning in a meaningful way, merging popular songs with increased technical control and proprioceptive awareness. I gave him some goals to work towards for the lesson on Wednesday.

- Important to show an interest in and give guidance with materials that the student brings in. In this case, it’s the piano accompaniment of a jazz piece that Finn is singing in the school choir.
- Jazz keyboard harmony.
- Finn needs specific, written goals to complete before the next lesson, otherwise he will just ‘forget’.

Lesson 20: 13 August 2014

This had the potential to be a great lesson, and in many respects it was. Finn really seems to be enjoying the new jazz piece, spending a good amount of time reviewing keys, chords, dominant sevenths and dominant ninths. We did a terrific exercise with dominant sevenths and tonic chords in all 12 Major keys, which Finn loved it. He really seemed to come alive, so I gave him the I-IV-V7-I chord progressions, with chord I starting in first inversion. We also discussed the possibility of chord I beginning in root position or second inversion. Within *Under the Sea*, I helped Finn with some more fingering, and explained sixth chords and minor seventh chords. However, when I heard him play *Study in C*, it was clear that he had not practised, in
effect wasting his parents’ time, money and commitment. Sarah seemed pleased that I acknowledged this, saying that she had told him the same thing. I spent the next 10 minutes taking him through what was covered previously, but when I asked him what he was going to review for homework, he couldn’t tell me. I handed him a sticky note and asked him to write out the tasks for practice this week. Sarah said that he’d miss his lesson on Saturday due to percussion commitments. Along with singing, I think that that is where Finn’s interests and ‘natural’ abilities lie. He is clearly interested in music, but just doesn’t seem to have the fine motor skills to rise to upper levels of piano playing, at least in the foreseeable future.

- He loves keyboard harmony.
- Finn has trouble remembering specific directions, so I have now started asking him to write down his own weekly goals. He needs to be reminded of the importance of taking greater responsibility for his own progress.
- Progress is slow but steady and, when viewed holistically, he will no doubt mature into a well-rounded musician in the years ahead.

Lesson 21: 23 August 2014

In terms of using the iPad to help Finn ‘see’ where he might make/is making improvements with this body awareness, technique and sound, this was a great lesson. George understands Finn, both his personality and how he learns best, and was really thankful that I used the iPad, and that I asked Finn to write down ‘steps’ to follow in order to finish Study in C. This ‘list’ really seemed to make sense to Finn, and I will write about its perceived success next time. Now that I am almost at the end stages of data collection, it’s quite clear that if the overall ‘technique’ and awareness of the body are not there, using gesture to teach expressivity and expressive sound are slow to develop.

- iPad feedback regarding body awareness, technique and sound is useful for Finn to see where he might make/is making improvements.
- George offers support and useful information regarding Finn’s personality and how he might best learn.
- Giving Finn greater responsibility for writing down agreed upon, itemised and systematised weekly goals does seem to have worked – he achieved them!
- If body awareness and technique are slow to develop, so too are expressive gestural concepts and associated tone production.

Lesson 22: 30 August 2014

This was another really good lesson. Progress is slow but steady, and Finn’s body awareness is improving from lesson to lesson. He had prepared the last half of Study in C as agreed, and while it was untidy, with faulty fingering, inaccurate rhythms and problems with keyboard geography, I was really pleased that he was able to complete the work independently. To me, it means that there is something to build on, and that things move forward, slowly but surely. In the lesson, we reviewed the fingering for the left hand, used the metronome to ‘rediscover’ the rhythm within the final bars, did some ‘chord push-ups’ for the development of right-hand chords/finger awareness, and I asked Finn to write down what we did in the lesson so that he could chart his practice through the week. I think that him writing rather than me will be really helpful. It may take time away from the ‘lesson’, but it will probably enhance his overall learning autonomy. This lesson and Harry’s lesson yesterday got me thinking about what Diana Blom suggested at the confirmation seminar, regarding encouraging the students to become their own ‘mini reflective practitioners’. At the time, I didn’t consider it a concept that I could explore fully, but it is interesting how this process appears to be evolving naturally anyway. I encouraged Finn to keep notes of what he had practised in order to track his learning progress, and to reflect on the part that he plays in his own progress. Next week, I offered to bring in and show him some of my lesson journals and practice tapes that I used to keep, when I was ‘around the same age’.

- Progress is slow, but Finn’s body awareness is improving weekly.

- I think that he feels empowered writing his own goals, and I have started to encourage him to write down what he practises, in effect becoming his own ‘mini reflective practitioner’, as suggested by Diana Blom at my research confirmation. This may allow him to reflect positively on the part that he plays in his own progress.

- Confidence with the ‘nuts and bolts’ of fingering, rhythm and keyboard geography is a priority before gestural detail can be explored.

- Of obvious benefit, this research has positive parallels with other students who are not part of this study.
Finn came to the lesson today a bit upset because of some bullying by the boys at Nudgee, but he seemed to transition into the lesson quite well. Despite his ‘advancing’ age, he is still at the ‘how do I practise’ and ‘how do I curve my fingers and hold my arms’ stages of learning. That said, he is still showing progress, and seems to be taking more and more pride in what he is doing. Lowering my expectations a little has really helped, and I have realised that he will get ‘there’, wherever ‘there’ might be. He can play all of Study in C Major now, and while it is ‘average’, the notes are there and we can build on what he can do, rather than what he can’t. In terms of posture, sound and fluency, we used the iPad to compare and contrast various ‘takes’. I think that it really helps Finn to have immediate, visual feedback. As the end-of-year concert is coming up in about eight weeks, I reminded Finn that it was now time to prepare so that he could have an easier time in the last few weeks before the performance. He continues to write directions for practice in his journal; it’s such a useful learning tool. I encouraged him to continue writing what he practises, for how long, and for what purpose, using Andrew’s and Harry’s work as examples. I asked him to increase his progress with Study in C Major so that it can be ‘finished’ in terms of fingering, notes, fluency and rhythm, ready for further development of sound and increase of tempo. I also asked him to review Say Something and All of Me in preparation for the next four or five lessons.

- Finn is still at an elementary stage in many respects, but I will continue to give him opportunities to think critically on ways he can move forward. He is taking pride in his independence, and demonstrates increased self-efficaciousness, with those factors in themselves being worthwhile goals.
- I think that adjusting my expectations has helped make the learning to be more relevant to Finn.
- The iPad continues to serve as a useful reflective tool, especially if used in a positive way: We are building on what he can do, rather than focusing on what he can’t.
- Using other students’ work as examples, I encouraged Finn to set weekly goals and to write down what he practises, for how long, and for what purpose.
Finn came to the house last night for a double lesson and it went really well. He seemed to enjoy himself and had prepared, making the ‘value’ of the lesson offset its ‘cost’. He had learnt *Study in C* all through with hands together, and there was actually very little to do in terms of notes, rhythm and fingering. A couple of adjustments were faithfully notated in his workbook. I took a photocopy of the notes that he made, because there was a very good statement that sums up my teaching philosophy at this time:

> Practice is a process where notation (notes, rhythm, fingering) is moved from the short-term procedural memory to the long-term body or motor memory. Piano Playing is as much a musical activity as it is a motor activity. Like a ‘sport’, the use of the whole body is combined with the precision of fine motor skills and the poetry of musical expression.

The idea of ‘scratching the nose’ to enhance tactile sensitivity of the fingertips was something that I learnt from watching Irina Gorin’s video on YouTube during this week. It’s been really useful for many students, both in terms of facilitating their awareness of the distal joints, and the sensitivity of the fingertip itself. It seemed especially helpful for Finn, especially as *Study in C* contains many left-hand scales that begin with the fifth finger. Other activities included ‘chord push-ups’, ‘lifting up the apparatus’ of the arms, and body awareness exercises where the arms are brought up parallel to the floor, the palms facing out and then wiggling the fifth fingers, with a view to ‘leading’ with the fifth fingers and not the thumb. I heard him play *Say Something*, and asked Finn to sing the words too. I also asked him to practise the chorus of *All of Me* while singing the words, and I reminded him that while big ambitions are admirable, he needs to back them up with ‘big’ practice so that goals are met in a timely manner.

- He is polishing the rudiments of notes, fingering and rhythmic detail much faster now, and he continues to use his journal as a learning tool.
- Body awareness exercises and ‘scratch-the-nose technique’ for increased tactility of the fingertips.
- Social media can be a source of good ideas.
- Finn needs constant encouragement to be realistic in terms of ‘effort in equals progress out’.
- ‘Practice is the process where notation (notes, rhythm, fingering) is moved from the short-term procedural memory to the long-term motor memory. Piano playing is as much a musical activity as it is a motor activity. Like a “sport”, the use of the whole body is combined with the precision of fine motor skills and the poetry of musical expression’.

Lesson 25: 5 October 2014

This was a great lesson. I really enjoy it when George comes with Finn – he’s a very funny man. Finn played his vocal/piano version of All of Me and apart from the chorus, the whole thing works well. I ‘helped’ a little with the vocal part, as he was straining his voice and needing greater clarity of diction. We worked on keeping the accompaniment ‘behind a veil’, and moved towards a one in the bar feel with expressive shaping. There was a really interesting part of the lesson where we reviewed the tonal shape of the right-hand motif in B-flat minor, but this time using small anti-clockwise circles that are initiated from the elbow, producing sympathetic movement through the forearm and wrist. Combining this with the idea of playing the notes with the hand/forearm unit rather than ‘poking’ with the fingers seemed to make sense to Finn. It really made a big difference to his touch, and enabled him to produce a dreamy timbre that suited the harmonic colour. Towards the end of the lesson, we started to analyse the chords and their inversions, with a view to arranging a new self-accompanied solo of I Can’t Fight This Feeling, but the majority of the lesson time before that was spent on Study in C. He has improved, but I reiterated the need to keep the whole playing apparatus ‘switched on’ so that his fingers could speak the rhythm clearly. He responded quickly with very good control of sound, rhythm and ‘technique’. I asked him to always listen to what he is playing, to imagine how his playing looks, and to be aware of how his playing feels – it’s a multi-sensory workout.

- Working with gesture and associated expressive nuance is not restricted to a particular genre or style.
- Analogy: ‘Behind a veil’.
- Anti-clockwise elliptical movement initiated at the elbow seems to produce sympathetic movement at the forearm and wrist, allowing the notes to ‘roll’ out of the hand, producing a dreamy touch.
- Finn’s new piece is learnt through harmonic analysis without referring to the printed score.
- Keeping the whole playing apparatus ‘switched on’ and ‘lubricated’ seems to allow the fingers to ‘speak’ more clearly.
- Finn needs to be encouraged to become more and more aware that playing is a multi-sensory activity – ‘How does your playing look, feel and sound?’

Lesson 26: 11 October 2014

This was an excellent lesson. Finn has done really well with both Study in C and *All of Me*. He finally seems able to play the Czerny with an awareness of the technical elements, and in turn, he is able to make a good sound with minimal effort. We were able to start shaping the right hand, and he followed my ‘gestures’ quite accurately. Historically, he’s found it challenging to copy spatial choreography through observation alone. He applied the ‘add-a-note technique’ to build a crescendo, grasping the concept much quicker than in previous weeks. His technique and overall physical ease have improved so much that he was able to start playing the piece faster while still retaining tonal colour and rhythmic clarity. Scratching his nose with the fifth finger in order to encourage greater touch sensitivity and tactile/postural awareness works well, and his ability to self-correct issues of finger alertness and deltoid activation show a big improvement. When reviewing elliptical movements of the elbow within *All of Me*, Finn was able to identify other areas the methodology could be applied. The first time that he sang and played *All of Me*, he seemed unable to free his right shoulder, but the second time his gestural awareness was such that it changed the quality of the sound enormously. It was encouraging to hear Finn say that he feels able to apply what he knows. He seems to better understand the intrinsic link between body movement and tone production, where having the notes and fingering in place gives him the space to enjoy being expressive. When I asked him how he got to know the pieces so well, he said that he had been practising all week. It seems that he can play expressively if he has the cognitive resources to do so.
- Confidence with the notation and increased control of the upper arms seem to allow him to focus more on the expressive possibilities of sound and overall tone production.
- Finn’s ability to accurately imitate gestural choreography and absorb spatial information does show signs of improvement, and he demonstrates increased skill in terms of being able to self-monitor and correct issues of finger alertness and upper arm activation.
- ‘Scratch-the-nose technique’ to enhance tactile sensitivity and postural awareness of the fifth finger does work well with Finn.
- Good demonstration of building a right-hand crescendo and learning associated gestural choreography through ‘add-a-note technique’.
- Finn is starting to make his own connections now, saying that he feels able to apply gestural information to new but similar material – good segment on clockwise movement initiated at the elbow.
- A significant change in sound quality was evident when he ‘swapped’ a tight shoulder with a loose shoulder.
- He said that having the ‘nuts and bolts’ in place gives him the space to enjoy being expressive.
- ‘It’s really good – I’d be feeling pretty proud if I was you’.

Lesson 27: 18 October 2014

I am so pleased with Finn. I feel like he has made a big improvement this year. He seems more confident, perhaps because I let go of expectation and moved him forward realistically and sequentially. My aim was to provide him with enough challenge, but not to the point where those challenges seemed insurmountable, lest he becomes withdrawn, negative and worrisome. I feel that he has more ‘options’ with his playing due to absolving some technical issues that were hindering his expressive potential. In addition, he has a greater array of practice tools at his disposal. His ability to sing and play has improved exponentially, his overall physical approach to playing is much more facile, and he believes that he is progressing. I gave him a couple of chord handouts and he loved exploring new types of sixths, sevenths and ninths.

- It feels as though I have met Finn ‘where he is’ and tried to move him forward in a realistic and sequential manner.
- With too much challenge, he seems to withdraw and become worrisome. His need to feel self-efficacious is paramount.
- Keyboard harmony/chord qualities fire his interest and support his desire to use the piano as a vehicle to enrich his singing.
- Have technical challenges, misdirected cognitive resources and inefficient practice techniques been inhibiting his expressive potential?

Lesson 28: 24 October 2014

This year is shaping up to be a fantastic one for Finn, and not just in terms of his piano playing. I can feel his confidence growing, and he harbours a real desire to improve. George came to the lesson as Sarah was with Elissarita at dancing. I really appreciate and respect George’s input. He told me that when they were working together during the week, he could see that Finn was becoming tired and having trouble keeping his upper arm switched on towards the end of Study in C, causing him to lean on the keys with a subsequent loss of finger clarity. He said that as he was helping Finn with some exercises to help build up his upper arm strength, he realised that Finn is particularly weak in the upper left arm, to the point where there is a divot in the top of his arm. This might explain the issue that Finn is having in this part of the piece. Keeping his fingers rounded is challenging, particularly fingers 4 and 5, and a flattening of these fingers appears to cause his thumb to collapse. Instead of playing on the tip of the thumb, Finn plays with a flat thumb, which in turn makes it difficult to round out the other fingers, which in turn flattens the thumb, etc. Inevitably, these issues make for an untidy delivery of passagework, with tonal shaping for expressive forward flow and excitement next to impossible. We were looking through some of his old pieces, and found Study for Scales and Staccato, so we started learning it together. It will be a perfect piece for him. Finn played very well at the audition yesterday, with Angela making mention of significant progress since this time last year. She said that, ‘there is a real performance presence happening here’. I was really proud of Finn and how far he has come. He played Study in C and sang/played All of Me at the audition.

- His desire for self-improvement is stronger now, and his confidence continues to grow.
- George mentioned that he noticed Finn’s upper arm strength diminish as his practice of the Czerny progressed. This seems to cause him to ‘lean’ on the
keys, with the playing becoming clumsy and lacking clarity. He showed me a divot in Finn’s arm where muscle should be.

- The position of fingers 4 and 5 seem to equate with that of the thumb and vice versa. Inefficiency here produces untidy passagework and an inability to shape the notes in an expressive manner.

- A colleague mentioned that Finn appears to have made significant progress since this time last year – ‘There is a real performance presence happening here’.

- Good quotes from me towards the end of the lesson regarding … facilitates … facilitates … facilitates, etc. …

Lesson 29: 1 November 2014

Not a lot of ‘new’ things to talk about, as we mainly rehearsed for the concert next weekend. Finn performed All of Me for Khoa, and Khoa performed Forest Stream for Finn. Finn’s technical skills have improved beyond what I could have hoped for, and it may mean that he has more expressive options available. We worked on scales, with Finn using ‘add-a-note technique’ to refine his ability to pronate the forearm whilst ‘tilting’ the thumb under. I encouraged him to keep his upper arm muscles switched on, lest the thumb tends to bump when a smooth transition is desirable. As he hadn’t practised much on this piece due to reviewing his concert items, we moved on and I heard him sing and play All of Me. Finn really has developed an increased ability to generate a more ‘open’ sound due to the gestural activity of his arms, but the next stage in the process will be to encourage him to use expressive gesture whilst ‘letting go’ of the trapezius muscles above his shoulder. We ‘experimented’ with the ‘toxic putty’, aiming to garner the feel of a ‘squishy keyboard’, a term that I recently came across written around 20 years ago on the first page of Bach’s Prelude in C from Book 1. Experiments like this really seem to physically engage the imagination, hopefully giving the sensation that the muscles in and around the wrist and forearm don’t ‘freeze’ on impact, but appear to continue their movement trajectory past the point of sound, albeit in a decelerated manner. It seems potential energy is reabsorbed, in preparation for the next ‘stroke’.

- Greater body awareness, technical ability and notational polish through efficient practice techniques may mean that more expressive options are available to him. For example, using forearm pronation with upper arm
engagement enables him to refine the tonal shaping of scales in Study for Scales and Staccato.

- Finn has developed an increased ability to generate a more ‘open’ sound due to gestural activity of his arms.
- ‘Toxic putty’ analogy and prop for a ‘squishy keyboard’: Experiments like this really seem to physically engage the imagination, hopefully giving the sensation that the muscles in and around the wrist and forearm don’t ‘freeze’ on impact, but appear to continue their movement trajectory past the point of sound, albeit in a decelerated manner. It seems potential energy is reabsorbed, in preparation for the next ‘stroke’.

Lesson 30: 8 November 2014

This lesson had a decidedly celebratory feel, as Finn has had a great year. He played and sang really well in the concert yesterday, and it is obvious that his focus is much more crystalline than it has been in the past. He has matured, his ability to manage his time has matured, his motor system has ‘awakened’, his ability to utilise expressive gesture to ‘create’ expressive sound has catalysed, and his interest has weathered the process. It has become clear that his future with the piano will be as a learning tool for his singing, but at the same time, he is developing skills that will be of use as an all-rounded musician.

- Finn has matured, his ability to manage his time has matured, his motor system has ‘awakened’, his ability to utilise expressive gesture to create expressive sound has catalysed, and his interest is still strong.
- Piano playing is clearly a learning tool to enhance his singing and general musicianship.

A1.4 Adrian (35 Lessons)

Lesson 1: 16 February 2014

Much of this lesson was spent reviewing Major, contrary motion and Chromatic scales for Adrian’s Grade 5 AMEB exam. Adrian is relatively weak in this area, but the way that he played Jinker Ride in the lesson was terrific. Plenty of improvement had been made, particularly in terms of building harmonic tension towards resolution within each section. There was interesting talk regarding the possibility that the piece
may well be about a train ride, particularly as the closing bars sound like a horn tooting. We worked on tonal balance between hands, and I explained that crescendo doesn’t necessarily mean that all notes become louder, but rather it may be that each phrase gets louder in turn. Adrian also played J. S. Bach’s *Invention in A Minor*, in which tempo and ‘space’ were addressed, so that the listener could actually ‘listen’. Voicing and balance of register, as well as expressive movement to assist in the projection of melodic shape (particularly in the bass), were focus areas here. The idea of a conversation between the two hands seemed to ring true, at least for Jane, who is always a great support. Adrian really seemed to enjoy the lesson and was very pleased when I suggested that he might play *Jinker Ride* for his school assembly on Thursday, owing to the fact that he had worked so well with details of expression and fluency over the past seven days. Sometimes I feel guilty bossing Adrian and his brother around so much, but they often ask irrelevant questions that slow down the momentum of the lesson. Not that any question is really ever totally irrelevant, but they are extremely inquisitive, and if I don’t cap such conversation, the tasks at hand are not achieved. Jane really doesn’t like it either and finds their constant questioning very annoying. Adrian really does seem to need more of a transfer approach to support his ‘transformation’.

- To Adrian’s pictorial mind, visual imagery works well to ‘validate’ the dynamic interest of the ‘sound picture’.
- Harmonic tension can be a source of expressive interest, and isn’t something that students are necessarily able to understand or implement without appropriate coaching.
- The student can be directed to become more aware of the audience’s perception of their playing: ‘What would it be like to listen to your performance?’
- Melodic shape can be attained through expressive gesture and directional movement, especially in the (often neglected) bass.
- ‘Conversation’ analogy for *Invention in A Minor*.
- Fantastic parental interest and support here.
- Performance opportunities provide a tangible reward for pleasing work ethic, and the validation of ability and skill.
- Adrian is an extremely dominating person and, as such, needs more of a transfer approach to support his ‘transformation’. I am cognisant of the need to take a more authoritative stand, lest he starts to take too much control of the lesson, asking questions that become increasingly irrelevant, intrusive and overbearing.

Lesson 2: 23 February 2014

This was another productive lesson, perhaps not in terms of actual piano playing, but in conveying concepts related to Adrian utilising his ‘race car brain’. The first 25 – 30 minutes were spent wading through a relatively small amount of technical work, with Adrian asking lots of annoying questions and taking as long as possible between tasks. For example, even finding the page for each scale was a drawn out process. I became a bit frustrated with his apparent disrespect for the value of the lesson, but I retrospectively think that it doesn’t occur to him that there could be a more efficient way to complete these tasks. However, he did play *Elfin Dance* with some really interesting expression and plenty of fire, despite many incorrect notes, which I helped him to fix. He is very distractible, and his mind quickly wanders to something else that seems more interesting at the time. Nonetheless, I feel that this amazing ability to think quickly and focus on what takes his fancy are the qualities that allow him to be good at the piano. I reminded Adrian of the need to be respectful, as at this time he is the less experienced than me. I often feel very guilty being so harsh with him, and I told him so, but he really does need to distil his attention so that he gets the maximum benefit from the limited time that we have. That said, there were some good sections of the lesson, namely the detail in which scale playing was approached and the rhythmic attention that *Sonatina in A Major* received, a new piece that he is still learning. I reminded Adrian to listen to the recording that I sent him, and to learn the rhythmic counting along with the notes, so that time is not wasted fixing errors that need not be there. Jane mentioned that she is having trouble downloading the mp3 that I sent, so I offered to make both boys a CD, which they seemed excited about.

- ‘Race car brain’: He has an amazing ability to think quickly, but can become distracted easily.
- Adrian needs to be constantly reminded about matters of interpersonal respect and time efficiency within the lesson environment.
- Expressive and stylistically authentic playing comes from systematic layering of tasks over an extended period; there is no need to ‘fix’ everything at once.
- Fiery rhythm and a dynamic triple lilt for Elfin Dance.
- Listening to the recording is helpful in ‘piecing everything together’.

Lesson 3: 2 March 2014

This was a fantastic lesson and Adrian knew it. He seemed focused on maximising the limited time that we have. I reminded him that if he was as smart as I thought he was, he would value the opportunity to gleam as much knowledge from his ‘expert’ teacher as he could. Adrian’s scales had really improved, demonstrating a succinct knowledge of body movement and general alignment of the whole playing mechanism. There was an interesting discussion regarding flexibility of the thoracic spine, and how important it is to tilt the pelvis slightly back in order for the head to sit tall atop the spine. At Adrian’s instigation, we started on arpeggios this week; it’s encouraging to see his autonomy growing. He had corrected the fingering for chromatic scales and ‘asked’ me to complement him on his improved distal joints. We started exploring In the Wind, including aspects of timing, time signatures, and listening to it on the computer. As I demonstrated, he asked me about the overall crescendo on the first line which he guessed might have something to do with the wind enveloping the space or person, and carrying them off on a pictorial journey. We also covered the first page of the Mozart Viennese Sonatina in A Major. The right-hand timing was spot on and I helped him with the next few bars in terms of timing, sound, fingering and gesture, all of which were coached, albeit in a scaffolded manner. Adrian asked me what ‘4-5’ on the next page meant and I proceeded to demonstrate and explain the concept of finger substitution, which he and Jane both found interesting. During the final minutes of the lesson, we managed to squeeze in some work on Grieg’s Elfin Dance. We corrected some rhythms and notes, enhanced the triple lilt and forward flow, and applied cautious use of the pedal so as not to muddy the ethereal texture. That said, the piece was sounding spooky and polished overall. Adrian is a clever boy and he knew that he had had a very productive lesson. He even said so, saying, ‘Great lesson!’ It will be interesting to see how things go this week. He really seemed to take on board what I had suggested during the previous lesson, not only with regard to his playing, but also in terms of his general attitude to learning, the learning environment and being aware of how his actions affect those around him.
- It’s important to remind students that scales and other technical work help to ‘prime’ the whole body for playing, are useful in addressing concepts related to joint alignment and freedom of the whole playing mechanism, and can serve as vehicles to develop body awareness and ‘expressive touch’.

- General posture and body awareness need constant review here, as there is a tendency to over-extend the pelvis, causing the head to topple and vertical alignment to be compromised.

- Adrian’s general attitude towards the value of the lesson, and his interest in productivity have crystallised this week. Even so, he does seem to thrive within a definitive master-apprentice framework.

- He loves positive praise, craves it and ‘asks’ me to validate his improvement.

- Creating interest in new repertoire by listening, using imagery and discussing interesting aspects within the score – Adrian loves to ask questions!

- Adrian copes quite well with integrating rhythm, fingering, sound and gesture simultaneously, if approached in a scaffolded manner.

- Expressive interest comes from a sense of forward flow, a sense of direction and ultimately, a sense of purpose in the playing.

- Doing well with the piano seems to be helping Adrian build his self-confidence, his self-awareness and his awareness of the needs of those around him.

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Lesson 4: 9 March 2014

We had a very productive lesson today, even if there were some initial issues with Neil creating a distraction. There was a golden moment within the opening bars of Mozart’s Sonatina, where the two hands punctuate the two-part texture with their own melodic line. Adrian seemed to respond well to the ‘hand-over-hand technique’ that I used with Finn the day before. I used this technique to heighten Adrian’s awareness of the contrast in upward velocity between the up movement of a two-note slur and the up movement of a single staccato note. Overall, Adrian continues to improve his scale and arpeggio technique. In order to reach the extremes of register, I used the mop to encourage him to keep his head upright when tilting sideways on his hips. With lots of metaphoric imagery and discussion regarding In the Wind, we also discussed and compared different applications of pedal. This was a welcome example of collaboration, as I often feel that I dominate the lesson too much. The piece really
suits Adrian and I tried to motivate him to work on it further by suggesting that it is an excellent competition piece, mainly because it sounds much harder than it actually is. I helped him learn the next few bars and he really seemed keen to try it. Probably the most frustrating part of the lesson was working on the double thirds technique, possibly due to Neil and Jane’s constant arguing interrupting my train of thought. However, with some coaching and general encouragement, Adrian has made progress with his technical work, and I reminded him of four key ingredients: posture, feet position, distal joints and an upright position of the head and neck. He has started to put the hands together for Major, minor and chromatic scales, and had learnt two new arpeggios independently. I asked him to practise his arpeggios with hands separately, and extend the compass to four octaves. We finished the lesson with some AMEB Grade 5 Aural Tests, which weren’t too good, as Adrian does have some problems pitching his voice. He tends to sing the notes flat, to the point of being several half tones out. I’ve seen this before with children who have perfect pitch; they can be poor singers, at least initially. This will definitely be an area that will need constant and probably weekly practice over the coming months. I demonstrated and asked Adrian to complete one sight-reading example per day, suggesting a coding system so that he and Neil don’t get their requirements confused.

- Seeing the expressive tonal properties of a two-part ‘duet’ texture as two unique gestural patterns that are woven together seems to work very well for Adrian, as it gives him something tangible to strive and listen for.
- He responded well to the ‘hand-over-hand technique’, where the speed of the hand’s ascent correlates with tone quality and articulation.
- Mop prop for encouraging forward pelvic tilt and free movement from the hips.
- Imagery for In the Wind.
- Collaboration and discussion within a master-apprentice framework, e.g. pedal ideas.
- Competition and performance really motivate him, and provide incentive to meet learning goals.
- Four key ingredients: Posture, feet position, distal joints, upright head and neck.
- Recognise and validate learning autonomy.
- Clear expectations and definitive goals.
Teacher self-reflection and planning.

Lesson 5: 16 March 2014

Another great lesson; Adrian continues to move forward, slowly but surely. His attitude and approach to the lessons has matured considerably in the last few weeks. He genuinely seems willing to extract the most out of the lesson, and appears to want to collaborate with me rather than dominate and assume that he has all the answers already. He really is playing the Mozart Sonatina with a lot of stylistic maturity already. The first page is quite fluent and he has continued to make progress. I encouraged him to employ gesture to help ‘unlock’ details of articulation, expressive sound and coordination. Also we discussed the need for an ‘elasticised’ wrist so that tricky fingering can be achieved without any hardness in the sound. Being a Classical sonata/sonatina, there is plenty of gestural activity anyway, but it is often different within each hand, meaning that a scaffolded approach is needed, and separate hands practice is crucial to automating confident and fluent movements. Adrian played In the Wind really well with interesting talk of using pedal to create greater swell in the sound at the beginning of the piece, as well as the using the analogy of a tornado tossing people and property. I suggested that the diminuendo and ritardando aspects of the ending could be likened to the tornado steadily moving to another town to unleash its destructive power. The piece really suits him and he has learnt it very quickly. Jane said that he really likes it and this is of course will impact his ability to successfully convey the expressive, pictorial character. Invention in A Minor has a lot of potential, but Adrian is still playing the piece with a tendency to quicken the tempo when using crescendo, creating considerable instability in the overall pulse. I asked him to play the piece with the metronome on quaver = 110. Actually we did a bit of team playing and by the end of the lesson, he really seemed to be noticing how he is rushing. While not perfect, I could hear him starting to adjust the tempo. The actual expressive imitation is working reasonably well overall, but he is getting carried away with the tempo in an effort to be more expressive. We also had time to further discuss the circle of fifths and complete the chord progressions for Major keys, up to and including A-flat Major.

- Collaboration rather than domination from either party.
- Progress is consistent, as we ‘fix one thing at a time’.
A holistic approach to articulatory detail, expressive tonal shape and coordination through expressive gesture. Gesture facilitates expressive playing, rather than simply being a by-product of expressive playing.

- Analogy: Elasticised joints, particularly the wrist.
- Gestural movement must become automated and confident with hands separately, particularly when each hand utilises its own unique choreography.
- Tornado analogy for crescendo, decrescendo, ritardando: Linking sound with ‘mind movies’.
- A ‘fascination’ with the piece seems to help Adrian learn quickly, and impacts positively on his ability to successfully convey the pictorial character, increasing its expressive potential.
- Definitive explanation of ‘errors’ and remedy through ensemble playing.
- Keyboard harmony

Lesson 6: 23 March 2014

Adrian and his brother continue to impress me with their recent change in attitude. While still cheeky, they both seem more serious, happy to get on with the job at hand without interrupting the flow of the lesson with irrelevant questions. It was a relatively short lesson, as I had accidentally spent 60 minutes with Neil. Adrian played In the Wind and had finished learning the whole piece. After helping him correct the register placement of the middle section, we moved to coordination and gesture drills, with noticeable improvements in tone and ease of execution. It seems that secure coordination allows the expressive aspects of the music to shine more readily. We turned our attention to Mozart’s Viennese Sonatina, which appeared to have regressed since last week. It didn’t take too long to realise that Adrian had been playing the piece too fast and ‘pokey’. We reviewed the gestural choreography, and I asked Adrian to play more ‘deliberately’. That really seemed to enrich the sound, and both he and Jane agreed. The complementary voicing of the bass in the opening section was missing when compared with previous weeks, but after reminding him to ‘roll’ through the notes with varying speed, Adrian’s playing came to life again. He asked me about the overlapping of voices in the treble at the top of page two, and I suggested that he should probably ignore the written fingering and just employ non-legato, as his hand is too small. I explained that the alternative would likely result in tension and clumsiness, hardly what you want for such an elegant piece. I also
introduced Adrian to his new piece *Little Bird* by Grieg and he had a try. We ended the lesson with AMEB Grade 5 aural tests, all of which seemed to have improved significantly since the previous lesson.

- It certainly helps to be a pedagogical chameleon! I am finding that, to a large extent, I adapt my teaching style and philosophy to suit different families, their shifting expectations and educational goals, and potential emotional association of ‘piano lessons’.
- ‘Gesture facilitates coordination and coordination facilitates gesture’. Both appear to facilitate a more rounded sound and improve overall confidence, perhaps in turn opening the door to greater self-expression.
- Expressive gestural interplay appears to help Adrian ‘roll’ through the notes with varying speed, equating to varying tonal shape.
- ‘Rediscovery’ puts a positive spin on the revision of previously learnt concepts.
- Parental feedback: ‘Yes, that does sound more expressive’.
- Edited fingering must be adjusted, as stretching appears to cause inordinate forearm tension, uncoordinated movements and a clumsy sound.
- Regular aural ‘training’, rather than last-minute ‘testing’.

*Lesson 7: 6 April 2014*

I am very excited with Adrian of late, and it seems that he is becoming more and more ambitious. He told me today that he wants to play the Mozart *Sonatina* at the Queensland Piano Competition in September, and it’s only the start of April. He’s certainly planning ahead, and it’s great to see his confidence growing. He’s doing remarkably well to remember six pieces with a high level of musical detail. When I suggested that he play *Elfin Dance* at the upcoming performance workshop on 4 May, he was initially concerned, but with a little prompting, he soon played the whole piece! It surprised me, as I know that he hasn’t played it for a number of weeks. He had done a good job finishing *Sonatina*, and I praised him on his ability to work independently. His learning capacity and the rate at which he can complete set tasks have improved quite a lot this year. In terms of preparatory movement and building the expressive tonal shape of a phrase, there were some nice moments in *Sonatina*. As the writing is very orchestral and requires a wide hand span, double rotary movement was used on page two, where building momentum is far more effective in creating
volume than ‘pressing’. I reminded Adrian that the left hand plays an important role in defining character, and I suggested using tonal shape when playing soft staccato to give the piece a three-dimensional texture. This could be a good analogy to use, particularly if the student has seen a movie in 3D. We then moved to Little Bird, which he has done very well with, though the compound duple timing did require review. Adrian has become very quick to fix errors, unlike a year or two ago, where inaccuracies were often hard to shift. We did some rotary drills for coordination and lightness of touch, which was of interest too. I mentioned that perhaps we could look at Adrian doing a concerto movement as an extra list for his Grade 5 exam, which he will probably sit during August.

- Growing confidence, ambition, and setting personal goals.
- Verbal validation of growing learning autonomy.
- ‘Preparatory’ gesture helps to ‘recycle’ energy and appears integral to building the expressive tonal shape of a phrase.
- Double rotary movement facilitates greater volume through momentum, eliminates harshness in the sound, and reduces the propensity to press or ‘keybed’ the notes.
- ‘Aim for a 3D sound’: The volume, the timbre and the articulation.
- Rotary movement facilitates coordination and can be ‘taught’ in a scaffolded manner using the ‘add-a-note technique’.

Lesson 8: 13 April 2014

I have waited for several days before writing this reflection. The lesson with Adrian’ brother Neil was so draining; Jane was extremely angry and I had a bad headache for the next couple of days. I still feel very tired actually, but it’s probably because I have been doing quite a few interviews the last couple of weeks, with another scheduled for this evening. Adrian’s lesson was very good, as he is racing ahead with his progress and taking more and more ownership for his learning. We had the interview at their home two days before this lesson, and while some of his answers were slightly unusual, his reference being ‘special’ stands out. Adrian defined talent as something that ‘surprises people’. The lesson started with his new piece, Concerto in D Major by Haydn (first movement). He had completed the first half page that I had set, and we spent some time changing a few fingerings and doing some coordination drills. We also started planning the expressive aspects of repeated notes, and where in the bar
they ‘fall’. It would be interesting to highlight that planning these concepts starts early on, meaning that expression is not something that is added in during the later stages of the learning process. We also worked on voicing and the use of weight/free fall to create decrescendo within the detached melodic line. I set him some more work to complete, asking whether I should ‘give him the answers’ in terms of fingering. It was interesting to note that Jane suggested that we ‘give him a go first’, meaning that she was keen to encourage his learning autonomy. He had done quite well with Little Bird, despite a few problems with the compound duple pulse at the bottom of page one. Again, the use of ‘the basic stroke’ becomes important to create tonal shape and forward flow with the two-note chromatic slurs, as well as fluidity with the right-hand demisemiquavers. Another point of interest was Adrian’s ‘knees-hand-hand’ while I played the piece, thus encouraging a sense of the triple metre away from the piano. Adrian continues to impress me with his progress, and I find it hard to believe that he has only been learning for three and a half years.

- Adrian sees himself as ‘special’. There’s an inner drive there that fuels his progress, which in turn gives him the self-confidence to achieve more and more, resulting in an even bigger ‘payoff’.
- He wants to ‘surprise people’ with his ‘special playing’.
- Adrian likes me to set small achievable goals that he can get excited about showing me at the following lesson.
- It’s important to start planning an ‘expressive’ reading of the piece early on, and Adrian understands this. I think he now realises the importance of doing one thing at a time. If fingering, notes, basic sound, phrase shape, voicing and metrical ‘rules’ can be implemented in small sections, foundations are set for a stylish, ‘expressive’ outcome as time goes on. This stands in contrast to a philosophical stance where notes are learnt and then the expressive detail becomes either ‘the icing on the cake’ or is seen as something that is the student’s responsibility, and should ‘happen naturally’.
- Rather than relying solely on verbal explanation, metaphor or demonstration that he is then expected to imitate, actually describing how the three-dimensional properties, direction and speed of the gesture work to create the volume, articulation and tone colour of a note/notes, appears to be a more tangible way for Adrian to achieve the desired result. He is then encouraged to
assimilate that concept into his expressive gestural vocabulary, ready for use in a similar setting, e.g. forearm free fall at rates of decreasing velocity creates a decrescendo across a series of staccato notes.

- Jane supports his learning autonomy and seems to understand the bigger picture, namely long-term engagement and fostering the learning triangle between student, parent and teacher.

- It’s important to strike a balance between attending to musical detail and providing opportunities that allow Adrian to ‘hear’ the piece while he ‘feels’ it with his entire body.

- The overall forward and up movement of the arms appears to provide the necessary momentum to facilitate the speed and coordination of the smaller trills/tremolo movements of the hands and fingers, i.e. the bigger proximal muscles of the arm seem to assist the smaller distal muscles of the hand and fingers, and they may be seen as interdependent parts of the whole playing apparatus.

Lesson 9: 19 April 2014

The time flies by when I’m teaching Adrian. He learns so easily and I really enjoyed every minute of the lesson. The boys came to my home today, as it’s Easter Saturday and I thought we should squeeze in another lesson. Next term will be busy due to concerts and masterclasses. Adrian played the first couple of pages of Concerto in D Major and once again, he was able to complete a lot of work independently. There were a few rhythmic errors, but they were quickly corrected, and that left us more time to explore tone and technique. Some really notable moments included making a scale expressive via a ‘technical’ approach, using the breath and a small ‘rocking’ movement from the hips to highlight the leaning notes within the Classical style, and making a staccato scale seem more alive by using tonal shape, expressive gesture and the whole body to connect the player, listener and piece together as one. There were many useful concepts covered here, particularly using the breath to coordinate movements of the body with expressive gestural activity of the arms. I reread the article by Elaine King (2006) regarding breathing in piano performance and that gave me some inspiration. Adrian had completed all but the last line of Little Bird. He’s doing really well with setting himself small, achievable goals each week. The overall shape of the piece is coming along quite nicely, particularly the downward chromatic
spirals in the middle section, which we had worked on last lesson. Of interest is the use of ensemble playing and ‘dancing’ to get a better feel for the compound duple lilt. It did seem to help, and I must remember to try it more often if Adrian is having rhythmic difficulty. We finished the lesson by outlining some goals for the remainder of the semester. Adrian’s next performance will be at the workshop on 4 May where he will play five pieces – *Elfin Dance, Viennese Sonatina, Jinker Ride, In the Wind* and *Invention in A Minor*.

- Teacher in ‘flow’?
- Adrian is very inquisitive and is quickly transforming into an efficient, autonomous learner, setting himself small, achievable goals each week.
- Injecting expressivity into a scale via a technical/analytical approach as opposed to an emotional one.
- Using the breath and a forward pelvic tilt to highlight leaning notes within ‘Classical’ two-note slurs.
- Using the breath to coordinate overall body movement with expressive gestural activity of the arms works well here.
- ‘Making a staccato scale seem more “alive” by using tonal shape, gesture and the whole body to connect the player, the listener and the piece together as one’.
- Using ensemble playing, expressive gesticulations and ‘dancing’ appears to really enhance the compound lilt in Adrian’s playing.
- Imagery and motor affective metaphor: ‘The little bird is flying in downward chromatic spirals’.
- Making time in the lesson to discuss and set short-/long-term goals together with parental input and awareness.
- I’m glad that I still have enough interest to ‘try out’ new concepts with my students, even if I’m not sure whether they’ll be effective. This is the core of reflective practice/action research.

*Lesson 10: 27 April 2014*

Adrian is really on a roll now. His confidence, focus and progress are increasing each week, and he continues to forge ahead, especially with his ability to study new sections of music independently. To be honest though, I’d probably prefer to watch this lesson again, as it’s only the following day that I’m writing this, and I’m having
trouble remembering specific detail. The lessons are starting to merge together in my mind. I do remember some good talk regarding fingering and rotary freedom within the left-hand demisemiquavers of Little Bird, which might be worth another look. We did have a lot of discussion regarding the concerto as an art form, explaining and demonstrating how the two parts combine together. Adrian (and Neil for that matter) did seem very interested in knowing more about the score. Sparking Adrian’s interest in the ensemble aspect is such an important part of the learning, and I was glad that Jane didn’t see this discussion as a waste of time. I might ask Adrian next week if he enjoys being the soloist, as I think that being fascinated with the piece is definitely a major factor in achieving an expressive reading. A large part of the lesson was spent on rudiments of fingering, rhythm and ‘setting the scene’ for future lessons. I actually think that Neil’s lesson was the best he has had for quite some time, and there is valuable material in terms of character, breathing, touch and solutions to the technical demands of left-hand semiquavers. It would be good to review this in the future, especially talk regarding the clockwise and anti-clockwise wrist movements that facilitate speed, tonal shape and overall character.

- An independent learner!
- Fingering, alignment and ‘three-dimensional movement’ appears to facilitate left-hand trills.
- Fingering, notes, rhythm, and background knowledge of the piece: ‘Setting the scene’ for future lessons, right from the beginning.
- I think that Adrian really enjoys the concerto because he feels ‘special’ being the soloist.
- Being fascinated with the piece seems a major factor in achieving an expressive reading.
- Neil’s lesson: Clockwise and counterclockwise elliptical movement seems to facilitate speed, fluency, tonal shape, voicing and ease of execution.

Lesson 11: 11 May 2014

Quite a lot of ‘discoveries’ here, as Adrian continues to power ahead with his beautiful and refined playing. I gave him some feedback regarding the performance workshop and we worked on Little Bird and his Haydn Concerto. There was a good example of using expressive gesture to induce crescendo (‘feel the melodic stretch’) between D# and C in the right hand of the Concerto just before the change to A
Major. We fixed a couple of rhythmic imperfections and did some chaining drills to help with physical execution of right-hand semiquavers. This led to an interesting segment on ‘expressive pointillism’, where not every note need be ‘expressed’ or highlighted. I suggested that progress on *Little Bird* had stalled because Adrian was ‘flapping too much’, instead of the demisemiquavers being like a shimmer of light on the feathers or perhaps the bird momentarily ruffling its feathers. I suggested that he avoid hesitation, where a sense of forward-flowing purpose could be likened to a bird in flight (motor affective metaphor). I suggested something similar in Neil’s lesson, where he might create a less static and more life-like performance of *Grasshopper’s Wedding* by imagining and then embodying the movement of a grasshopper. I reminded Adrian to keep practising his scales and arpeggios, and to begin revising the *Pirates* duet in preparation for the piano duo festival in August.

- Adrian’s playing is beautiful and refined.
- Using gesture/double rotary movement to induce a crescendo, to ‘feel the melodic stretch’ and to provide a visual cue to the listener.
- Gaining mental confidence and physical freedom through chaining gestural fragments together, one step at a time.
- ‘Expressive pointillism’: Each individual note plays a small but important part in the overall expressive effect.
- Imagery and motor affective metaphor: ‘The demisemiquavers are like light shimmering on feathers, or perhaps the little bird momentarily ruffling its wings’, i.e. ‘keep the piece forward flowing like a bird in flight’
- Use movements that ‘suit’ the piece: For a more life-like and realistic sound picture, when playing pictorial, programmatic music, think how the central ‘character’ might move, and then aim to embody those qualities within your playing.

*Lesson 12: 12 May 2014*

Adrian came over to my home tonight for an extra lesson. He’s been such a pleasure to teach lately and really deserves some extra encouragement. We worked mainly through the *Pirates* duet and it was much better than I thought that it would be. The first couple of pages are fine in terms of rhythm and sound, but in order to enhance forward drive, I did suggest that he review the type of gesture used to execute repeated chords. The last two pages are fine in terms of notes, but he is having
difficulty alternating between simple and compound time. We set the metronome on quaver = 120, and slowly worked our way through all troublesome spots. I attached highlighted tape on all bars in simple time. After this I heard *Little Bird*, and he had improved in some areas. We reviewed the compound duple lilt, and also the tone colour of line three, where the writing descends into the bass. I suggested that it sounded more like a ‘dead chicken than a little bird’, but a few alterations to the way he was using gesture saw further improvement. A significant amount of time was spent of scaffolded exercises with the demisemiquavers at the bottom of page one. I explained that fingers three and four share the same tendon, so we must work harder to train those fingers to ‘think for themselves’. I showed him some ‘Pischna’ type exercises to start this process, though I did caution him to play them for no more than a couple of minutes. Mentally and physically, we deconstructed the five-note figure to ‘let go of the glue’ between fingers and mind, so often the cause of technical limitations that affect sound and clarity. At every stage of this process, I encouraged Adrian to breathe life into the notes using preparatory movement, and to avoid ‘starting cold’.

- ‘Changing the gesture changes the sound’.
- Using gesture appears to give a more ‘life-like’ sound, e.g. ‘it sounds a bit more like a dead chicken than a little bird!’
- Preparatory movements seem to ‘breathe life’ into the notes.
- Metaphor: ‘Let go of the glue’/’don’t start out cold’.
- Technical limitations seem to be hindering confidence, fluency, clarity and expressive sound.
- Using the ‘add-a-note technique’ at a fast tempo and in numerous permutations seems to help train him to ‘let go of the glue’ between the fingers and in his mind.
- ‘All that is gold does not glitter’ – we worked our way through the troublesome spots with the metronome and I attached highlighter tape to remind him what to review during the coming week, i.e. this process is vastly more important than it is sometimes perceived.
Lesson 13: 18 May 2014

Sometimes I find Adrian’s inability to ‘capture’ rhythm really frustrating. He and Andrew came over for a rehearsal of *Pirates* last Friday night (16 May) and it became obvious that for all his gifts, he can sometimes be quite inflexible, especially when working with someone else. I felt that I was quite patient during the rehearsal, but with little progress after working extensively on rhythmic stability and continuity of tempo in today’s lesson, I berated him for being unprepared and inflexible, and he cried and ran out of the room. Neil took over the lesson and had done very well with his pieces. Adrian did come back in sometime later and we worked on the Haydn *Concerto*. I did apologise after the lesson and said that I was sorry, but I still felt bad. Anyway, in terms of material, there was good use of the two pianos for demonstration and correction of rhythm. I think that’s one of the main advantages of teaching at Young Con, as utilising two pianos and the physical and mental space that that brings is far better than being cramped into a small studio with an upright. Demonstration is such an immediate and powerful tool, especially when students don’t respond to verbal direction quite as effectively.

- Adrian is better suited to working solo unless he is given lots of space to review.
- Be direct, but not unkind; he doesn’t respond well to subtlety and can sometimes be quite inflexible to change.
- Working with two pianos ‘as a team’ vastly improves his ability to ‘digest’ the rhythmic detail, an area that he has always found challenging.
- As opposed to a small studio with one piano, teaching at Young Conservatorium gives me the mental and physical space that I need to do the job well.
- Demonstration and imitation seem to suit Adrian better than verbal instruction.

Lesson 14: 25 May 2014

As with other Intermediate students this week, a considerable amount of time was spent on technical work, which in itself is very useful, as the concepts reviewed relate to repertoire, and vice versa. ‘Gestures’ covered included pronation of the forearm for scales and arpeggios, particularly so for contrary motion scales. Adrian played
Invention in A Minor, but it appeared to have deteriorated a little. However, I know that Adrian will want to achieve his best, and he will work very hard this week to make that happen. There were a few problems with fingering at the end of the piece, which Adrian asked me to help him with. A lack of confidence here meant there was no climax, particularly as the powerful bass line moves in contrary motion to the treble. The tempo needed to be stabilised, and I directed Adrian to improve his voicing at the end of page one, where the hands ‘converse’. Another interesting feature of the lesson came when working on the Mozart Sonatina. Here expressive gesture and momentum were used to inject volume into the very top of the ascending scales, rather than allowing them to ‘bottom out’. As usual, I became very animated, and that really seemed to fuel Adrian’s understanding of the need to communicate the theatrical, operatic nature of the writing. Within Little Bird, a similar thing occurred before Andrew arrived for duet rehearsal the previous day. Through expressive gesture and vocalisation, I showed Adrian where ‘the cat attacks’ and where ‘the bird flies away into the distance’. It seems that linking expressive gesture and dynamic detail with metaphorical and/or pictorial representations can inspire an expressive and imaginative result, full of life and youthfulness.

- Technique isn’t necessarily a separate entity, as concepts of body position, alignment, sound production, tone and freedom of execution may directly facilitate expressive ideas. For example, pronation of the forearm to facilitate thumb passing in scales may be seen as part of a larger gesture that facilitates the expressive realisation of crescendo in an ascending melodic line.
- His initiative and sense of ownership are growing, as he asked me to help him with fingering.
- A lack of confidence with the rudiments of fingering, notes and geographic accuracy appears to be causing the piece not to climax appropriately.
- Analogy and imagery: As the hands are essentially ‘in conversation’, they need their own personality, articulation, animated tonal shape and sense of purpose, ‘like two cartoon characters’.
- Relating different registers of the piano to different instruments in the Mozart Sonatina seems to help Adrian ‘invigorate’ the sound.
- ‘Throw your arm into the top note so that it doesn’t bottom out’.


- ‘As usual, I became very animated, and that really seemed to fuel Adrian’s understanding of the need to communicate the theatrical, operatic nature of the writing’.

- Use of imagery and metaphor to define structural points within the music that resonate expressive significance, e.g. ‘this is where the cat attacks’ for the energetic climax of the middle section, and ‘this is where the bird flies away into the distance’ for the whimsical decrescendo and Tierce di Picardie in the closing bars of *Little Bird*.

- ‘It seems that linking expressive gesture and dynamic detail with metaphorical and/or pictorial representations of the piece can inspire an expressive and imaginative result, full of life and youthfulness’.

*Lesson 15: 1 June 2014*

Both boys had extremely good lessons today. I am finding Neil’s lessons more interesting that Adrian’s at the moment, as they seem to demonstrate many concepts relating to expressive gesture. For example, I discovered today that Neil is extremely touch-oriented, and that he really needs a lot of proprioceptive feedback as he plays to induce expressive movement. It’s not that he isn’t ‘movement-oriented’, but I think that he finds it hard to make a mind/body connection without some prompting. Neil and I worked on voicing and pedal in *Capriccio*, expressive shaping in scales, overall body, trunk and pelvic movement in *Minuetto*, and then exercises to help with joint alignment, clarity, rhythmic impulse, forward drive, tonal shape and overall dexterity.

Adrian was so proud to receive his medal. At only $10, it’s amazing what such a little amount of money can do in terms of recognising someone’s achievement. Hopefully it will spur him and the other students on to bigger and better things. Adrian had forgotten his books so we worked mainly on the *Concerto*. I played it with him on the second piano up to page seven, and then we worked mainly on revising/revisiting/reworking fingering for greater technical ease and enhanced tone quality in the opening section. There was an interesting moment where I suggested the interludes on the second page were really like a duel between soloist and orchestra. There was a big focus in the lesson on rhythmic fluency and clarity of scales, as this seems to induce expressive tonal shape. Various rhythmic exercises and ‘add-a-group’ technique were deployed to achieve this.
- Adrian was so proud of his medal. It validates my belief in him and helps him to process his achievement in a physical way.
- He finds concerto playing very exciting.
- Fingering often needs to be reworked from that printed, and sometimes revisited, always with the goal of what might facilitate optimal alignment and physical ease, and therefore, optimal sound quality.
- Confidence and technical ease of scales will allow their inherent tonal shape to be the listener’s focus.
- Rather than just diagnosing the problem, show how to achieve improvement through careful sequencing of practice techniques, i.e. Adrian seems to find real benefit in me taking him through the work to be done. In effect, I ‘show him the practice ropes’ that he can then apply for himself, both here and in novel learning contexts.

**Lesson 16: 9 June 2014**

Adrian and Neil both came to my home for an extra lesson because the Intermediate Recital is this Sunday. Adrian played *In the Wind* and it was very good, but in need of some expressive shaping, overall polish and structural definition so that the audience might better understand the piece. We talked about overall tone and character, and I made the analogy of ‘a devilish wind whipping up a bushfire’, where the various sections ‘narrated’ the sound story. I told Adrian to be sure that he wasn’t showing off by playing too fast, when really this piece, just like any other, needs a ‘show and tell’ approach. In order to illustrate the journey of the wind, the most obvious expressive devices employed were crescendo and decrescendo. The link between sound, gesture, expression and finger clarity can be seen as ‘four pieces of the same pie’

- What is the performer’s role? To ‘narrate’ the piece in such a way that the audience will ‘get’ what the piece is all about, i.e. ‘show and tell’ rather than ‘show off’.
- Analogy, imagery and teacher ‘theatrics’: The overall shape and character of the piece is like ‘a devilish wind whipping up a bushfire’.
- Four pieces of the same ‘piano pie’: Sound, gesture, expression and finger clarity.
Adrian and I had a good lesson – we worked extensively on all Major and minor arpeggios for his Grade 5 exam, and he seems to be doing quite well with the overall technique. Looking forward, it will really be a matter of getting more comfortable with the volume of material that he needs to be familiar with. I asked him to focus on arpeggios this week, and to be sure that harmonic and melodic minor scales are known. He continues to forge ahead with the Haydn Concerto, and really seems excited with his learning. He showed me the section where the right hand plays broken chords, so we worked with the clock analogy. This can be thought of as not a perfectly rounded clock, but more of an anti-clockwise ellipse, where the first note is played at 9.00, then the second at 6.00, then the third at 3.00 (while being sure that the elbow, wrist and finger align without inordinate tension), before moving to 12.00 on the fourth note of each group of semiquavers, ready to start the process again. There seemed to be a similar theme here and in the following section where the left hand covers an octave from D – D with the C# turn. It became quite apparent to Adrian and Jane that we don’t play a note and then shift, but rather we play the note while shifting towards the next, thus ensuring quick and even coverage without any lumps or bumps. There was a good example of taking a breath and dropping into the first note of the descending right-hand scale, enhancing forward flow, technical ease, and of course a beautiful sound. It seems that piano playing is not really about playing notes and then moving to others, but rather studying the three-dimensional relationship between the notes, and how we can ‘recycle’ and economise movement in order to achieve a natural, humanistic sound. I asked Adrian to study the next page in preparation for the lesson this coming Sunday. Neil had practised very well during the week, and presented the entire right hand for the Scriabin Prelude, complete with correct rhythm, tempo, metronome and gesture, leading to beautiful phrase shape. He is really starting to forge ahead more quickly than before. Apparently, he was very excited to receive his medal, and I can definitely see a huge change in his attitude these past couple of weeks. Both Adrian and Neil played very well at the Intermediate Concert. Adrian is very confident and polished, and Neil appears more aware of his overall body and spatial position when playing, enhancing his ability to communicate the piece to the audience, as well as the actual sound that he makes.
- Adrian is fascinated with the Haydn *Concerto* and really seems excited to be learning it.
- Analysing and studying the micro-movements by using the elliptical clock analogy in conjunction with optimal alignment of elbow, wrist, finger and a ‘quiet’ hand, i.e. no stretching between the fingers, seems to really help Adrian overcome his technical limitations, generates elliptical freedom, and in turn, allows cognitive resources to be directed to more creative aspects of the passage.
- Using the breath with a preparatory up movement appears to generate the momentum required to facilitate forward flow, a sense of purpose and a beautiful sound.
- ‘It seems that piano playing is not really about playing notes and then moving to others, but rather studying the three-dimensional relationship *between* the notes, and how we can ‘recycle’ the movements and economise our movements and achieve a natural, humanistic sound in doing so’.
- Adrian is a confident and polished player in performance.

*Lesson 18: 29 June 2014*

Adrian took the double lesson today, as Neil had been in Canberra for the past week. We didn’t cover a lot of repertoire, spending time revising scales and arpeggios, aural tests, sight-reading and general knowledge (stylistic characteristics and time frames for the musical periods). Adrian was having some trouble with the aural tests and was on the verge of a breakdown, but Jane and I were able to remind him that he is trying his best, and might need some more practice in order to improve this area of the exam. I don’t think he realises that it is only a small part of the exam. I reminded Adrian not to worry and instead be proactive in reviewing the lower grades 3 and 4, as well as Grade 5. His pitch with the higher and lower part-singing had definitely improved by the end of the session, and I photocopied some for him to do at home with Jane. I know that Adrian will try his utmost, as he’s determined to achieve the best result possible.

- Adrian sets himself high standards, and while not as sensitive as he used to be, he still has to be reminded that ‘the glass is half full’.
- Adrian is intrinsically motivated to do his best.
This was another good lesson, especially in terms of overall ‘connection to each and every note’ and ‘turning it up a bit’, to enhance audience understanding. I explained to Adrian that I do something similar in the lessons, so that children might ‘catch’ expressive ideas more readily. After reworking the opening section of Haydn’s *Concerto in D*, Adrian’s parents agreed that the end result was starkly different. After a bit of coaching with the overall philosophy of ‘performing’ the piece with ‘a little bit of yourself behind each and every note’, I remember Oliver nodding and saying, ‘totally different’. Adrian was having trouble with the semiquaver broken chords due to insufficient elliptical freedom, or ‘the clock technique’ as he likes to call it. I demonstrated how quickly and easily I could play the said passagework by using movement of the entire forearm in tandem with the hand and fingers. He said, ‘but aren’t you getting tired from that?’ I suggested that the bigger muscles of the upper arm can and should take that load, whereas the fingers and wrist were much smaller and needed help from their ‘big brothers’. It seemed to make sense to him. He only has a page or two to go, so I asked him to learn the last part including the cadenza. I encouraged him to inject life and spirit into each and every note, and to focus on gestural freedom and speed, and not just speed itself. I made sure that I was quick to say that he hadn’t done anything ‘wrong’, because I know that he can be quite sensitive to criticism, especially if he feels that he has tried his absolute best. I reminded him how he told me he was ‘special’ in the interview, so I suggested that he make his playing ‘special’ by making all notes and all sounds ‘special’ to listen to. I know that he will take heed, and I look forward to hearing his progress. We also covered three or four sight-reading examples, spoke about the stylistic characteristics of various musical periods, discussed the idea of ‘walking, listening and talking’, just like ‘moving, listening and playing’, and I gave him more aural work to practise. I also reminded Adrian to continue practising his technical work, especially the harmonic and melodic minors. He and Jane said they (he) had been doing so.

- Analogy: ‘I ‘turn it up a bit’ during your lessons, so could you do the same in your playing so that the audience understands your expressive intentions?’
- Taking the audience perspective and what they might find satisfying is a good way to deflect what may come across to Adrian as negative feedback.
- There is good talk in this lesson regarding a mind/body connection behind each and every note, and encouraging a multi-sensory approach to piano playing.
- Good example of parents noticing a difference (before/after).
- Evidence here that Adrian is absorbing and relabelling his gestural vocabulary, e.g. He calls elliptical movement ‘the clock technique’.
- Gesture allows for technical freedom and speed here
- A good example of student questioning whether using the entire forearm would be tiring, followed by analogy: Use your ‘big brother’ muscles in the upper arms to help the little ones in the fingers and hand.

Lesson 20: 20 July 2014

I’m finding it increasingly difficult to write these reflections, not entirely sure why, but I find it hard to remember what we were doing. It feels as though I may have enough data, and that perhaps I’ll be repeating myself if I continue to reflect on each lesson for the rest of the year. I also feel very tired balancing all that I have to do. Nonetheless, I will push on; things always reveal themselves in due course. Anyway, both Adrian and Neil continue to impress me with their industriousness. It feels like both boys really enjoy playing and expressing themselves through their music. As I have said before, though Adrian is acting as my case study, it is really Neil that is still proving to the most interesting, at least at the moment. Today he played the Scriabin Prelude hands together with beautiful flow, rubato, pedalling, an expressive touch, and interesting subtle nuance. I asked him why he likes the piece and while he said that he didn’t know at first, further probing revealed that he found playing the piece made him feel calm and peaceful. Adrian had a few epiphanies of his own. He is starting to realise that technical limitations limit his expressive intentions and make the playing uncomfortable and strenuous. He and I chose a few spots to work on – he wanted to show me the trill section. I ‘conducted’ him as he played, asking him to lean in from the hips when becoming louder in the left hand. When executing ascending semiquavers in the treble, his rhythm was wonky, and the touch uneven, so we also worked on position of the thumb, and alignment of upper body, forearm, wrist and elbow. Through a process of chaining and analysis, we were able to arrive at a musically satisfying result. In order to avoid forearm stiffness, there is interesting material combining forward pelvic tilt and double rotary movement when employing
crescendo. There was also an interesting part in the lesson where I dipped my wrist and got Adrian to feel the muscles in my forearm ‘freeze’, essentially what he was tending towards when not using the tip of a downward sloping thumb in passagework and scales. The last section of the lesson was spent reviewing scales and arpeggios. In terms of confidence, response time, dynamic contrast and overall speed, there is still quite a lot of work to do here, so I asked Adrian to put in a big effort this week. Adrian loves playing the piano, and both boys seem to really enjoy their lessons at present. Jane and Oliver also seem pleased with the degree of intensity, and the boys’ overall commitment to their progress.

- ‘Adrian had a few epiphanies of his own’: Technical limitations seem to inhibit comfort and self-expression; he showed me where and what was bothering him (good evidence of growing autonomy).
- Good example here of using the pelvic tilt as a means to inject greater energy and volume into the playing, i.e. concepts like these can be coached.
- Good example of combining hips and double rotary movement to facilitate crescendo and technical ease, without the need for pressing or forearm rigidity
- Evidence of teacher’s expressive behaviour via gesture and conducting.
- Good example of improving technical aspects of the score (Haydn semiquavers) through gestural analysis, alignment and ‘chaining’, with pleasing sense of tonal shape as a result, i.e. technical ease facilitates expressive freedom and vice versa.
- Good analysis (via muscle feeling and noting muscle ‘freezing’) of how a low wrist/thumb can create restriction and loss of expressive nuance.

Lesson 21: 27 July 2014

Another really good lesson today – both boys are really doing a good job and there is an almost competitive atmosphere in the air as to who can progress the most and who can receive the most positive feedback. Adrian had done exceptionally well with his progress on the Haydn Concerto, especially as the broken chord passagework has quickened up and sounds much less laboured. The best thing is that Adrian seems to understand why he was having trouble and is proud of having found a workable solution. We explored the left-hand semiquavers in a similar way, employing the idea of using elliptical gesture and playing notes ‘along the way to other notes’, both of which made a big difference to the ease of execution and the overall sound. During
the lesson, I often ask Jane and Oliver whether they perceive a (positive) difference in the sound and they usually agree. I helped Adrian learn some more of the cadenza, and we played in ensemble for a good amount of the time. I also asked Adrian and his brother what they enjoyed most about playing piano when their parents were out of the room, but as usual, ‘because it’s fun’ seemed to be the basic response. A really interesting (and really funny) part of the lesson was when ‘Professor Chan’ stuck his right-hand pointer finger up and muttered something like ‘okay’ or ‘got it’ as he cut me off because he knew what I was explaining and then proceeded to apply what he understood to be what I was asking for. Later in the lesson as he was ‘practising’, he did something similar, saying ‘no’ or ‘wrong’ if it wasn’t to his satisfaction. He takes ownership of what is happening, and I feel like I am acting as a guide, rather than someone who ‘fixes’ everything for him. Also, he often asks me about different aspects of the score, e.g. ‘Why does the orchestra play for so long there?’ or ‘What is that rest for?’ which tells me that he really wants to know the answers for himself and not just so that I will praise him. He told me that he wanted to play *Invention in A Minor* and *Jinker Ride* for the Queensland Piano Competition, which was a very odd coincidence, because I had previously thought that might be a second option to *Sonatina/In the Wind*. The last part of the lesson today was spent on melodic minor and harmonic minor scales. It seems that Adrian has definitely increased the tempo, but in the process, much of the clarity and the uniformity of touch has regressed. He isn’t using effective pronation when turning the thumb or keeping the upper arm muscles engaged so as to avoid a constantly changing forearm weight, which of course produces tonal errors and/or gaps in the legato. The other really interesting thing is that even though I said that he really ought to be more serious with these scales, he emphatically replied, ‘Yes, fair enough, but I have still got another four weeks, so I’ll be fine’. It seems that Adrian is aware of the strategies needed to improve and his confidence is growing as a result, and hopefully his anxiety about not being perfect will diminish in the process. I received notification this morning that his AMEB exam is on Wednesday, 10 September (today is the 28 July).

- Adrian really does seem to thrive in a competitive atmosphere.
- Adrian seems to demonstrate an understanding of technical cause and effect in this lesson, i.e. he seems to understand why he is having trouble and seems to have more of an idea of how he might implement a solution, e.g. In the Haydn
Concerto, the pace of the right-hand broken chords has increased and they sound much less laboured than last lesson.

- There is a good example of implementation of gestural choreography with the left hand in order to increase facility and the refinement of the sound, i.e. In the Haydn’s left-hand semiquavers, using double rotary movement and playing notes ‘along the way to other notes’ seemed to make a big difference to the overall ease of execution and the expressive nuance,

- Evidence of Jane and Oliver perceiving a positive difference in tone quality.

- In order to demonstrate gesture’s role in Adrian’s improvement, it would be good to contrast these segments outlined above with the previous lesson and perhaps next lesson.

- Why do you enjoy piano playing Adrian? Because it’s fun!

- Adrian is very curious about the details within the score.

- A really interesting (and really funny) part of the lesson was when ‘Professor Chan’ stuck his right-hand pointer finger up and muttered something like ‘okay’ or ‘got it’ as he cut me off because he pre-empted what I was explaining and then proceeded to apply what he understood to be what I was asking.

- ‘Guide on the side’: Two excellent examples of burgeoning learning autonomy in this lesson; as above and later when something wasn’t to his satisfaction.

- Evidence (and quotation) of Adrian’s growing understanding of his own capabilities and ownership for progress, and the strategies that might be most effective in meeting learning goals within the required time frame: ‘Yes, fair enough, but I have still got another four weeks, so I’ll be fine’.

Lesson 22: 10 August 2014

After a few issues relating to the duet rehearsal with Neil and Andrew on Friday night, this was a good lesson. Apparently both Adrian and Neil have been telling Jane to ‘shut up’ quite a bit this week, with Adrian swearing at her this morning before the lesson. However, both boys were very calm and studious, and we had a good rehearsal of Swan Lake. There were many examples of using tonal shape and blending parts in order to highlight the musical interest. I was working with Adrian, asking him to project the top notes with greater brilliance and volume, when he referred to the sound I described as being like a ‘red-eye’ gem stone. He then started talking about
different gemstones, their shape and properties, but then went off on ‘Minecraft’
tangent. Jane chastised him for wasting time, but I found what he was saying of
significance, at least initially. There is another excellent part of the lesson where
Adrian learnt to systematically shape the melodic line using a combination of
acoustical analysis and expressive gestural choreography. Adrian was able to achieve
what I was asking quite quickly, and with apparent understanding of the overall
concepts involved. In terms of confidence and speed, Adrian’s scales have certainly
improved, but there was a need to review the uniformity of touch through a more
efficient combination of forearm pronation and alignment of the elbow, wrist and
upper arm. Adrian seemed to know exactly what I was talking about, discussing how
he might review the movements slightly in order to improve the overall touch. We
also reviewed staccato, where there appeared to be some restriction in the left
forearm, enhanced the tonal uniformity and associated forward and backward
leverage of the trunk in contrary motion scales, and alleviated some restriction in the
right wrist within double thirds by analysing alignment of the hand and forearm.
Adrian played through the entire concerto with me on second piano, and then we
made some adjustments to the tempo between sections using the metronome.

- A good example here of coaching expressive tonal shape and blending
  registers in the ensemble setting.
- A good example of Adrian using his own analogy/imagery for timbral colour
  (‘red-eye’ gem stone).
- Adrian learnt to systematically shape the melodic line using a combination of
  acoustical analysis and expressive gesture.
- Fantastic evidence here of Adrian discussing how he might use gestural
  movement to improve the overall touch within scales.
- It seems that within technical work, concepts of body awareness and
  expressive gesture can be introduced, developed and then applied to repertoire.

Lesson 23: 11 August 2014

Adrian and Neil came to the house today for a make-up lesson, as they were away in
Sydney recently. As Adrian and I had worked on the Haydn Concerto yesterday, Jane
suggested that he play Invention in A Minor and Jinker Ride. It quickly became
evident that both pieces need considerable review/‘rediscovery’. While Invention in A
Minor starts off quite well, Adrian appears to become more and more ‘unaware’ of
the music, and the performance becomes faster and faster as a result. We spent time comparing the opening bars to those at the end of page one, and then worked towards matching tonal shape and articulatory detail, especially in the left hand. I asked Adrian to spend time ‘rediscovering’ and matching the expressive detail within each hand, essential to the style of the piece. *Jinker Ride* was far too fast, and Adrian was using inappropriate pedal. The whole piece was a bit of a mess really. However, a sense of forward drive was created via the analysis of the left hand’s speed of descent (strong-weak-medium-weak), and the realisation of sequential crescendo within the right-hand melody. Essentially, ‘planning’ an expressive outcome through the realisation of metrical ‘rules’ and melodic (vocal) inflection (Parnicutt, 2002).

- It seems that rebranding ‘review’ as ‘rediscovery’ is an effective way for Adrian not to take criticism personally.
- Not being entirely comfortable with the notes seems to diminish his ability to convey his expressive intentions.
- A good demonstration of ‘planning’ the expressive elements using acoustical analysis and metrical projection via gesture in the left hand of his Bach.
- Good example of ‘explaining’ expressive intent using vocal inflection (prosody).

*Lesson 24: 17 August 2014*

It seems like Adrian is back on track again. He practised with the metronome to organise *Invention in A Minor* and *Jinker Ride*, and both pieces sound much more settled. With the Bach, there was really good work regarding ‘sliding’ into the phrase; going towards the middle note and then back again. Adrian is smart, and I can tell that he understands and will implement what I ask him to do. We talked about the fact that lyrical and expressive playing can be seen as a ‘science’ as much as an ‘art’, and that if he was to apply these ideas to every entry of the subject, his performance would be much more expressive and sophisticated overall. We turned our attention to the top of the second page, where the left hand has the melodic interest. There are good examples of analysing which note of the phrase to go ‘towards’ and then ‘away from’. We also explored different fingerings, to order to choose which variation helps the hand to roll onto the notes without any bumps or abrupt changes to the tone quality. I suggested that he work on the first page and the top of the second as we did in the lesson, and we could take it from there next week. With *Jinker Ride*, there was good
use of expressive gesture, with varying speeds of ascent and descent to match the acoustical requirements. Adrian demonstrates increasing understanding of the correlation between expressive gesture and tone quality, and that we ‘choose’ movements to enhance the expressive, life-like, natural qualities of sound. I reiterated that those qualities induce an interest to listen, as they help to propel the musical energy forwards, rather than chopping the piece up into notes and beats. Neil and Adrian’s duet of *Swan Lake* had really improved, and we took three recordings on the iPad, looking, listening and analysing each one before re-recording. I gave them direction and musical explanation between each take. Jane said that she found this method of teaching valuable, particularly for Neil, due to its visual immediacy. I think that it’s a great tool, as it encourages the students to see themselves and their playing from an ‘outside’ perspective, not always easy to do as a young student. We finished the lesson with some Grade 5 aural tests. Adrian had clearly improved in this area, and was very pleased when I praised him. An interesting thing that Jane said: ‘You don’t have to be perfect, just meet your teacher’s weekly expectations’.

- Analogy: ‘Sliding’ in and out of the phrase to create crescendo and decrescendo.

- A good conversation regarding lyrical and expressive performance as a ‘science’, i.e. fostering a growth mindset where expression is seen as a skill that can be developed.

- Within the left hand of *Invention in A Minor*, there is a good segment where various fingerings are explored in order to find which combination allows for effective ‘rolling’ between the notes, thereby avoiding abrupt changes to tone quality.

- Within *Jinker Ride*, Adrian demonstrates increasing understanding of the correlation between expressive gesture and tone quality, and that we ‘choose’ movements to enhance the expressive, life-like, natural qualities of sound. I reiterated that those qualities induce an interest to listen, as they help to propel the musical energy forwards, rather than chopping the piece up into notes and beats, i.e. Encouraging expressive autonomy and application of known skills to novel situations.
- Adrian responds well to definitive and achievable weekly goals, where the emphasis lies with quality over quantity; Jane: ‘You don’t have to be perfect, just meet your teacher’s weekly expectations’
- A good demonstration here of using the iPad as an effective analytical tool, with Jane agreeing that it’s a valuable teaching tool because of its visual immediacy.

Lesson 25: 24 August 2014

Oliver came again today and as usual, Jane videoed the lesson on the family iPad. Both boys had good lessons, and seem increasingly motivated to try their best. One thing that really strikes me about both of them, is that if I say, ‘but you are still doing really well’, after giving them what they might perceive as negative feedback, they are quick to say ‘Yay!’ and then try even harder. It was a very intense lesson from start to finish, with Neil only receiving 15 minutes at the end, due to the boys rehearsing Swan Lake together and Adrian having a longer lesson. The boys are playing Swan Lake really well now, and like it when I give them a definitive ‘score’ e.g. 90% along with feedback. We listened to the orchestral recording, discussed the instrumentation, and I suggested that we could aim to achieve a similar tone colour on the piano. I asked Adrian to make his ‘oboe’ more ‘nasally’ and louder at the beginning, and I coached both boys in taking a breath at the ends of phrases, much like people singing, dancing or ‘playing in an orchestra’. There were some issues with Neil overplaying and Adrian underplaying towards the end, so we worked to ‘share’ the melodic line and support each other. They genuinely are playing well, so I hope they do well in the masterclass and the Brisbane City Hall concert next week. Adrian and I worked through Invention in A Minor for quite a while in the lesson. I see now that expressive playing is ‘developed’ over time, and is usually the result of hard work, planning, attention to detail and confidence, rather than something that is ‘either there or not’. Lots of good references to an overarching duple lilt, ‘where is the music going’, harmonic colour, rolling through the notes, choosing fingering for the best outcome in terms of comfort, fluency and sound, ‘planning’ crescendo and decrescendo, and questioning/self-reflection – ‘What are you doing/feeling in order to create that sound? Can you recreate it?’
- Even though Adrian and Neil are playing reasonably advanced repertoire for their age, they are still young and love verbal praise and encouragement as much as anyone; ‘Yay!’
- Adrian loves it when I give him ‘points’ that relate to how much improvement he has demonstrated, i.e. 90%.
- Listen, analyse and then imitate orchestral ‘colour’ in Swan Lake.
- A good example of ‘breathing’ and ‘connecting’ with the phrases.
- It seems that ensemble playing is an often underutilised but valuable way to encourage listening, and further developing expressive tone colour, rhythmic reliability and confidence.
- As demonstrated here, expressive playing can be developed over time, through attention to musical detail and the ability to ‘hear’ the bigger picture.
- Lots of good references in this lesson to: overarching duple lilt, ‘where is the music going’, harmonic colour, rolling through the notes, collaborating on finger choice for the best outcome in terms of comfort, fluency and sound, ‘planning’ crescendo and decrescendo, and questioning/self-reflection (‘What are you doing/feeling in order to create that sound? Can you recreate it at whim?’).

Lessons 26 and 27: 5 September 2014 and 7 September 2014

Adrian had an excellent lesson today, considering what a dreadful lesson we both had on Friday. He started crying after I gave him negative feedback about his playing not sounding as good as it could, and in particularly the lack of detail and sparkle in Sonatina, not to mention so many missing notes, errors and coordination problems with Little Bird. After talking with him and his parents, and thinking about it in the interim, I now realise that he hasn’t been practising with as much care and attention to detail at home of late, constantly telling Jane to ‘shut up’ when she tries to remind him to do so. As Oliver put it, ‘Adrian thinks he knows everything since he won the competition last year’. Adrian seems to have lost his enthusiasm for doing his best and without that, no amount of expressive gesture, coaching or even practising will make up for that shortfall. During his lesson of Friday night, I could tell that he wasn’t taking in what I was saying. Previously he would ask a lot of questions and say something like ‘oh, I get it’, before proceeding to play with increased feeling, shape, enthusiasm and colour. I couldn’t understand why such a good student would be so
uninspired to try his best. It could be that he’s a bit bored of the pieces now. At the
lesson on Sunday, Jane said that he had adjusted his attitude after taking on board
what I had said, resulting in increased enthusiasm and a desire to learn more about the
composers after reviewing some of the general knowledge notes. Along with Wendy
and Kelly’s lessons this week, I realise that without a student’s heart being in it, no
amount of expressive gesture or dynamic coaching is going to transform their playing.
The question is, ‘How do we get a student to love what they are doing?’ It’s a
complex question without a single answer, and I think that the solution fluctuates, and
is something that is different for each child. Adrian has his Grade 5 AMEB exam on
Wednesday. As I said to him during the lesson as a summed up each piece, ‘I feel that
you will do well with that in the exam, but in order to lift it to the next level for public
performance, or for the competition, or just for sake of achieving your best learning
goal, consider doing …’, and that seemed to resonate with him, leaving him with a
sense of perspective, achievement and an opportunity to improve further. As usual,
there was some good detail in the lesson, including the need to highlight cadences and
the modulation to E minor at the end of page one, how sequences ‘play’ with the
listener’s ears, and the realisation of the climax in the Bach, ‘speaking clearly’ in the
Mozart and ‘illustrating’ the story more definitively in the Little Bird and Jinker Ride.
Apparently, he and Neil have been listening to the pieces many times, and this really
seems to help them focus their thoughts and review what is important.

- It seems his progress has stalled because of a fixed mindset, where he has
  become over-confident, thinking that he doesn’t need to work hard anymore
  because he is ‘the best’. Oliver: ‘He thinks he knows everything since he won
  the competition last year’.
- Attitude is just that, ‘attitude’, and encouraging Adrian to avoid a fixed
  mindset while opening his mind to focus on learning goals seems paramount,
  i.e. process versus product orientation.
- Without a student’s heart being in it, no amount of coaching is really going to
  transform their playing. So the question is, ‘How do we get a student to love
  what they are doing?’
- Very strong parental support, interest and encouragement: Jane and Oliver
  understand the ‘process versus product’ trap, and as such, the ‘golden triangle’
  is extremely strong here.
- Analogy: ‘Speak to me clearly’ in the Mozart.
- Imagery and storytelling in the Grieg.
- Good example of ‘finding’ harmonic purpose (E minor cadence at the end of page one, Bach Invention),
- Analogy: Sequences that ‘play’ with the listener’s ears.
- Lots of auditory input of the pieces is proving very helpful in speeding up his progress.

Lesson 28: 14 September 2014

The thing that stands out with this lesson is Adrian’s increasing understanding of how, why and where expressive gesture might be used. For example, when I asked him what kind of movement he might use to generate volume and project expressive intensity within Invention in A Minor, he said, ‘double rotary movement’. There was good discussion regarding the need to slow down and ‘speak to me’, as he was, as usual, tending to speed up in order to become expressive. I asked Adrian to play the first few bars, then the middle few bars, and then the final few bars so that he himself could compare the three tempi before matching them. I think that he will play very well at the competition this Saturday, and it is good to see him taking feedback without getting upset. I explained to him that as an objective listener, his increasing the tempo was making me feel anxious, and that was the reason why he should unify the tempo throughout, so that the listener is able to ‘digest’ what they are hearing. Giving him a reason why such a directive might be a good idea did seem to make sense to him. The same idea came up in Sonatina, as he seemed to be racing and not taking the time to ‘illustrate’ what is happening harmonically and melodically. He doesn’t really like to use the metronome at home, but I suggested that it would be a good idea ‘here and there’, with a few spots to tidy up in terms of uniformity of the pulse. I tried to give Adrian some feedback that would be meaningful in an overall sense by helping him to feel that no one is perfect, but could rather strive to do their best in multiple areas, as everyone has natural strengths, as well as those things that are not so easy, e.g. Wendy needs to remember to implement partial practice, Kelly needs more overall strength and energy in her playing, Khoa needs to believe in himself more, Andrew needs to be himself more when he plays, Neil needs to listen for and project dynamic detail, and Adrian – you could be more mindful of not
rushing through your performances so that those listening can really enjoy your skills.

I can’t wait until next term – exciting times and new pieces ahead!

- Strong evidence of Adrian’s ability to articulate why gesture might be useful and in what context (using double rotary movement in the Bach so as to generate volume and project expressive intensity).
- Analogy: ‘Slow down and speak to me’.
- Taking the perspective of the listener and how they might best enjoy the playing (‘the tempo is making me feel anxious’ in the Bach and Mozart).

Adrian seems to take direction if he is given a reason why something isn’t ‘correct’; it gives him something tangible to improve, it helps to avoid negativity associated with criticism (turning it into meaningful feedback), and he is more likely to see me as ‘a guide on the side’ rather than ‘a sage on the stage’.

- It seems that over-praising isn’t effective with Adrian, and nor is under-praising, but perhaps being honest, encouraging and optimistic is.

Lesson 29: 5 October 2014

Adrian is so proud and excited to come to the lessons these days. The look on his face, his general demeanour, and how proudly he tells me what learning goals he has achieved, point towards immense personal, musical and creative satisfaction. We really do work well together, and I genuinely can’t wait to hear what he’s ‘got for me’. He was so excited to show me Alla Turca and Rage over a Lost Penny, both pieces that he chose himself, because in his words, ‘they are cheerful’. Independently, he had done very well with both pieces, but particularly the Mozart. It was so musically interesting and harmonically colourful, and I noticed that he was employing gesture and a slight forward thrust of the trunk to convey his expressive ideas. It’s that very personal involvement in creating the sound, the care of notation and nuance, and the energy and commitment that comes from within that really sets him apart. Of course the fact that he has had four years of good teaching has certainly paved the way. Our work together has given rise to an awareness of the interdependent relationship between mind, body and instrument, and has led to him developing his own understanding of ‘expressive gestural vocabulary’. In turn, this has given him greater command of expressive tone colour, has increased the number of expressive ‘templates’ at his disposal, and has afforded him the opportunity to encapsulate his
interpretative creativity. An interesting point of discussion that came about was the rolling chords in the left hand, where it becomes necessary to jump to the left as the fourth quaver of the bar is played in order to be ready for the following chord, i.e. where leaps are concerned, the first note is played on the way to the second. It became clear to me that some gestures come about not only to enhance expressive sound, but also to ‘solve’ technical challenges, in this case covering the large distance between one note and another in the most efficient way possible. Incidentally, after I suggested to Jane that Adrian play *Little Bird* along with the Haydn *Concerto* at the Intermediate Concert, she suggested that Adrian play the concerto only, as he doesn’t really like the Grieg. This goes quite a way to explaining why Adrian was having so much difficulty achieving his usual ‘perfect’ standard just before the exam. However, the question remains; is his lack of interest in the piece because he perceived that he wasn’t good at it, or was it that he wasn’t good at it because the piece didn’t fascinate him as others have?

- Evidence here (at the start of the lesson) of Adrian focusing on learning goals rather than talent and perfection.
- He has chosen two pieces himself because ‘they are cheerful’.
- There is good evidence in *Alla Turca* of his ability to implement what he knows to new situations (after four years of groundwork).
- Our work together has given rise to an awareness of the interdependent relationship between mind, body and instrument, has led to him developing his own understanding of ‘expressive gestural vocabulary’.
- Evidence here of using gestural analysis to overcome technical and expressive ‘deficits’, e.g. in the Mozart, the last quaver of the bar is played in the direction of travel so as to negotiate the leap and to provide the necessary thrust for the bottom note of the arpeggiated chord.
- Jane: It’s hard for him to be willing to fully develop the piece if he isn’t fascinated by it.

*Lesson 30: 10 October 2014*

Adrian didn’t have much of a ‘lesson’, as Neil took all but 15 minutes of the lesson. Adrian was very excited to show me what he’s been up to in *Alla Turca*, and he’s clearly doing a great job with it. He’s just so interested, and that is a quality that money can’t buy. We adjusted some of the chords so that it is more manageable for
him, especially as he was complaining about getting sore from playing the broken octaves towards the end. He also asked me about what fingering might be best in a couple of spots, and I helped him to decide which gives the best alignment, which ‘feels’ best and what each option ‘sounds’ like. It’s great to see his collaborative skills and sense of ownership developing. Tomorrow he is playing two pieces at the MTAQ Piano Competition Winner’s Concert, but unfortunately I won’t be able to make it, as I’ll be teaching. He really isn’t fazed, and only told me casually about it at the end of the lesson. Clearly, he is confident, and I know that he’ll do a great job. He mentioned that he was excited to see the older ‘diploma’ students and also told me that the winner of the 18-years section, William Shi, didn’t participate this year. He asked me why, and I said that once you win the top section, people usually go on to try their luck in more prominent competitions. Perhaps these might be at a national level like the Sydney Eisteddfod and then after that maybe something international. Adrian asked me what the most famous competition in the world is, and I suggested probably the Chopin competition in Warsaw or the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow. As his parents and I said, ‘dream big, work hard and enjoy all that you do’.

- A good example of his growing collaborative skills and sense of ownership. He asked me to help him with the fingering of the Mozart, and there is good discussion regarding fingering choice that reflects principles of joint alignment, comfort and sound.

- He demonstrates growing ambition and thinking into the future: ‘Dream big, work hard and enjoy all that you do’.

Lesson 31: 12 October 2014

Adrian didn’t have much of a lesson because Neil needed the time, but we did manage to squeeze in about 20 minutes. Adrian showed me how he had finished the last two pages of *Alla Turca*, successfully rearranging the notes as previously advised. He was doing well with the rolled chords on the whole, but I encouraged him to be more vigorous and ‘athletic’ in his approach, ensuring the fingers, wrist and forearm are aligned for maximum thrust and consequently, volume. I questioned Adrian regarding these points and he was very responsive, seeming to know the answers before I could give them, which is encouraging. I feel like I am acting as a mentor and he is really taking charge of his own learning now. It’s been a great year for him, both with his playing and with his general attitude, commitment, efficacy and learning autonomy.
He was awarded an A+ in his recent AMEB exam. According to Jane and Mimia, he played ‘beautifully’ in the MTAQ highlights concert, which is really something, considering I hadn’t heard his pieces since before the competition. He doesn’t need me once he gets beyond a certain point, because he is able to take charge, and I trust him to do his best. We finished the lesson playing the Haydn *Concerto*, which is very fulfilling for both of us, and I could tell his Mum and Dad were very proud. I helped Adrian with some small details, particularly to do with the final trill, and the uniformity of tempo throughout all sections. He was very keen to show me that he had ‘fixed up’ those few spots that we had worked on in the lesson last Sunday.

- Within the Mozart, there is a good segment where I encourage Adrian to check his finger, wrist and forearm alignment while garnering greater ‘athleticism’ in his gestural approach, so as to generate greater volume, excitement and physical ease.
- The transition from transfer to transformative learning has been most obvious this year (general attitude, commitment, efficacy and learning autonomy).
- Adrian’ Mum and Dad are very proud and encourage his effort.
- Within the Haydn *Concerto*, he wanted to show me that he had met the learning goals set in the previous lesson.

*Lesson 32: 17 October 2014*

As usual, we had a great lesson. Lately, Adrian has been waving and saying ‘hi’ with a huge grin when he comes into the room. I can tell he is just loves playing the piano. I asked him about it and he said that it makes him feel proud to play the piano. There was very good analysis of forearm and elbow angle in relation to the fluid execution of passagework in the final bars of page two in *Alla Turca*. The idea of playing the piano with an awareness of the entire body is so important, especially so here, as repertoire increases in difficulty. I chose about five or six things for him to ‘fix up’ and he seems to like having definitive goals to tackle. I see part of my role as being able to pick the ones that I think that he will manage in the timeframe and ones that I think are of highest priority. Today he was having trouble with the coordination of the hands because of a slight tendency to stretch between adjacent fingers of the right hand, which of course results in less than ‘pearly’ passagework and refined elegance. Further, rhythmic fluency and tonal beauty become stilted due to physical restriction. Towards the end where the left hand has to shift and roll along with the right hand, it
becomes more and more obvious that the relationship between sound, expressive impact, mental agility and physical ease are interdependent, and careful scaffolding via directive partial practice with all of the above in place at each step of the way proves time and time again to be an effective methodology, with Adrian and many others.

- Adrian: ‘I feel proud’.
- Within the final bars of page two in Alla Turca, there is good analysis of forearm and elbow angle in relation to fluidity of passagework, i.e. physical difficulties = musical difficulties.
- A good example of improving passagework by avoiding stretching between the fingers, i.e. rhythmic fluency and tonal beauty can be improved with a focus on overcoming physical difficulties, rather than a blanket diagnosis of ‘more practice’.
- Towards the end of the Mozart where the left hand has to shift and roll along with the right hand, it becomes clear that the relationship between sound, expressive impact, mental agility and physical ease are interdependent, and may be achieved through gestural analysis and partial practice, one step at a time over time, i.e. layering ‘progress upon progress’.
- Adrian seems to respond best to definitive goals to reach, and it’s really up to me to teach him how to prioritise and fulfil these.

Lesson 33: 24 October 2014

I spent most of the double lesson with Neil, but Adrian and I did have a ‘rehearsal’ of the Haydn Concerto. An interesting part concerning the semiquaver broken chords was the way that I was able to help Adrian overcome a tendency to ‘freeze’ his forearm muscles by choreographing an upward gesture at the end of one section. This may help him to release the muscles of the forearm before moving laterally to the following chord, thus eliminating the need to stretch for the notes, impeding the delivery of subsequent material.

- Within the right-hand broken chords of the Haydn Concerto, there is a good example of choreographing an upward gesture to facilitate lateral shift by ‘refreshing’ the muscles of the forearm instead of stretching.
Lesson 34: 31 October 2014

Adrian was all smiles after his two performances at the Intermediate Piano Recital yesterday – I was just so proud of him and I can’t wait to see what next year has in store. I have built him from the ground up, and together we have been on a journey that has brought him to where he is today. He did start with a little talent and curiosity, but a lot of hard work from him, his parents and myself is why he is where he is. It hasn’t been an easy ride, and there have been many bumps along the way. There have been technical issues to deal with, I have helped him develop his ‘expressive gestural vocabulary’ and his ‘expressive templates’, I have taught him how to deal with his perfectionism and to channel his often times explosive frustration into solving problems rather than creating more, I have taught him how to partial practise with a definite goal in mind, and best of all, after four years, he still enjoys coming, his curiosity is stronger than ever, and his learning autonomy is to be admired. Like Adrian, students may find that piano study offers much more than one may have first imagined, building their self-esteem and personhood in the process.

A1.5 Kelly (40 Lessons)

Lesson 1: 16 February 2014

This was Kelly’s first lesson in a few weeks and the first official one back at Young Con, so there was a good amount of material to cover. We started with scales where emphasis on rotary movement of the forearm, a loose wrist, firm distal joints and support of the upper arm and trunk help to support an even passing of the thumb, i.e. Technique is not just about curved fingers, but how the whole body can support the ease at the instrument that inevitably leads greater control of touch and sound. We worked extensively on the three movements of Haydn’s Little Concerto in C Major, as all movements were very well prepared, and I hadn’t heard the third or second
movements since before Christmas. There were lots of good examples of using expressive gesture in two-note slurs, as well as how overall dynamic width within a series of two-note slurs can help to create forward momentum and a sense of purpose. Also of note was the upward movement on thumbs that creates a lovely sense of shading and Classical elegance. There was good discussion regarding the way the mood of the three movements fit together neatly. The first movement is bold and regal, the second is tender, and the third is usually cheerful and spirited. We also covered the second movement of Mozart’s Concerto K467. There were a few spots where rhythmic coordination was an issue, which we worked through. I made an interesting analogy regarding taking the sound up and out of the piano and letting it bounce all over the walls and in and out of people’s ears. We also discussed the role of expressive gesture in supporting the music’s role to help the audience understand what was going on musically rather than sitting still and letting the sound ‘do all the talking’. A very good lesson overall, with plenty of gestural activity from both student and teacher.

- It seems helpful to see scales and other technical work as opportunities to create a whole body connection to the instrument that inevitably leads to more control of the touch, and therefore the resultant sound, rather than ‘exercises to help produce curved fingers’.
- The basic gesture: two-note slurs.
- Could expressive gesture help the audience to ‘understand’ the musical genre of the piece, i.e. a visual and aural representation of Classical elegance?
- ‘3D dynamics’: Localised dynamics contained within slurs that combine with the overarching tonal shape give the music a sense of direction and purpose.
- Analogy and imagery: ‘Taking the sound up and out of the piano and letting it bounce all over the walls and in and out of people’s ears’.
- Three different kinds of happy for the three different movements of the Little Concerto.

Lesson 2: 23 February 2014

Most of this lesson was spent reviewing Kelly’s theory homework and technical work, including Major scales, contrary motion and staccato sixths. Kelly had made significant improvement with many aspects of scale playing, including forearm pronation, distal joint reliability, effective elbow alignment and pleasing uniformity of
sound. I asked her to extend the compass to four octaves this week. She played most of *Invention in B-flat Major* with hands together, but it was quite flat and uninspired overall. In addition, there were many incorrect fingerings and lapses in fluency. I asked her to pull the hands apart, slow down to MM = 60 one quaver per beat, and to move out of the ‘note-learning’ phase. We explored aspects of gesture, rolling in and out of the notes, tonal shaping of rising and falling arpeggiated figures, and how a slight forward thrust with the upper body can be used to not only connect oneself with the piece, but also serves to ‘explain’ to the listener what is happening musically. That is, the gestures of the arms and body match what is happening with the sound, making it easier for those listening to digest what they are hearing. I could not help but think that more progress could have been made, considering how well Kelly plays her other pieces. It might be that I am expecting too much and need to remind her that it’s possible to apply what we learn in one piece to another.

- She seemed to make significant improvement with scale playing within a single week.
- ‘Rolling in and out of the notes’.
- ‘A slight forward thrust with the upper body can be used to not only connect oneself with the piece, but also serves to ‘explain’ to the listener what is happening musically. That is, the gestures of the arms and body match what is happening with the sound, making it easier for those listening to digest what they are hearing.
- At least here, Kelly doesn’t seem to be able to apply what she ‘knows’ to novel situations. Does she like the piece? Is her heart in it? Why is she not playing the piece ‘musically’?

*Lesson 3: 27 February 2014*

Jean told me that Kelly would be away in Korea for four weeks from around 26 March. We spent the best part of the lesson on *Invention in B-flat Major* and Grieg’s *Waltz in E Minor*. The Bach seemed to have improved dramatically compared to Sunday’s lesson. It felt like Kelly was listening to the sound as she was creating it and I praised her. I hoped that this would encourage her to keep going in the right direction, while boosting her confidence and ability to take ownership for her progress. Some lesson highlights included the necessity to roll from a note to make it sound louder if it was connected by legato to the previous note (double rotation).
There was a really good discussion regarding closely related keys and how these can be quite different tonally, and this was followed by an effective demonstration where I used the dimmer on the light to demonstrate B flat (sunny), G minor (dark), C minor (gloomy) and E-flat Major (happy). We also reviewed the elements of an invention in terms of voicing, textural definition, and tonal shape. There was the adage of getting louder as the notes go higher and softer when the notes go lower, i.e. when the arpeggiated figures rise and fall. We also discussed the modulation from B-flat Major to the dominant of F Major at the end of the first section, being typical of this style. As such, there is a need to let those listening aware by making the modulation a ‘celebratory aural experience’. I used a ‘butter instead of buttons’ analogy to help Kelly imagine how ‘rolling’ through the notes could help to inject tonal shape into what might otherwise sound like an exercise. Overall, the Grieg had improved, but it did sound rather cloudy due to mistiming of the pedal. There was some interesting work in the middle section where an increase in tempo and expressive shape were built at the same time. There was some good elliptical movement with the left-hand crotchets thereafter and how a sense of direction can really help with the overall tonal shape, especially when the hand cannot stretch the notes themselves. Finally we started to work on clarity of the melodic line and the need to soften the third beats of the bar in a waltz, unless there is something significant to say, e.g. when playing the high A, which could be seen as a link between phrases one and two. We also started to touch on the role of gesture in time stretching, but this will need to be expanded on in the next lesson. I asked Kelly what she liked best about piano, and she replied, with a huge grin, ‘It’s fun’. I can foresee that quite a bit of probing is going to be necessary when we come to the interviewing, as she is, by nature, not overtly verbal, at least not in the lesson environment. Jean could tell that she had made improvements with the expressive and communicable aspects of the pieces during the week and also during the lesson, which I was pleased to hear. I know that I was quite emphatic and excited in the lesson and expressive gesture and expressive vocalisation myself.

- ‘It felt like Kelly was listening to the sound as she was making it’ – How can we expect students to ‘listen’ to themselves if we don’t first give them ‘expressive templates’ to work from?
- Knowledge of expressive ‘rules’, e.g. crescendo for ascending, decrescendo for descending, and metrical accents (duple/triple lilt).
- Using double rotary movement seems to create a crescendo that ‘rings’.
- ‘Butter instead of buttons’ analogy: Rolling through the notes in a ‘slippery’ way appears to enhance tonal shape in what may otherwise sound like a finger exercise.
- Keyboard harmony: closely related keys and tonal colour; let the listener ‘know’ about these modulations by making them ‘a celebratory aural experience’, i.e. part of playing ‘expressively’ involves highlighting points of structural and harmonic significance.
- Using the light dimmer demonstrated the different ‘brightness’ of closely related keys.
- Using elliptical movement and studying the directional relationship between notes that are wide apart appears to facilitate expressive tonal shape and physical ease.
- It seems that as the level of difficulty of the pieces increases, the interdependence of expressive devices and technical facility increases.
- Jean said that she could tell that Kelly had made a big improvement with the expressive aspects of her pieces this week, both in the lesson and during her home practice.
- Linking gesture with time stretching to ‘illustrate’ to the audience what is happening aurally.
- Teacher use of gesture and expressive vocalisation.
- Kelly said that learning piano is ‘fun’.

Lesson 4: 2 March 2014

Kelly had a great lesson today, and I can see how much potential she has. The middle movement of K467 suits her and it’s coming along very well. Her rhythm is improving and the overall sound of the piece is maturing. In terms of fingering, notes, ornaments and sound, we mainly worked on the A-flat Major section, but a significant part of the lesson was spent on the first two pages. We discussed closely related keys, where F Major could be seen as cheerful with a bright treble and sonorous bass and the D minor section is much more retrospective and gloomy, at least initially. We spoke about fingering helping to facilitate expressive gesture and resultant tonal shape, especially at the ends of phrases in the D minor section. I also suggested that ornaments are part of the melodic line and should be shaped with that intent. There
was an interesting moment that related back to a question that Diana Blom had posed – ‘Is time stretching part of gesture or is gesture part of the time stretching?’ This concept may be seen on the first page just before the right hand plays a top C and the left hand moves into an F7 chord, where elements of preparatory gesture facilitate a bright treble and illustrate its importance as a melodic idea to those listening. A slight stretching of the time combines with slight forward movement of the trunk, and links the sound and the illustration of the sound together. We also worked on clarity of pedal and balance of textures when using the pedal, as it ultimately increases volume. Again, I asked Kelly what she likes about playing the piano and she replied (as last time) that, ‘it’s fun’. However, on prompting, I did manage to get ‘it’s exciting’ which is quite telling as I might now use that term when I am trying to convey aspects of expression. An inspiring lesson; really enjoyable.

- Teacher satisfaction is important too.
- Knowledge of keyboard harmony facilitates discussion regarding the ‘colour’ of closely related keys.
- Choice of fingering facilitates gestural direction and the consequent phrase shape.
- Initiating the sound with preparatory movement from the hips and arms appears to be both functional, in terms of stretching the time, ‘easing in’ to the phrase and facilitating a ‘ring’ in the sound, and illustrative, in terms of using the body to highlight points of melodic significance to the audience.
- ‘Trying out’ new ideas and reflecting on their effectiveness within the teaching context is an ongoing process.
- Kelly finds playing the piano ‘exciting’.

Lesson 5: 9 March 2014

I didn’t feel too good about this lesson. While I wasn’t any more forceful than I might be with the Chan boys in the previous lesson, it felt like I didn’t ‘change gears’ and was quite flippant in my approach to the Mozart *Concerto*. Kelly’s ‘lack of progress’ with regard to pedalling and the right-hand trill were really annoying for some reason, even though the whole piece is generally improving. Anyway, I was quite rigorous in insisting what I wanted, and suggested that playing Mozart really required perfection, which was why I was being so demanding. I sometimes feel sorry for Kelly, as she looked sad today. She learns harp and cello and I know that her harp teacher is very
pushy, as her parents and I have discussed. Anyway, we made it all the way to the end of the exposition where the piece modulates to C Major, but there is still a long way to go. I gave Kelly an idea of where she was up to on a sliding scale, suggesting that she was only about a third of the way there. I really need to remember to immediately shift my expectation when I start the lesson with her next week, perhaps going to the bathroom in order to refocus myself. I know that she will do the work and if she doesn’t quite get it 100% right in the lesson, I need to remember that she will go home and diligently work on it and it will come good. *Invention in B-flat Major* had really improved and everything that I had asked her to implement was there. It really is sounding sweet, just like Kelly’s personality. Next time things will be different, as I need to remember that she responds to lots of praise and encouragement and not just making her feel as though it still isn’t good enough, even though she did what was asked of her. I started to remember this towards the end of the lesson and praised her for improving *Waltz in E Minor*. I just need to think about this lesson and remember that she is probably the hardest worker of all of my students and that she does get there, but not necessarily as fast as some other students, and not necessarily successfully in the lesson itself. I also need to reread my reflections so that I can remind myself of what I was thinking and what I might do better next time.

- Each student is an individual and often requires ‘a change of gear’.
- Is my mood affecting the effectiveness of someone else’s learning experience?
- Progress is sometimes slow and that’s OK – whose lesson is this anyway?
- Try to see the positive and frame observations and expectations accordingly.
- Make the student feel like they are your only student.
- Kelly responds best to praise and encouragement. She is a diligent student who may not catch on to every concept within the lesson, but given the opportunity and some space to practise, she will get there.
- Reflective notes are pointless unless they inform future action.

*Lesson 6: 23 March 2014*

This was Kelly’s last lesson for a while, as she and Jean are going to Korea for a holiday, as Kelly’s reward for working hard throughout the year. They told me this at the interview during dinner at ‘Ginga’ last night. The highlight of this lesson was the in-breath analogy and associated movement used to create momentum and a life-like sound in *Invention*. Kelly was having trouble with the sound, the flow and the
coordination towards the middle section, where both hands duplicate the melodic idea in conversation. Apparently, she plays the piece quite well sometimes but unreliably other times, and I suggested that those times when the playing seems ‘better’, it might be that she is anticipates how it feels to confidently roll through the notes sooner. Further to this, there was some discussion regarding building a kinaesthetic image of the piece, where the notes are memorised and they come ‘tumbling out as a series of movements and gestures rather that fingerings and notes’. It came up in the interview that they are considering buying Kelly a grand piano, which is very exciting news. I think that will help her immensely, as she is quite a slightly built child and sometimes the tone is quite shallow, though greatly improved over the last 12 months. The first part of the lesson was spent on looking at the Mozart Concerto, in which I played the second piano part along with her for the first time. I could tell Kelly was enjoying it as much as I was. The first section had really improved, so we turned our attention to the next part. I helped her sort out fingering and associated gesture that might help to balance the hand, bringing about ease of execution and therefore greater confidence in the sound. There was some interesting work in terms of integrating the thumb by using an upward movement of the arm at the point of sound, and a great part where the long G semibreve was used to prepare the hand to travel in a large ellipse towards the high B flat. I later gave Kelly the music for Debussy’s Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum from Children’s Corner. I think it will suit her style of playing and extend her physically and musically in the coming months. I suggested that she and I perform Haydn’s Little Concerto in C and Invention in B-flat Major in the concert on 4 May, a week after she returns from Korea.

- Kelly’s parents recognise and reward her hard work and they are devoted to her success.
- Using the breath and a preparatory up movement appears to facilitate a rhythmically secure and ‘humanistic’ sound, through the creation of momentum and the ability to roll through the notes without ‘getting stuck’.
- Building a kinaesthetic image of the piece, where the notation is memorised and executed as a series of gestures and movements rather than notes and fingerings.
- Aim to anticipate what the playing will feel like in advance, as you confidently roll through the notes in the most fluid way possible.
- Kelly’s tone has certainly improved in the last 12 months, as it used to be quite shallow and ‘fragile’.

- Fingering and associated gesture need to be chosen with overarching principles of balance of the hand, limb alignment and ease of execution in mind, as they appear to facilitate a confident and coordinated delivery.

- Ensemble playing is exciting and it builds musicianship, perhaps more directly than verbal direction.

- ‘Recycling’ the movement between notes, i.e. the upward movement that ‘finishes’ one note merges with the preparatory movement of the next.

- Using an upward gesture to ‘play’ the note (rather than the finger/thumb itself) seems to result in a more tonally integrated decrescendo at the end of a phrase.

Lesson 7: 1 May 2014

Unfortunately, Kelly has been in Korea for about five weeks and hasn’t had access to a piano to keep up her practice. Sam seemed rather embarrassed, as he sent me a couple of text messages apologising, but as I said, we will get there, but it is rather like fitness, where one week off usually means three weeks of catch-up to get back to the same point. We rehearsed Little Concerto, as Kelly had practised the previous afternoon, but it soon became obvious that we would not be performing it on Sunday 4 May as planned. We spent the lesson revising the notes and sound, but particularly the appropriate choice of tempo for each movement. The lesson finished shortly after going through the first couple of lines of the Debussy.

- Fitness analogy for practice: Use it or lose it!

- Awareness of sound and tonal nuance is a priority at all stages of the learning process.

Lesson 8: 11 May 2014

Lots of great material here, particularly in terms of metaphor and imagery; perfect sushi and no ‘Botox playing’, come to mind. There is excellent material in terms of the Classical style, an elegant sound and making a simple melody more sophisticated through phrasing and colourful repeated notes, easily achieved through analysis of gesture, free fall and associated tonal shape. We covered all three movements, with the second movement very fruitful in terms using gesture to create stylistic authenticity. We also discussed goals and planning for the technique exam on 1 June,
the concert on 15 June, and I mentioned to Kelly that I had been talking to the conductor of the string orchestra about the possibility of collaborating for the Little Concerto. Kelly seemed a bit worried, but Jean was very excited about the idea. I gave Gwyn the parts the day before, so hopefully we will have something happening at the end-of-year showcase concert in November. There was also good material covered in terms of breath and preparatory movements commencing each phrase, and small tilts of the pelvis to provide impetus and momentum for the arms, and therefore enhancing the sound.

- Analogy and metaphor: ‘Perfect sushi’ for an elegant articulatory detail and ‘no Botox playing’ for avoiding paralysis/stiffness/lack of fluidity in the arms and a consequent lack of expression/tonal nuance/personality.
- Rather than relying on ‘divine inspiration’ or ‘giftedness’, it seems helpful to use gesture and a ‘hands on’ approach to develop expressive ‘templates’ that are able to be customised by the student as they mature.
- It seems that in Kelly’s case, the physical momentum needed to achieve a forward-driving, energetic and self-confident sound is achieved through employing a combination of the breath and preparatory movements of the arms, trunk, pelvis and head.
- Taking time in the lesson to forward plan and set and review goals is important.

Lesson 9: 15 May 2014

Kelly came to the house for an extra lesson. Almost as soon as she arrived, Jean told me that Kelly was having problems maintaining her interest in the Bach and Grieg pieces. I shouldn’t be too surprised, as she has had them for a long time and while not ‘completed’, they are probably past their use by date. According to Jean, she had been practising them at home and not paying attention to details, resulting in tears. It did catch me off guard, as I hadn’t prepared anything new for her, but we worked through a number of suggestions and settled on Chopin’s Nocturne in C-sharp Minor. I had previously thought that this would be a good piece for her, but at that time I was worried it would be too difficult. We also worked on the Debussy, of which Kelly had prepared a page and a half, quite well for just a week or so. The topic of fingering needing to be addressed early arose, as fluidity of gesture is dependent on employing fingering that fits the phrase structure while enhancing tonal shape.
Kelly isn’t interested in the Bach and the Grieg anymore. While disappointing, it’s sometimes better to cut your losses and just move on.

She doesn’t appear to be ‘fascinated’ with those pieces, and needs something more challenging and ‘mature’ to cut her teeth on.

Fingering needs to be addressed early, as it provides a foundation for physical ease, gesture and sound.

In terms of tonal shaping, there is a good segment on the ‘clock’ analogy within the left hand of the Debussy.

There is good discussion and demonstration of ‘add-a-note technique’ and chaining within the Debussy here.

Lesson 10: 18 May 2014

We are starting to catch up a bit now, which is good. Kelly came well prepared to the lesson and asked that we work on the two new pieces. While the pieces are still in the very early note reading stage, but there is still a lot that can be reflected on. The most obvious example here was the need to choose fingering that will facilitate the appropriate gesture and minimise any stretching, especially in Nocturne. I showed Kelly how to practise the left hand by playing pairs of notes while emphasising the direction that the notes were travelling in. This will help her lay down a preparatory kinaesthetic map of the bigger gestures. We worked through the first page of Nocturne and there are some good early examples of using expressive gesture to enhance the ‘sighing’ of the chords during line one, even at this early stage of the learning process. The left hand has its own melancholy, and so as to enhance the inherent contrary motion with the treble melody, it needs to be shaped with expressive gesture too. We worked through fingering and notes for the first three pages of the Debussy, and I suggested that Kelly finish learning the piece for the lesson next Sunday.

- Kelly is asking for what she wants and her learning autonomy is strong.
- Fingering should minimise stretching, facilitate physical alignment of the limbs, and pave the way for fluidity of gesture and increased tonal nuance.
- Rather than waiting until the notes are well known, building a kinaesthetic ‘map’ of the piece can begin early, starting with studying the directional relationship between each pair of notes in the left-hand accompaniment. This lays down foundations for awareness of the larger gestural shape of each half
bar, and avoids any habitual stretching between notes that could limit progress, comfort and expressive potential later on.

- Using an expressive gestural approach to facilitate chord voicing, melodic shape of the bass and general ease of execution seems to work well.

Lesson 11: 22 May 2014

Today Kelly came to the house for an extra lesson on the Mozart Concerto. To be expected, she was having significant problems with the coordination of the cross rhythms. A scaffolded practice approach is really necessary, as becoming confident with each bar is essential to joining larger quantities of the music together. We also spent time reviewing similar parts early in the piece, being sure to use gesture to generate tone, direction and expressive sound. Other aspects covered included trill technique, melodic direction and tonal shape in ‘Classical’ ornaments, and pedal technique on the opening page.

- ‘All that is gold, does not glitter’, i.e. not every lesson is full of ‘teaching expression’, as oftentimes notation and fingering must be reviewed, confidence with tricky bars must be built up note-by-note, and smaller fragments chained together slowly but surely.

- Teaching the gestural movements that open the door to generating tonal shape and melodic direction does seem to speed up Kelly’s ability to copy the expressive ideas, with the ultimate goal being to widen her gestural vocabulary, broaden her tonal palette and increase the number of expressive templates that she has at her disposal.

Lesson 12: 25 May 2014

There is some very good material here in terms melodic shape on the first page of Nocturne. We reviewed material that was previously covered, so it would be interesting to compare the two, in terms of how much progress was made from the previous lesson. We also rehearsed the two concertos – Haydn and Mozart. Kelly is playing the Haydn Little Concerto for her technique exam next weekend, so it was good to have the rehearsal. I will see her again on Thursday so we can go into more detail then. There was some good material in the third movement in terms of using expressive gesture to facilitate tonal shape and direction in the melodic line. We didn’t get very far in the Mozart Concerto; only to the A-flat Major section, as Kelly
probably needs a bit more time to practise what was covered in her lesson on Thursday. However, she genuinely seemed excited to be playing it with the second piano, and I was very happy for her. I was pleased that I had taken time during the holidays to rework some of the orchestral part and practise it, as I enjoyed the first rehearsal too.

- Kelly loves and seems to be genuinely excited by ensemble playing.
- It might be of interest to compare how quickly Kelly assimilates material that is ‘started’ in one week and then ‘reviewed’ in the next.
- Expressive gesture seems to heighten Kelly’s ability to inject both melodic shape and depth of touch into her playing.
- Teacher satisfaction is very important – it helps if I enjoy these lessons too.

Lesson 13: 29 May 2014

I offered Kelly an extra lesson here at home and of course she took the opportunity. She loves to learn, and Jean is happy to bring her. As the technique exam is only a few days away, I went through all of her technical work. It’s going pretty well overall, though there is a problem with overall confidence and depth of touch, especially with the left hand. Everything seemed a bit too fast, so I asked her to focus on accuracy of notes and uniformity of sound first and foremost. I felt that we really needed to include staccato as well, as I think that it will help her with overall finger shape, strength and clarity. The staccato sixths are excellent, the best of the all material. I coached Kelly with Doctor Gradus, with the main objective being how to inject tempo, fluency, confidence and tonal shape into each beat, thereby moving the piece beyond the initial note-learning stage. Rather than always playing slowly, I encouraged Kelly to speed up small fragments, and then increase the length of those fragments as her confidence and accuracy improved. We reviewed most of the piece, adjusting and adding fingering along the way. Afterwards, I showed her a DVD recording of me playing the piece 10 years ago. We also spent time playing the Haydn Concertino. It sounds so charming, particularly the second movement. We worked a little on sound and tempo in the first movement. It seemed a bit slow, and Kelly was overplaying the staccato upbeats, leading to a lack of momentum and overall forward flow. Again the issue of overusing gesture and tonal shape at the expense of finger clarity and rhythmic stability was discussed within the right-hand semiquavers of the first movement.
Kelly’s love of learning is strongly supported by her parents.

Slow practice is not always best for fast pieces, as it is difficult to get a sense of how the notes combine to form larger gestural shapes, which then combine together to form an overarching kinaesthetic ‘map’. It may be better to play small fragments at tempo, aiming for total physical ease, confidence and tonal shape and then gradually chaining these fragments together over time, repeating the process with larger and larger sections of material.

Fingering needs to take priority in the early stages of a new piece, often needing to be reworked together, with the individual in mind.

Novel teacher demonstrations via DVD.

Gesture and tonal shape are important, but need to be carefully balanced with finger clarity and rhythmic stability, i.e. disproportionate use of gesture can lead to overlapping of fingers and imperfect rhythm.

Lesson 14: 1 June 2014

This is a really good lesson, full of rich references to an expressive gestural vocabulary, general elements of pedalling, voicing and movement and feedback from Jean (‘the sound is so different’). While I was working with Kelly on the D minor section of the Mozart Concerto, I suggested that, in general, piano playing has less to do with ‘music’ and more to do with body awareness, movement and being an ‘athlete’. Angela mentioned in the corridor when I was talking to her during Wendy’s lesson that Kelly had very good rotation, which of course I was very pleased to hear, as most of our lessons are spent experimenting with such principles. As I said earlier, this lesson stands out as one of the best in terms of using a gestural vocabulary to induce an expressive sound, while introducing metaphorical concepts and general principles of tone, voicing and projection.

- There are good examples of using the term ‘gestural vocabulary’ as a way to induce expressive sound here.

- Feedback from Kelly’s mother – ‘the sound is so different’.

- ‘In general, playing the piano has less to do with ‘music’ and more to do with body awareness, movement and being an “athlete”’. 
Another excellent lesson, a highlight being an improvised narration of ‘Cinderella’, where I played a combination of tutti and solo in the Mozart Concerto. I could tell that Kelly was enjoying it, as her eyes were as wide as saucers. I linked the harmonic language to relevant parts of the story, and I asked if she could ‘see’ what I was seeing. I related the duet between the bass and treble to Cinderella and the prince having a conversation, after having asked her not to play the left hand too loudly, or else it will sound like the ugly sisters instead. Actually there was some very good exchange of ideas regarding the ugly sisters instead. Actually there was some very good exchange of ideas regarding the Classical period in general. I referred to the style as ‘music of the wealthy, not the homeless’, with Kelly’s playing needing to be polished, exact, not blurred or ‘dirty’, and full of elegance and dignity. I drew her attention towards the sequence at the end of the A-flat Major section, and how this part of the music should be highlighted and ‘celebrated’. When Kelly started playing from the beginning, it was too strident, so I suggested that she imagine Cinderella scrubbing the floor daydreaming, singing a sweet melody to herself. Conversely, the A-flat Major section is a minor third higher and could be where Cinderella is excited, ready for the ball, and therefore the volume and overall approach might be bolder. When I asked her what kind of movement she might need for a bigger sound, I was a bit surprised when she came back with ‘a preparatory up movement’. Kelly is smart and a hard worker. She had obviously put in a huge amount of effort since her last lesson. We are going to have another rehearsal at the Conservatorium on Sunday.

- Kelly loved the way that I ‘narrated’ the Mozart Concerto by linking the harmonic language to relevant parts of the story – ‘Can you see what I see?’
- Metaphorical imagery: Correlating the dynamic levels, musical mood, keys and modulations with what is happening theatrically, much like a movie soundtrack.
- Analogy: Classical music is for the wealthy, not the homeless; so your playing needs to sound polished, not ‘dirty’. Kelly is starting to demonstrate an understanding of the interdependent relationship between gestural choice and tone production, i.e. her ‘expressive gestural vocabulary’ is flourishing.
Lesson 16: 8 June 2014

Not a great lesson from me! I was so tired from such a big day that I was making a lot of careless mistakes. Nonetheless, it’s always good to rehearse, but I might need to go back and view this lesson again as I was so tired and, having been without the computer for several days, I have completely forgotten what was covered.

NA

Lesson 17: 10 June 2014

We had another rehearsal lesson today, but just 30 minutes or so due to parking and Kelly’s early start with cello the following day. It went well, though I couldn’t help but feel that I was overpowering her, so I might watch the DVD and discuss it with her on Thursday when I see her next.

NA

Lesson 18: 19 June 2014

It’s been such a busy week that I had forgotten to write this reflection. Kelly played well in the performance last Sunday, and I was very happy with the way that she rose to the challenge and complete the tasks that I set for her. Her parents invited me to go out to dinner with them to a Malaysian restaurant at Kangaroo Point. Apparently they used to live in Kangaroo Point before moving to Macgregor, so it’s a family favourite. Kelly attended East Brisbane State School until Grade 2, before the family moved. Actually Sam and Jean asked me my opinion of which high school that I thought Kelly should attend, and I advised them that a state school might be a good option, as it seems that a lot of the private schools give an excessive amount of homework, which of course will interfere with Kelly’s practice. Within the semiquavers of Doctor Gradus, there was very good work on elliptical gesture to shape the sound while aiding economy of motion and technical ease. I reminded Kelly that she would need to practise ‘add-a-note technique’, followed by ‘add-a-group technique’ in various combinations, followed by ‘add-a-bar technique’ while simultaneously working within a brisk tempo. While slow practice is necessary sometimes, the movements required for a fast tempo really only become apparent when the piece is sped up. We also worked on the Chopin, covering the expressive phrase shape and corresponding gesture in the treble at the top of page two, the cross rhythms on the second page, followed by voicing and pedal for the introductory bars. I also helped
her with the fingering on the last page, laying the foundations for successful fioritura. So as to ensure a healthy sound and healthy movements, there was good segment dealing with the alignment of wrist, forearm and fingers when playing at the extremes of treble register. We also took time to listen to various options for her List A for Grade 7, and she seemed pretty taken with the *Prelude and Fugue in C Minor* from Book 1.

- Reviewing previously taught concepts: ‘add-a-note technique’, ‘add-a-group technique’ and ‘add-a-bar’ technique’.
- Laying foundations of fingering, alignment and gesture are very important in being able to take the piece to its most comfortable, inspired and expressive level, one step at a time.
- Private schools give too much homework?
- Studying the directional, spatial relationship between the notes in the Debussy seems to help Kelly economise her movement and align her limbs. It assists her ease and speed of execution, and provides a direct means to shape the sound.
- Student-driven repertoire choice.

Lesson 19: 21 June 2014

The lesson was at the Conservatorium this time, and I had a lot of fun introducing Kelly to J. S. Bach’s *Preludes and Fugues*. I explained with examples and looking at Khoa’s score how the piece is constructed from various fragments that are developed, and she seemed excited by the new challenge. We started work on the first few bars of her *Prelude*, carefully reworking the fingering to suit her relatively small hand. We also started with the Grade 7 technical work, studying the D-flat Major scales and arpeggios, and briefly discussing dominant and diminished sevenths in the process. I think that we will need to play the Mozart *Rondo in D*, as the other options seem too large for Kelly to manage at this stage, whereas the Mozart contains only a couple of octaves that could easily be refigured without the overall result being hampered, unlike the Haydn Sonata that I had in mind.

- It’s important to take the time to create interest in new work, create a broader historical framework and rework fingering without delay.
- Kelly is genuinely excited by her new challenges.
Lesson 20: 29 June 2014

There wasn’t not a big focus on repertoire here, as I really wanted to get moving with the technical work, particularly with regard to arpeggios, dominant and diminished sevenths (plus inversions). We worked thoroughly with the F# group and I explained in detail how to construct a dominant seventh and a diminished seventh, their purpose, and a comparison between how many there are, and how few that need to be studied. I also introduced Kelly to the Mozart Rondo in D and we spoke and played at length the structure and compositional techniques held within Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in C Minor. We also reviewed fingering and alignment of the wrist, forearm and finger in the Prelude, as it’s crucial to plan gestural movement from the beginning rather than waiting until the piece has been ‘learnt’.

- Keyboard harmony and general knowledge are embedded within the lesson.
- Fingering, alignment and gestural choreography need to be considered and planned from the beginning rather than being thought of as an inevitable by-product of sufficient practice.

Lesson 21: 12 July 2014

Kelly came for an extra lesson at the Conservatorium today. It was a good lesson, especially in terms of using the piece to catalyse ‘self-expression’, while aiming to ‘put a little bit of yourself behind and into each and every note’ at each and every stage of the learning process. This came about after Kelly played me the first page of the Mozart Rondo in D. The playing was quite dry seemingly without stylistic understanding, despite the fact that she had already studied the Mozart Concerto K467 and the Haydn Concertino. I asked her to apply what she ‘already knew’ as early as possible in the learning process. I reiterated that I was always happy to take her through anything and everything as necessary, but it was be ideal if she took greater responsibility for the expressive aspects of pieces, especially those that she was likely to understand from previous experience. In retrospect, perhaps this was too much to expect. Within Rondo in D, there was a beautiful demonstration of injecting a duple lilt into the broken chord accompaniment of the left hand, which would then merge three-dimensionally with the gestural activity of the right-hand melodic line. However, I suggested that something like the Debussy piece was quite different in the way it might be studied, as it was likely that with such a large amount of elliptical
movement throughout, constant refinement, self-confidence and total awareness of the physical movements were necessary before it could be lifted to a more expressive level, i.e. pieces may have different ways of realising the expressive aspects of the score at different times during the learning process. As usual, we chose just a couple of spots to work on: descending semiquavers where the hands alternate at the end of the first section, and where there is a C in the left hand at the beginning of the third section. Kelly had done very well overall and played the whole piece fluently with minimal disruptions to the rhythmic detail, but the main figure was somewhat unreliable in terms of clarity and depth of touch. Greater refinement was achieved by employing add-a-note technique in the direction of travel. These notes were then chained together, with an emphasis on freedom, economy of motion and expressive tonal shape. I wrote some of these movements in the score for illustration purposes.

- Is philosophical reflection regarding using the piece as a means of self-expression OK at such a young age?
- ‘Try to put a little bit of yourself behind and into each and every note at each and every stage of the learning process’, i.e. Rather than waiting until you have to ‘put the expression in’ during the performance, aim to convey your intentions and embed them into the piece at all stages of the learning process.
- When approaching what might seem like a novel situation, Kelly needs to be encouraged to be confident enough to apply what she already knows, i.e. While I am happy to help her as necessary, Kelly can be encouraged to take greater expressive ownership here, as she ‘knows’ the (Classical) style through previous experience. Am I expecting too much?
- Analogy: 3D effect (a good example here).
- The Debussy may be seen as a series of elliptical gestures chained together (good example here of directional gestural practice, aiming to embed total freedom, self-confidence and tonal shape into each ‘ellipse’).
- Where total comfort and physical freedom take priority due to the physical aspects being more technically challenging, the localised and globalised expressive aspects of pieces like the Debussy can take longer to be realised.
- One thing at a time, over time.
- ‘Illustrating’ the score with expressive gestural indications is proving useful in aiding gestural understanding, memorisation and speed of gestural uptake.
Kelly came for her second lesson of the week at the house. I am very happy to be seeing her twice a week, as I think that she needs it. Today we worked on *Prelude and Fugue* and *Nocturne*. We started the lesson looking into aspects of ‘expressive and articulatory uniformity’ in the *Fugue*. I asked Kelly to play the subject, and while expressive, it seemed to be missing some ‘punch’, so I likened its character to J. S. Bach himself; perhaps a serious man, full of German pride and vigour, and quite fat and robust. As usual, I started to get very theatrical, vocal and gestural as I acted out what J. S. Bach might have said if he were there to say it. I think at one point I was ‘channelling’ Bach while he was ‘instructing’ Kelly to do his piece justice. A couple of times I talked about treating the music with due academic respect and ‘planning’ the expression, one voice at a time. At one point, I ‘played’ how the subject might ‘feel’ on Kelly’s shoulder so that she might imitate the speeds of descent into the keys, which seemed a powerful way to convey information on sound and gesture. There was some good talk regarding following expressive ‘rules’ of sequences, being so typical of this music. I also asked Kelly to shape the countersubject ‘a bit more like J. S. Bach’s wife’, slightly more song like and ‘supportive’ in nature, given the historical context of marriage at the time. The juxtaposition of the robust subject/entry with a cantabile treatment of the countersubject, codetta and episodes will become a feature of this piece in due course. As usual, fingering for expressive gesture and sound rather than for intellect or editorial adherence was pertinent. More than anything though, planning for, and extracting the expressive aspects of the piece throughout the learning process and not just when ‘the hands are together’, is of significance. I also led Kelly through some of the technical ‘rudiments’ contained within the right hand of the *Prelude*. As she has a small hand, it is essential that the choreography and the movements ‘between’ the notes be addressed early, as stretching, tightness and a rigid sound are likely to ensue otherwise. There was some good work with ‘bracing’ the fifth finger right hand by using the ladybug prop, and the necessity of having some tension, but in workable proportions, lest the whole apparatus freezes up. Aligning fingers, wrist and forearm with rotary freedom of the forearm is extremely important in this piece. The last part of the lesson we looked at the middle section of *Nocturne* where the hands have cross rhythms. Kelly was asking me about how to put the hands together, but I asked her to concentrate on the hands
separately. Within both hands, we reviewed the fingering, allowing for enhanced
gestural ease and associated tonal shape. I asked her to practise ‘the expression’ and we (Kelly, Jean and I) talked briefly about the importance of not trying to fix everything at once. Each piece is a long-term project at this level, and it’s very important that all movements are comfortable, fingering be considered for ease of execution, and that corresponding gestures reflect the inherent ‘expression’ within the writing. Individual poeticisms tend to reveal themselves when supported by a solid grounding, where the individual is confident enough with the material to be able to let go of the notes, and think of the piece as more of a dance, where spatial patterns around and between the notes become the main focus. Apparently, Kelly asked Jean whether she could be as famous as Mozart – she is certainly ambitious! I suggested that Kelly could be the best that she could be if she continued to work hard and put a little bit of herself into each and every note, at all stages of learning and performance. General principles can be observed, but ultimately, the sound that she makes will be unique to her own self, her own thoughts and feelings and the movements of her own body. Kelly and I talked about how she felt about the Mozart Concerto at the Intermediate Concert. I had watched the DVD the day before, and I wanted to make a point of talking about the performance with her in the lesson. She (and Jean) said that she wasn’t entirely pleased with how it went. I suggested that it was only the first performance, and no doubt when she performed it again, perhaps with the other two movements in a few years’ time it will be even better then. I suggested that her tone was a little on the forced side, being a bit too loud in the Mozart, but beautiful in the Haydn Concertino. I have asked Kelly previously to play louder with greater ‘thrust’ of the forearm and elbow behind every note, as her playing was quite flimsy in the past, but I think that she is probably overdoing it now and maybe needs greater subtlety at times. It was good to talk about it with her and she seemed pleased that I had broached the subject.

- Her practice schedule is very good, to the point where she needs two lessons a week.
- Gesture and expressive sound is being constantly refined very early on in the learning process.
- Analogy: Subject and countersubject/husband and wife.
- Analogy and imagery: Bach’s physical appearance reflects the robust character of his music.
- Expressive behaviour from the teacher: Humour, drama and ‘channelling the composer’.
- Highlighting the harmonic colour and intensity is paramount/sequential ‘rules’ need to be learnt at some point.
- Effective decisions regarding fingering are those that facilitate alignment and ease of execution rather than those that reflect editorial adherence.
- For maximum gestural ease and tonal shape, fingering often needs ‘tweaking’ throughout the learning process, as problems and solutions that are unique to each student may not be immediately apparent (good example in the middle of the Nocturne).
- Alignment and rotary freedom are essential for tone production and facility.
- Tactile demonstration of how the gestural information might feel is useful in conveying information regarding the speed of descent into each key.
- Analogy: Extracting expression at all times is important, like an actor trying to immerse themselves in a character.
- Kelly demonstrates greater ambition than the average student. She really seems to enjoy the challenge and finds a sequential learning path easy to administer.
- ‘Individual poeticisms will reveal themselves when supported by a solid grounding, where the individual is confident enough with the material to be able to let go of the notes, and think of the piece as more of a dance, where spatial patterns around and between the notes become the main focus’.
- Ladybug prop.
- Gestural/geographical choreography must be addressed early just to be able to ‘play’ the notes without stretching, as stretching does seem to ultimately restrict expressive nuance and overall comfort.
- Analogy: ‘The sound that you make will be unique to your own self, your own thoughts and feelings, and the movements of your own body – tone is unique, like a fingerprint’.
- Student reflection: ‘How did you feel about the performance?’/Watching the DVD together with discussion.
- Even though I was pleased that Kelly asked me, getting the hands together isn’t always the number one priority, even if she thinks otherwise, wanting to be a ‘good girl’ and get the piece ‘finished’.

Lesson 23: 20 July 2014

This lesson started off with a discussion about what Kelly might like to cover in her lesson. It led to me encouraging her to ‘choose from the menu’ as she was travelling in the car to the lessons, essentially asking her to plan ahead as to what she wanted to cover in ‘her’ lessons. Nonetheless, I asked her how her technical work was going as she had the workbook in her hands as I was talking. We reviewed D-flat Major scale and a few others. She really needed some guidance in terms of overall body position, pronation of the forearm when passing of the thumb, bracing of stomach muscles, alignment of elbow, trunk and head at the extremes of register, and a downward sloping position of the thumb so as to form a ‘C’ shape with the thumb and pointer finger. Thereafter, we spent most of the lesson on the first page of the Mozart Rondo. Kelly seemed to have implemented a ‘taste’ for the sound and a wonderful duple lilt in the left hand over the past week, which was really pleasing. We spent quite a bit of time on the last few bars of the first page where expressive gesture, ‘conducting’ and sound were combined. I encouraged Kelly to think as if she is her own conductor, and that the notes were really just the different instrumental groups that need her energy for expressive inspiration. There was also a good segment dealing with the merger between technique, gesture and tonal shape in the passagework between the first and second entries of the main theme. Gesture was used to shape the Alberti bass at the bottom of the page, where rotary movement of the forearm is not only important to ease of execution, but also notational clarity and tonal nuance.

- Discussion and encouraging ownership of the learning: ‘What do you want to cover in this lesson?’
- Scales and arpeggios provide a good opportunity for technical growth and body awareness if the student is willing and able to take specific instruction, i.e. overall body position, pronation of the forearm when passing the thumb, bracing of the stomach muscles, alignment of elbow, trunk and head at the extremes of register, and downward slopping position of the thumb so as to form a ‘C’ shape with the thumb and pointer finger.
- Flavour analogy: ‘Try to develop a taste for the sound’.

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- Gesture and conducting from teacher important (good example here).
- Conductor analogy: ‘The notes are really different instrumental groups of the orchestra that need your inspiration Kelly’.
- Good section here regarding the ‘interdependent trio’ of technique, gesture and tonal shape in passagework.
- Gestural shape of Alberti bass – ‘add-a-note technique’ (gesture) where tonal shape and rotary freedom (technique for ease of execution) are learnt together.

Lesson 24: 24 July 2014

Kelly came to the house with Jean for what ended up being a 90-minute lesson, as it’s her Mum’s birthday on Sunday and she won’t be attending her regular time. As usual, it was a great lesson. The thing that stands out most here is the fact that Jean is so supportive, regularly commenting that she can really hear the difference in Kelly’s sound. If Jean thinks she is doing well and that the methodology is worthwhile, then that is very positive for the overall study. We worked on the Prelude and Fugue, spending equal amounts of time on each. With the Prelude, I had Kelly ‘roll’ from one half-bar figure to the next using ‘add-a-note technique’, before chaining each half bar together. Then I asked her to chain the second half of the bar to the first half of the next bar, as this is often the place where students become stiff and clumsy, and therefore, ultimately make a poor sound. Of course this is because the speed of the rotary movements to geographically ‘cover’ the notation changes as each figure changes, so getting comfortable and building an internal and external kinaesthetic map of these changes is essential to a fluid and effortless transition, which is of course the key to a fluid, effortless and therefore seamless sound. We worked through the first page with both hands, and I instructed Kelly to continue in this manner during her practice, citing the key to an expressive, rhythmically stable and driving delivery that reflects the growing harmonic intensity, as being total comfort, an ability to roll freely from one note to the next, and an absence of overuse of the forearm muscles that tends to hinder coordination, rotary flexibility and a pearly touch. There was a lot of ‘talk’ at the end of the lesson regarding the fact that piano playing is in many ways ‘easy’, but it takes a dedicated approach to learning notes and the choreographic patterns that link the notes, to achieve a wonderfully intellectually invigorating result. We also worked on the Fugue; it was quite intense session in terms of matching the phrase shape and gestural layout of the countersubject with its appearance later in the
piece. We worked hard on fingering, trying many different options, as we did with the Prelude. As a follow on from material covered in the previous lesson, I took Kelly through many different ways of ‘expressing’ the subject through gesture, shape and articulation and hopefully, this segment will reflect the collaborative atmosphere that I was striving for.

- Very high parental expectation is met with very high parental support.
- Excellent comments from Jean in this lesson regarding her being able to discern a difference in Kelly’s sound.
- Stiff and clumsy movements seem to equate with poor sound.
- Good example of using ‘add-a-group technique’ where half-bar fragments are chained together from each half bar: This seems to improve awareness of the how the rotary movements change in speed as the notation changes, ultimately building an internal and external kinaesthetic map that allows for fluid, effortless transitions and a seamless sound.
- ‘The key to an expressive, rhythmically stable and driving delivery that reflects the driving intensity is total comfort, an ability to roll freely from one note to the next, and an absence of overuse of the forearm muscles that tends to hinder coordination, rotary flexibility and a pearly touch’.
- ‘Piano playing is easy, it’s just that all the notes get in the way’.
- A dedicated approach to learning the notes and the choreographic patterns that link those notes means that cognitive resources can be directed to expressive ideas more readily.
- The lessons are a place where fingering is ‘workshopped’, and this process of guided exploration will hopefully imbue Kelly with the tools to do so independently in the future.
- Guided exploration and collaborative learning: Experimenting with different ways of expressing the subject using tonal inflection and articulation through gesture.

Lesson 25: 31 July 2014

I am writing this reflection rather late, so I’m not sure if I will remember much. I will try to recollect points of interest. There was one point that stands out above all others, and that was the idea of not only ‘practising’ the left-hand broken chords in the Chopin Nocturne, but so as to avoid stretching, it is very important to ‘learn’ the
speed of lateral movement needed to cover the distance from one note to the next. For example, the speed of lateral movement will be quicker for a larger interval than for a smaller interval, and as all intervals are to a certain extent unique, these adjustments will also be unique. Each half bar can be thought of a single gesture, unique because of the note combination contained therein, and also because of the tonal shape that the notes may blend to make. It is therefore imperative that a kinaesthetic sense of each of these half-bar gestures is developed as early as possible. In some ways this is probably more important that ‘getting the hands together’ which is often the primary goal in the early stages of learning. This was of particular relevance to not only the first page, but also with the cross rhythms on page two. It was here that Kelly was asking me how to get the hands together, but it was obvious that there was still so much work to do before hands together really became a fruitful goal. There is also good material dealing with the opening bars in terms of expressive vocalisation, pedal, gestural combination/interplay and rhythmic accuracy. Use of double rotation came to pass during the descending triplet/semiquaver passage in the middle of the first page, both in terms of generating sound and the delivery of an ‘angry’ sentiment. I suggested to Kelly that she doesn't necessarily need to feel angry when playing, but rather it is a bit like being an actor, where imagining the feeling while playing may invoke that feeling in the listener. I’m not really sure that she has the maturity to understand, but I guess that these things take time and need to be introduced at some point, perhaps sooner rather than later. There was a lot of talk about the meaning of the piece; it is obviously a sad piece, with a middle section that seems to provide some hope and optimism, and we spent a good amount of talking about and imagining what different emotions related to ‘sad’ might feel like. From a purely gestural point, there was good material relating to phrase shape and associated gesture, particularly with the wide octave leap from g sharp. The piece is definitely improving, and while progress is slow, Kelly seems to enjoy working hard at a more challenging piece, so I am happy for her to keep going with it. I also heard a bit of the Debussy – some aspects had definitely moved forward, particularly the interchange from the end of the first section into the middle, but the beginning seemed to have become ‘lumpy’ due to Kelly overusing elliptical movement when executing the thumbs, essentially causing tonal bumps and an unsteady rhythmic pulse. I directed her to play the thumbs while moving to the right, rather than landing on them and then moving. With these more virtuosic pieces, the relationships ‘between’ the notes and how one moves from one to
the next and the speed and direction required for that movement are very important concepts to understand and then implement when practising. However, if these concepts are not implemented in the early grades with larger and more basic gestural interplay, it may become problematic to ‘catch up’ when the difficulty of the material increases in the higher grades.

- ‘Practising’ the left hand of Nocturne can be seen as a process of kinaesthetic memorisation, where knowledge of the speed of lateral adjustment between each pair of notes is built, and the wider gesture of each half bar is constructed therein.
- Each half-bar gesture is unique because of the notes that it contains; therefore a kinaesthetic sense must be built early on, and this is probably more important than ‘getting the hands together’, often mistaken as the primary goal.
- Within descending triplets/semiquavers, double rotary movement is useful in generating sound and creating ‘an angry arm’. While it’s not necessary to feel angry, like an actor, you are playing a character and will hopefully invoke that feeling within those listening.
- She may not have the maturity to understand, but surely introducing these ideas must come sooner or later?
- ‘Explaining’ expressive ideas by exploring the concept of ‘prosody’, the rhythm and inflection of spoken language: During the opening bars, there was good discussion regarding expressive vocalisation and gestural interplay.
- Good example of using gesture and tonal inflection when employ the octave leap between the G#’s.
- Good talk regarding the harmonic and formal structure relating to a story and using sound to portray the different moods therein, like a movie soundtrack.
- In the Debussy, Kelly appears to be overusing elliptical movement when executing the thumbs, essentially causing tonal bumps, an unsteady rhythm and a lumpy texture (good problem solving here).
- An awareness of the spatial/gestural patterns should be forged early with hands separately.
- ‘How one moves from note to note, and the speed and direction required for that movement are very important concepts to understand and then implement when practising, especially at an early age. If these concepts are not
implemented in the early grades with larger and more basic gestures, it may prove problematic when the material increases in difficulty and the gestural interplay becomes more intricate’.

Lesson 26: 3 August 2014

Kelly came to the Conservatorium today, and we worked on the first two pages of the Mozart *Rondo* and a little bit of *Doctor Gradus*. Her Mozart had definitely improved both in terms of sound and reliability of notation. We worked on the detailed phrase structure and associated tonal shape achieved through expressive gesture, and also the necessity of not only softening the left-hand broken chords (which she was doing well with), but also further softening the left-hand broken chords if the right hand sound was also softening. In the first section before the left hand takes the melodic material, there was interesting work where gestural activity of the left hand was used to achieve a stylistic, forward-flowing sound, and a polished cadential ending. With the Debussy, there were very good drills that related to taking a ‘visual snap shot’ in order to recreate the look and feel of the arms and associated gestures in the tricky crossing hands/arms section in the middle of the first page. Movement patterns memorised during partial practice would be of little use if they weren’t implemented in larger sections of the music. Kelly was having difficulty keeping the rhythmic figures precise, not because she had ‘uneven fingers’, but because the right hand was squishing her left hand as it crossed over, causing the original gestural pattern that she had partial practised to mutate. It seems that gesture is not only functional to the realisation of an expressive sound, but can assist with technical facility and freedom. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to tease the two apart at these higher levels.

- Good example here of using gesture and tonal inflection to illustrate cadential interest and forward flow, both aurally and visually.
- Good example of trying out various phrase shapes via gestural variation here.
- At higher levels, it is becoming increasingly difficult to tease apart the expressive versus the technical role of gesture.
- When practising the Debussy, it seems important that Kelly builds a kinaesthetic ‘snap shot’ of the look and feel of the arms within each beat/half bar, one ‘frame’ at a time through chaining/’add-a-note technique’ before recreating the look and feel of the passage in performance, without
‘mutations’, i.e. movement patterns memorised during partial practice would be of little use if they weren’t implemented in larger sections of the music.

Lesson 27: 10 August 2014

This was a bit of an unusual lesson. Kelly and Jean were both sick, with Jean in particular looking very tired and overwhelmed. At the start of the lesson, Jean and Sam reluctantly told me that Kelly would not be able to come for extra lessons at the house on Thursdays, saying that her eyesight was getting worse and that having a lesson late at night wasn’t good for her; they want her in bed by 8pm. Jean said that she felt worried that Kelly’s progress would be slower with only one lesson a week, but I said that I understood, and the most important thing was for the family to reduce the amount of stress they are under. It means that I will need to move things along a bit more in the lesson, and spend a bit less time on everything in order to hear all of her pieces in the 45 minutes allotted. Kelly played the Mozart Rondo, but it did sound very tired, and in particular, the left hand was very thin. However, once I mentioned this and ‘conducted’ her, the sound came alive. There was also some good work on the Bach Prelude, especially in terms of ‘add-a-group’ drills for tonal shape, direction and coordination. I mentioned that the hands had different intervallic distances to cover at different times, and such drills may allow the hands, arms and body to ‘find’ how fast these transitions need to be in order to ensure a coordinated result, without the need for stretching. I also heard the first page of the Chopin Nocturne. I asked Kelly to exaggerate the gestural choreography in the opening bars, particularly the free fall movement of the C#7 chord, as there wasn’t enough tone there in order to create a sighing sound when following with the F# minor chord. She had obviously really improved, especially the ‘angry’ descending scale part and its associated coordination with cross rhythms. I asked Kelly to review the left hand, as it sounded too much like common time instead of cut time, with its inherent duple lilt. This was achieved through revision of the gesture involved, where the ‘down’ movement was followed by an upward ‘swirl’ when executing the following three notes. It appeared that Kelly was doing two cycles of down/up gestures for each minim beat instead of one, and this of course means that the forward-flowing dreamy character is impeded, even at this early stage of learning. Lastly, I heard the first page or so of the Debussy, and it seemed that Kelly had a good idea of the gestures involved, but there was an absence of finger clarity. When I asked her to focus on articulating the fingers clearly,
the gestural movements began to stagnate and she became ‘stuck’ in the keys, highlighting the need for active finger work and overall gestural shape to work together. The third time she successfully combined the two, resulting in an exciting and clear sound. I also gave Kelly the general knowledge information for the four pieces to study over the coming months.

- Try to ‘read’ the situation and the people in front you and adapt the pedagogy to fit.
- Unfortunately, two lessons a week is too much for the family.
- ‘Conducting’ really seems to energise Kelly’s playing.
- There is still evidence of stretching within the Bach Prelude, so we reviewed ‘add-a-group’ drills so that the arms, hands and body ‘discover’ how fast the intervallic transitions need to be, whilst refining tonal shape, direction and coordination in the process.
- Good demonstration of exaggerating the gestural free fall for enhanced fullness of sound so as to create a ‘sighing’ sound (opening bars of Nocturne).
- Good evidence of improvement in the ‘angry’ part of the Chopin Nocturne.
- Good demonstration of changing the lilt from four in the bar to two in a bar, simply by adjusting the gesture used (left hand of Nocturne); ‘one downward movement followed by an upward ‘swirl’ to either side on the following three notes’.
- Good demonstration within the Debussy of (a) not enough finger clarity, (b) not enough gestural movement, and (c) an effective combination of both.

Lesson 28: 17 August 2014

It feels like Kelly has really slowed down a lot these last couple of weeks, with her playing and general approach being quite lacklustre. Maybe I’m just being too critical, but it feels like either the pieces are too big for her, she is not doing enough practice to meet the challenge, or she is just too tired; I’m not sure. She started with Rondo, and while the section where the left hand takes the melody and the right hand has semiquavers is relatively neat and tidy, most of first two pages sound dull and uninspired. I asked Kelly to run down the corridor and back again, so that she might feel invigorated, and that seemed to work. I told her that now she is playing big pieces, she has to use ‘big movements’ and a ‘big heart’, or they will ‘swallow her up’. That definitely seemed to help, as did her using more sound and energy in the
left-hand broken chords, which sounded lifeless most of the time. I also heard her play the Bach *Prelude*, but it didn’t sound much different from the last lesson. The common problem of stretching and consequent lapses in coordination didn’t appear to have improved. Kelly said that she had been doing directional practice in half-bar amounts as I had asked, but it became apparent that she now needs to focus on less bars, for example four at a time and implement more detailed partial practising in combination with what she has already done. For example, it took us 20 minutes to do four bars, so I said that that might act as a guide of what is required. I took her through the various drills and exercises that she could do, including staccato, two-note slurs, repeated notes, and then a combination of these, finishing with what she had already been doing – in other words going ‘deeper’ into the micro-movements that make up each half and full bar. Next she played the first page of the Chopin *Nocturne*, and that hadn’t improved either. It sounds the same, the left hand is no more known or ‘embodied’, and the right hand lacks phrase shape, direction and intensity. I must have sounded a bit frustrated, as I could tell that Jean was becoming a bit defensive, reiterating that Kelly had been practising about 90 minutes a day. I said that Kelly might need to memorise the left hand of the Chopin in order to ‘glide’ over the notes, ‘picking them up’ and playing faster in order to maintain the required momentum. I did apologise that I couldn’t be more complimentary. Jean did look like she was pretending to be happy/nice but underneath, I could see that she was annoyed with either me or Kelly or both, but I couldn’t tell. Maybe the strain of doing three instruments is too much for Kelly, especially as now she is studying advanced repertoire with the piano. Jean said that she still enjoys the lessons and playing piano, but I’m not convinced. Maybe I’m a bit concerned that if her progress is too slow, she will not find the pieces that she has interesting anymore and that she may never finish them, much the same as the Bach *Invention* and Grieg *Waltz* earlier in the year.

- ‘Big pieces require big movements, and a big heart or they will swallow you up’.
- Apparently Kelly is practising about 90 minutes a day, but there is little improvement this week: Why? Are the pieces too big for her, is she doing enough practice, bored, or just too tired?
- In terms of the Chopin *Nocturne*, a lack of confidence with the left-hand notes appears to inhibit the required momentum to cover the notes with ease: ‘Aim
to memorise the notes and then glide over the top of them, picking them up along the way’.

- Just be honest, but not unkind.

Lesson 29: 24 August 2014

From the moment I opened the door to Kelly and Jean, it felt like a whole renewed dynamic, especially when they handed me a full-sugar Coke. I could tell that either Kelly was well rested, she was trying really hard to be energetic, or that she got a firm talking to after the lesson last week; perhaps a combination of all three. We reviewed all four pieces in the 45 minutes, and Kelly had done a marvellous job, particularly with her Mozart Rondo. As I said to her, the piece sounded like the bottle of Sprite (which she had brought to the lesson), full of bubbles, fizz and sugar. It was really wonderful to hear her playing with such zest and energy, which had been lacking the last couple of weeks. According to Jean and Kelly herself, she has still been practising as usual, but her attitude during that practice has changed, and she is trying to bring the music alive at each stage of learning process as I had directed her, rather than waiting until the music was ‘ready’ to be expressive and energetic. There was so much tonal detail in her Mozart, with the left hand really having its own personality now. There was an interesting little part in bar 7 where I asked Kelly to ‘illustrate’ through sound how the semitones descend and ascend, and she caught on very quickly. As usual, there was a lot of theatrics from me, as I can hardly expect the student to be energetic if I’m sitting sleepily in the corner. Pages one and two are now at a performance standard and we are turning our attention towards pages three and four, of which I heard the right hand alone. Kelly needed a bit of guidance regarding the right-hand passagework on page four, as it was technically untidy. Through the ‘add-a-note technique’, we were able to ‘find the spatial pattern on which to lay the notes across’. This seems to be of benefit twofold, both in terms of the actually physical ease and clarity of rhythm, as well as the expressive ‘swirly’ sound. I drew some indications on the score to help Kelly understand the small elliptical movements involved, and asked her to repeat the process for the next few bars, one step at a time. Actually, she is very good at being directed, it was just getting her to inject some musical personality into the ‘steps’ along the way that she was finding challenging. I also heard her play the first page of the Bach Prelude, and it shows good progress. The first two lines were spic and span, but the rest of the page gradually deteriorated
in terms of accuracy, fluency and comfort. The less accurate and fluent it is, the more likely she is to stretch and therefore experience tension, which may of course lead to injury over the longer term. I asked Kelly to give lines 3 and 4 the same ‘treatment’ this week, and likened the whole thing to a production line, where different segments of the piece are in different stages, and being aware of this really helps to break the whole project into more manageable portions. An interesting aspect here was practising add-a-note/half-bar technique to the middle of one bar to the middle of the next, as this is the likely spot where the movement ‘stops’, tension creeps in and the playing sounds clumsy and uncomfortable, because… it is! I also heard Kelly play the first page of Nocturne, and we worked on defining phrase boundaries with sound and gesture, for the benefit of those listening. There was discussion regarding ‘the Russian split’, as Kelly, had picked it up perhaps by instinct, but seemed to be overusing it. I heard the first couple of pages of Doctor Gradus, and that had improved too. Kelly’s playing was energetic, ensuring both a good sound and effective technical coverage of the notes. We started voicing for the second page now. Overall, this was a fantastic lesson.

- Kelly is trying very hard to be more energetic, and that zest reflects in her playing.
- Analogy: The Mozart Rondo really sounds like a bottle of Sprite this week, ‘full of bubbles, fizz and sugar’!
- A positive and energetic attitude when practising is crucial for Kelly to maintain her progress.
- Analogy: ‘Illustrate’ the direction of the semitones.
- Teacher’s energy and expressive behaviour important.
- There is a good demonstration here of using ‘add-a-note technique’ to learn the spatial patterns/gestural choreography on which to lay the notes across, seeming to enhance physical ease, clarity of rhythm and a ‘swirly’ sound in the Mozart Rondo.
- Good evidence of drawing gestural indications on the score to help Kelly understand the elliptical movements involved in the Mozart.
- Good example towards the end of the lesson where we worked on defining phrase boundaries with sound and gesture, so that the listener can process the expressive information aurally and visually.
- Somewhere, somehow, Kelly has picked up ‘the Russian split’.
- Analogy: ‘Production line practising’ – setting and achieving smaller goals makes a large project feel more manageable, and Kelly is becoming more aware of this principle.
- According to both Kelly and Jean, Kelly practises daily, but she just needed to be asked/reminded to inject musical and expressive energy into each step of the learning process (evidence of student self-reflection).

Lesson 30: 31 August 2014

This was quite a ‘short’ lesson, meaning that it felt like we didn’t get a lot done, as Kelly had asked me to help her with the Fugue in C Minor, particularly the fingering. As I said to her, the fingering shouldn’t really be considered in isolation, as it needs to be chosen to fit the voicing, balance, sound and overall complexity. Anyway, we did very good work regarding refining the shape of the subject, voicing of countersubject and answer and reworked fingering for the first three or four staves, further than what we had been before. I can really see that Kelly is becoming increasingly aware and taking on more self-responsibility for listening to her own sound, analysing ‘on the spot’ and taking on board what I am saying, digesting it, and then making it her own. We also worked on the Prelude. She had clearly improved, and there is interesting material relating to ‘building bridges’ with the transitory notes between the bars, where memorisation allows for effortless gliding over the notes, and enhanced ability to pre-empt the spatial information before it’s ‘too late’. Kelly seems to have an innate ability to organise her own practice and her own goals, but maybe next lesson it might be worth discussing the idea of a ‘progress journal’ so as to enhance her naturally organised personality.

- Kelly asked me to help her with the Fugue (growing learning responsibility) and she is becoming increasingly aware of her own sound.
- Fingering is not something that can be ‘done on paper’.
- Kelly seems to have an innate ability to organise herself to set and achieve goals.
- Analogy: ‘Building bridges between the notes’. In the Bach Prelude, it seems important to be able to effortlessly ‘glide’ over the notes with physical and mental agility, perhaps pre-empting the spatial information before its ‘too late’, lest stretching and discomfort start to settle in.
The thing that stands out about this lesson is me saying to Kelly that it takes a lot of energy to teach well, because it takes a lot of energy to play the piano well, and I can hardly expect my students to play expressively with their whole selves if I am unwilling to do the same. I said that I really enjoy teaching students like Kelly, because they are willing to meet me half way, and I feel like we are collaborating, rather than me just directing the lesson while they obey without question, passion, ambition or effort. There is a really good segment in the lesson where I ask Kelly to move both her forearms up through the air vertically above her head while saying ‘OK!’ or ‘let’s do it!’ or ‘here we go!’ or something similar. I then suggested that she direct that feeling of drive, energy, commitment and positivity into her playing, which she did. We were working mainly on Rondo today, and she does show excellent progress. There were many good ‘teaching’ moments, some to do with team playing, some to do with playing different segments in each hand to match tempo choice, and another to do with trill playing and finger technique. In short, a bit like ‘Google Earth’ – zooming in and out; seeing the detail and then considering the bigger picture. In effect, gesture is as important as finger technique, which is as important as overall philosophies regarding embodied, energetic and expressive performance, which is as important as the overall learning environment, which is as important as adjusting the teaching to the student’s strengths, weaknesses and personality type over time. I can see that as the data collection period draws to a close, my reflections are shifting to the bigger picture too, as considering the whole person is just as important as how that person might use expressive gesture to enhance their sound.

- Concept of emotional contagion: ‘I can hardly expect my students to play energetically and expressively if I am not doing the same’.
- Physical transference of energy, drive, positivity and commitment to the music: ‘OK, let’s do it!’
- Teacher satisfaction: ‘I really enjoy teaching students like Kelly, because they are willing to meet me half way …’.
- Analogy: ‘Google Earth teaching’ – constantly zooming in and out from detail to the bigger picture, i.e. ‘Gesture is as important as finger technique, is as important as overall philosophies regarding embodied, energetic and expressive performance, is as important as the overall learning environment, is
as important as adjusting the teaching to the student’s strengths, weaknesses and personality type over time’.
- ‘As the data collection period draws to a close, my reflections are shifting to the bigger picture too, as considering the whole person is just as important as how that person might use expressive gesture to enhance their sound’, i.e. teaching the whole person seems a worthwhile goal.

Lesson 32: 14 September 2014

Kelly really is a delightful student, and I can see that she is making more of an effort to be ‘expressive’ and energetic, not only in her playing, but in her general demeanour and interaction with me during the lesson. She always comes in with a big smile and says, ‘Hello Mark!’ in a way that she maybe didn’t do so much last year, or even earlier this year. This week she told me that out of the three instruments, piano is her favourite. Actually I asked a couple of children why they liked to come and see me for piano lessons. Colin said that he likes piano because I’m funny and that Sunday is his favourite day of the week. At the end of teaching on Saturday, I was talking to one of the Masters students, Jaein, and ‘teaching’ him how to smile. I reasoned that if you can make the children laugh while they are working hard, you will be half way there to having lots of satisfied students, and parents. Of course, it’s difficult to generalise, but a couple of the parents have told me that they asked me to teach their children because I am not only an accomplished teacher, but that they wanted someone ‘nice’ too. To Jaein’s credit, he was telling me that he realises after teaching just a short while, that giving students repertoire and study material that they are interested in and stimulates their natural inquisitiveness to learn is key. In his experience, he said that many children in Korea are forced to learn and practise, and while they become quite skilled early on, they quit later because they hate learning. It’s quite obvious really, but it’s nice to hear someone so young reflecting on their ‘ghosts’, and what they can do to improve their overall approach. Within Kelly’s lesson, there was plenty of material relating the importance of gesture to not only the mechanics of expressive sound production, but its indissoluble link to the technique of actually being able to physically play. This includes both slow passages, e.g. in the middle section of the Debussy piece, where incidentally there was good talk regarding imagery of a little girl doing her technical exercises faithfully, before she departs into her own imaginary, improvisatory ‘world’ and then back again; and fast passages, e.g. the left-
hand four-note expressive phrases and the right-hand semiquavers at around bar 5. Again in this lesson and others, it’s important to choose a few areas to develop, give the student reasons for and strategies to do so, and then ask them to implement ‘randomised’ partial practice between lessons for maximum effect. There was also an interesting segment on page two where I asked Kelly to waver from our usual ‘drop into the keys’ and actually start on the key surface for left-hand staccato. I asked her to use a quick upward action so that a pencil on the top of her hand might hit the fallboard. This was an interesting exercise that I adapted from Jackie Sharp’s video on staccato. While on the subject of Debussy, I enjoyed Anna Carson’s lovely playing of Debussy with Timothy Young last Saturday at the Australian Piano Duo Festival – very gestural. Stephen and I spoke briefly in the foyer afterwards and were commenting on several good pianists seen during the week, and what they all have in common.

- Kelly seems to be making more of an effort to be expressive, engaged and generally energetic, both in the lessons and during her practice: Perhaps she is getting more comfortable with me and that is helping her feel more relaxed?
- Aiming to create an atmosphere of joy and a love of learning is surely as important as teaching a student to play with joy.
- It seems that the indissoluble link between gesture, sound production and technical facility is very strong in the higher grades, e.g. in the middle section of the Debussy and fast right-hand passagework around bar 5.
- Good example of analogy and imagery here in the Debussy to enhance structural, harmonic and expressive contrast of the middle section.
- ‘Randomised partial practice’: We choose a few areas to develop to keep the mind active and responsive.
- There is an interesting part regarding left-hand staccato using a pencil, adapted from Jackie Sharp’s video on staccato.

Lesson 33: 1 October 2014

It’s school holidays at the moment and Kelly came to the house for the lesson that she missed due to me being at the Queensland Piano Competition a couple of Sundays ago. Kelly didn’t participate this year, and it’s probably a good thing, as I don’t want to hold up her progress. She doesn’t seem to be as motivated by external competition as some of my other students, particularly the boys – Andrew, Neil and Adrian.
Tonight we focused entirely on the Chopin Nocturne, starting from page three and working backwards, at Kelly’s instigation. We spent time reviewing the fingering, notes and sound before I asked Kelly – why should we practise? ‘To get more confident with the notes so that we might then have the freedom to express them in our own way’. How should we practise? ‘Using the add-a-note technique to really ‘study’ the overall tonal shape, the directional relationship between the notes and therefore, the overarching gestural shape of the phrases. This process can be done on a localised scale, before continuing on to chain small sections together, becoming confident with the notation and expressive content within larger amounts of material in the process’. The idea of a monkey ‘swinging’ through the phrase proved to be an interesting analogy for using a preparatory movement to ‘roll’ through the notes, and another was using a small green ball to roll through the notes, literally! There was another nice analogy about comparing an expressive crescendo to a flower opening, which Kelly and I both seemed to enjoy. Kelly has a tendency to play with flat fingers and too much rotary movement of the forearm, which seems to inhibit true legato and the range of tonal colour that she can extract. This was remedied by using the ‘scratch-the-nose technique’ to encourage greater sensitivity to the shape and tactility of the fingertips. As we went, I asked Kelly to write in fingering and ideas herself, something that I seem to be doing more and more of with all the students, lest they become completely passive. There was an interesting part of the lesson where we were discussing the expressive potential of closely related keys, and I suggested that A Major was a ‘sunny’ key. Kelly suggested that it was a yellow key with which I agreed. The first page was quite good, but there were many errors. I asked Kelly to play the page again, but this time much more accurately which she did. I then asked her – ‘Why do we avoid making mistakes?’ ‘So that the listener can enjoy the piece as much as possible and not get distracted by mistakes that get in the way of hearing the music’. Kelly said that she had never thought of it that way before. She has about four weeks to ‘complete’ the piece and I asked her to do at least six hours practice on the last page before Sunday – the other two pages would be extra!

- Kelly doesn’t seem to need exams or competitions to keep her motivated, unlike some of my other students, particularly the boys.
- Again, Kelly chose what she wanted to work on – the Chopin Nocturne.
- Small green ball to demonstrate ‘rolling’ through the notes.
- Good example of questioning the student here: Q – ‘Why should we practise? A – To get more confident with the notes so that we might then have the freedom to express the in our own way. Q – How should we practise? A – Using the add-a-note technique to really ‘study’ the overall tonal shape, the directional relationship between the notes, and therefore the overarching gestural shape of the phrases. This can be done on a localised scale, before continuing on to chain small sections together, becoming confident with the notation and expressive content within larger amounts of material in the process.

- Analogy: ‘… aim to be like a monkey, swinging through the phrases’.

- Analogy: ‘An expressive crescendo is like a flower opening’.

- ‘Scratch-the-nose technique’ to encourage greater tactile sensitivity of the fingertips (learnt from Irina Gorin).

- What ‘jobs’ can I give Kelly to keep her involved in the lesson, e.g. writing in the fingering and other ‘ideas’? I seem to be doing this more and more as a result of the study.

- An interesting part of the lesson was when we discussed the expressive potential of closely related keys and key ‘colour’ (‘sunny’/‘yellow’) of the A Major section of the Chopin Nocturne.

- ‘Why do we avoid making mistakes? So that the listener can enjoy the piece as much as possible and not get distracted by mistakes that can get in the way of hearing the music’.

Lesson 34: 5 October 2014

Kelly is such a good girl. She is trying so hard, and I find that many of her own ideas ‘appear’, especially in Nocturne, where she had made obvious improvement in the last few days. The main challenge now is generating enough momentum in the left hand to allow all notes to sound clearly, while redistributing some more body into the bottom register, as I felt it was becoming a little bit top heavy. There were many small details that we attended to, always with an attitude of fixing ‘one thing at a time’ and ‘every little bit helps’. I encouraged Kelly to widen some of her rubato, analyse and then make more of the modulatory colour at the top of page two, fix up a few rhythmic errors and general pacing, adjust a couple of fingerings that were causing tonal bumps, and review the spatial information/gestural choreography needed to
connect the notes more confidently within a couple of bars in the bass. In the last few minutes of the lesson, I asked her to play some of the Debussy. While the middle section and the crossing hands part had really improved, the opening couple of pages were rather clumsy. She had clearly started become tense during the week, causing the directional relationships between the notes and the subsequent gestural ‘output’ to become unreliable. I suggested that these spatial relationships needed review, in order to clarify the notes and rhythm. I gave Kelly an example: where there is G – E, a sixth with fingers 1 and 4 and then a couple of notes later, another sixth, F – D with fingers 1 and 3, the lateral speed required to shift between the second interval will be faster than the first, and that speed has to be generated from the upper arm. When Kelly tried the passage again after coaching with this concept, she did demonstrate improved tonal clarity, rhythmic accuracy and facility.

- Kelly’s ability to generate her own expressive ideas is starting to gather momentum now.
- The Chopin Nocturne might be soft and slow, but intention and momentum are still important.
- Aiming to ‘fix’ one thing at a time; ‘every little bit helps’.
- Good discussion of modulation at the top of page two: Show the listener the harmonic change with a change of colour and wider rubato.
- A good example where fingering is reworked so as to avoid tonal bumps and spatial information/gestural choreography is reviewed in order to ‘connect’ the notes more confidently.
- The Debussy shows improvement with the middle section, but the directional/gestural relationships between the notes for the first section have lost precision, and consequently the playing has become clumsy and rhythmically unstable (good example of reviewing the intervallic/spatial relationships and consequent gestural activity of the upper arm for enhanced confidence, clarity and expressive intent), i.e. Inordinate tension seems to cause the gestural output to ‘mutate’, and reviewing the spatial relationships with directional freedom takes priority here.
- Did Kelly forget about the role of her upper arm during the week?
The first half hour of this lesson was spent reviewing the Alberti figure in the right hand of the Mozart Rondo. For such a seemingly simple little figure, it seems incredibly challenging. I have heard Kelly play this section very fluently before, even with hands together, but it may be that playing faster requires a different approach. It was almost as if her finger movements and the movements of the arm were not synchronised, much like a violinist whose left hand doesn’t coordinate with the bow. On closer inspection, I realised that she was over activating her third finger and curling the distal joint of the thumb, both of which seemed to be cause the rotary movement of the forearm to disengage. Once she appeared to get that sorted, it then became evident that the upper arm was not as involved as it could be, and that was causing a lack of momentum to execute the fifth finger on the right side of the hand. Anyway, it demonstrates that playing advanced repertoire is not always about acquiring technique, but rather trying to find, remember and then reproduce the kinaesthetic pattern that a particular passage might require. The same kind of ideology could be applied to the Debussy, as Kelly was using a lot of elliptical movement, but each of her ellipses were the same diameter, and that is not necessarily functional if the intervals between the notes are different. Passagework of this nature demands the ellipses to be of different sizes, and the velocity need to cover the ‘circumference’ of each in the time required varies too. She really seemed to understand, with the improvement noticeable. I tried to encourage Kelly to think and experiment with the kinaesthetic concepts while she was practising, as the ability to ‘fall into’ this choreography automatically really requires the ability to memorise what the shape and speed of each gesture ‘feels’ like, and that is really what she is practising, not ‘getting her fingers even’. Working from this general concept until the choreography is refined, seems more beneficial than starting with the notes and continuing to practise until it ‘suddenly’, if ever, improves. We also applied a similar methodology to the part where the hands cross over on the first page, analysing the movements, their shape, their speed and refining these attributes until they ‘fit’ the notes and their tonal shape and of course, the rhythm and overall pulse of the music.

- It seems that the movement patterns and technical requirements to play quickly are quite different to playing slowly: Is practising fast passagework at a slower tempo always best?
- Over-extension of the fingers and ‘curling’ of the thumb seems to increase tension up the forearm, inhibiting rotary freedom.

- Could a ‘kinaesthetic map’ of gestural choreography be helpful in solving technical problems within more advanced repertoire?

- Within the Debussy, it seems helpful to Kelly if I describe the elliptical movements as being of different sizes, as the intervallic relationships and the velocity required to cover the ‘circumference’ of each is unique to the notation

- Good segment (with noticeable improvement at the beginning of, and the middle of page one) on encouraging Kelly not to practise ‘notes’, but aiming to refine kinaesthetic concepts and the ‘feel’ of each gestural fragment until the smaller notes are absorbed into the larger whole.

- Google Earth analogy: Zoom in for notes, zoom out for overall gestural choreography and continue refining until they ‘fit’ together.

Lesson 36: 18 October 2014

During the lesson, I realised that the left-hand fingering in Nocturne was causing Kelly to inordinately tilt her hand, seeming to place the fifth finger in a rather ‘pokey’ position. Such physical awkwardness appeared to inhibit Kelly’s ability to move around the keys with total fluidity, resulting in notes that were occasionally inaudible and lacking depth. I encouraged Kelly to improve these broken chords by studying the intervallic and directional relationship between each pair of notes, before moving to the idea of thinking and feeling each set of four quavers as its own little gestural configuration that must be ‘dropped and rolled into’ for total clarity and shape of sound.

- Good example of ‘drop and roll’ here.

- This is a review of a previous lesson/lessons where each half-bar gesture/focal impulse is constructed organically by studying the intervallic, directional and tempo relationships between the notes in a systematic and analytical way.

Lesson 37: 19 October 2014

This stands out as being a very good lesson. Lots of previous work in Nocturne and Doctor Gradus are starting to converge, and I feel as though Kelly will be ready for the concert on 2 November. I could have easily found a way to be negative, saying that this or that was still ‘not good enough’, but I could see how much effort Kelly
had put in, even since yesterday, and there seemed to be a significant difference in the *Nocturne*. Using creative drills and ‘add-a-note technique’ for the fioritura on page three, and the idea of illustrating the harmonic intensity and broader formal structure as well as localised phrases by ‘planning’ the rubato rather than leaving it to inspirational chance, have really lifted her playing to the next level. Here and in other situations, it becomes very important to be totally comfortable and mentally/physically agile with the material in order for cognitive space to be directed towards the management of expressive concepts. There was some very interesting analysis of the intervallic relationships within the Debussy, where a thorough knowledge of these relationships, and the gestural choreography that facilitates them can improve the rhythmic continuity, and therefore the driving intensity of the semiquavers. As usual, there was plenty of emotional, physical and ‘gestural’ involvement from me, but it’s authentic, as I really find her lessons inspiring. I mentioned to Kelly that I am not usually so extroverted, but when it comes to playing music, you have to be a bit of an actor in order for emotional intensity of the music to ‘travel through time’. I said, ‘If you want to play “big girl” pieces, you need to have a “big girl” attitude and a “big girl” musical persona’.

- A lot of previous work is starting to converge here, as some concepts take repeated review until they ‘click’. I can see how hard Kelly is trying to meet my expectations, which I greatly admire.
- In terms of illustrating the harmonic intensity, the broader formal structure, and localised rubato, there is evidence of good improvement.
- A good example (using creative drills and ‘add-a-note technique’ with the fioritura on page three), of becoming mentally agile and physically comfortable in order for cognitive space to be directed towards the management of expressive concepts during performance.
- Within the Debussy, there is revision of intervallic/spatial relationships on a deeper level than previously, leading to improved rhythmic drive and tonal intensity of the semiquavers.
- Big girl pieces = big girl attitude.
- Analogy: ‘Try to enable the emotional intensity of the piece to *travel through time*’.
Lesson 38: 26 October 2014

This was another very good lesson for Kelly. Both her pieces are basically ready for public performance next weekend. In terms of *Nocturne*, we focused on highlighting the role of the bass in defining the harmonic intensity throughout all sections, and ‘breathing’ between phrases on the second page by using a slight rallentando on the last two quavers of the bar. A lot of time was spent injecting greater confidence, tempo and volume into the ‘climax’ on page three, both in terms of the powerful left-hand bass, but especially within the right-hand fioritura. Techniques to improve familiarity, confidence, fluency, tonal depth, and volume, and therefore passion, intensity and expression, included ‘add-a-note technique’ in reverse, shifting accents, rhythmic alteration, double notes, triple notes, and two-note slurs. *Doctor Gradus* is really going quite well now, but we worked on the gestural interplay between the hands that will facilitate technical control, accuracy, tidiness and volume during the final bar. There are a few practical examples of choreographing the hands to achieve expressive shape and technical facility here that illustrate the functional role of expressive gesture within advanced repertoire.

- Very nice segment on defining the harmonic intensity, through highlighting expressive inflection within the bass.
- There is very good demonstration of partial practice techniques during the climax on page three here, devices that may improve familiarity, confidence, fluency, tonal depth and volume, and therefore passion, intensity and expression.
- Good example of ‘breathing’ between melodic ideas, both physically and metaphorically.
- Within the Debussy, there are good examples of choreographing the hands to achieve expressive shape and technical facility, illustrating the dual function of expressive gesture within advanced repertoire.
Lesson 39: 29 October 2014

I had a spare hour, so Kelly came to the house and we worked further on the two concert pieces, but particularly the Chopin Nocturne. Today I asked Kelly to focus on the atmosphere that she might be able to create for the introductory section, otherwise what is the introduction really there for? I likened it to the beginning of a funeral when the orator speaks. There were several very good examples of forward thrust with the upper body, generated through the hips within both pieces. These included the introduction of Nocturne, and in the climax, where I likened the upward run in the treble and its subsequent rallentando being like a rollercoaster, where a naturally occurring ‘pause’ at the very top is followed by a sudden cascade of sound on the way down. Kelly said that she had never been on a rollercoaster, so I asked her to imagine one instead. In the Debussy, we also used the idea of ‘illustrating’ the phrase shape through body movement, but also noted that it appeared to provide greater volume and swell in the sound as a subsequent gestural by-product. Back to Nocturne, I asked Kelly to be a bit ‘looser’ with the A Major section, perhaps a little dreamier, and similar to Andrew’s lesson, I conducted Kelly with the rubato, textural balance and overall harmonic intensity, which I then asked her to internalise, and perhaps draw on in future music making. I also reminded Kelly that it was her piece and gave her the responsibility to ‘create’ the ending. This is very mature playing, and I think that she will play beautifully on Sunday. The Debussy was a bit of a different story unfortunately. It was a bit of a mess, though the section that we had reviewed on Sunday did appear to demonstrate additional freedom of execution and therefore greater confidence, technical control and tonal shape. We had to review the tempo, as Kelly is playing far too quickly in my opinion. I explained to Kelly that the whole point of the add-a-note technique is to be relaxed in the delivery of a ‘secret’ gestural choreography that the notes then lay across the top of. As soon as she was able to just ‘let go’ it showed remarkable tonal beauty and physical ease, but being able to ‘let go’ at will, is challenging for her.

- Good examples of using pelvic tilt/focal impulse to ‘illustrate’ the phrase shape and to provide tonal swell with expressive intention through the hips.
- Analogy: Orator’s introduction at the funeral.
- Analogy: Rollercoaster for upward run in the treble, slight pause at the top, before a ‘sudden cascade of sound as we come down’.
- Analogy: Like a dream in the A Major section of the Nocturne.
- Good section where I ‘conducted’ Kelly and then asked her to internalise that feeling: It seems to be a very effective pedagogical tool for Kelly.
- The Debussy is too fast, but there is a good segment where we discussed the purpose of add-a-note/chaining: To discover the ‘secret’ gestural choreography that the notes sit atop. The challenge is then to ‘just let go’ rather than ‘choke under pressure’.

Lesson 40: 1 November 2014

I had a feeling that Kelly would play well at the Intermediate Recital yesterday, but I was still surprised that she managed to play quite as well as she did. She really has matured this year, both in terms of her piano playing and overall sound, but also in terms of her ability to ‘put her back into the playing’, her sense of storytelling and ‘illustration’, and particularly her confidence under pressure. Most of all she still loves to learn. This will be a great lesson to look back on; the final lesson before the recital, not only to compare how she plays here with the recital itself, but also the long journey that we made to get this far, at least in terms of the Chopin and Debussy anyway. There wasn’t a lot to do with the Chopin, we mainly just worked on stage presentation and audience connection, particularly with the eyes, overall sound, a sense of ‘space’ in the A Major section and we reviewed the dynamic detail within the climax. We also experimented with playing in the dark, and with a ‘torch’. I told a story about Chopin playing by candlelight for wealthy people, and the better he played, the more money he might earn. In terms of the Debussy, some of the notes played with the fifth finger were not sounding, due to an under-active upper arm and elbow, essential for the rotary vigour required for all keys to be fully depressed with minimal muscular effort. We also added some pedal to the final chords, as they did sound rather dry. However, I was amazed by the standard of Kelly’s performance on the day. Her ability to get involved in the playing has improved exponentially. In terms of her performance polish and her ability to convey the essence of each piece in such a convincing and expressive way, she stood out.

- In terms of putting her back into the playing, her sense of storytelling and her confidence under pressure, Kelly has really improved this year.
- Novelty, analogy, imagery (candlelight playing) and positivity for the final ‘rehearsal’ together seems very important to a successful performance.
- A good example of how an under-active upper arm can cause a loss of finger clarity, i.e. the arm acts as a kinetic chain, where each segment plays a part.
- Stage presentation and audience connection through the eyes: Can/should it be coached?

A1.6 Wendy (36 Lessons)

Lesson 1: 23 Feb 2014

A good lesson, in which quite a bit of time was spent on arpeggio technique. I hadn’t seen Wendy for a couple of weeks as she had been on camp. Yana told me that she had really missed school and piano while she was away. As Wendy tends to have a very fluid technique, there wasn’t a great deal to do, but nonetheless, there were still issues regarding fingering, inversions and an upright position of the trunk without ‘scrunching’ at the extremes of register. Alignment of the forearm, body and firm feet were reviewed so as to enhance overall uniformity of touch and tempo. Within her Mozart Sonata, there were some big improvements in terms of quality of expressive touch and gestural work that seemed to have matured, but there were many errors with timing and notation, which we addressed using of the metronome. I praised her for the overall quality of sound and she seemed genuinely pleased with herself. Wendy is strongly motivated by competitions, so I suggested that she enter the Queensland Piano Competition and also the Brisbane Eisteddfod this year, and perhaps the Gold Coast Eisteddfod too, especially since that will be close to home. She mentioned that she might like to get the Khachaturian Sonatina ready for the Arts Festival at her school so that she could win a ribbon. The Khachaturian is the perfect piece for Wendy, as she has tremendous rotary freedom with the right forearm, maybe too much, and therefore the balance between hands needed to be redefined. Rehearsing movement and sound without the distraction of the notes worked well. Once the movement was learnt and the notes ‘spread’ across the top, the result was captivating and energetic. We covered three pages in the lesson. We also covered some sixth grade aural and I discovered that Wendy has perfect pitch. I wondered why she got the intervals so easily even though I had only showed her once.

- Concepts relating to rotary movement of the hips, stability of the feet and alignment of the forearm, wrist and fingers that are so important in reaching the register extremes typical of advanced repertoire, may be seen as healthy
by-products of efficient scale and arpeggio technique, i.e. scales and arpeggios aren’t just about fingers, but rather learning how to integrate the whole body with the instrument while trying to bring about the most efficient delivery and fluid touch possible.

- When dealing with repertoire of this level, removing the notes and studying the gestural choreography as the entity that facilitates the delivery of those notes does seem to help Wendy enormously. When she ‘spreads’ the notes across this gestural choreography, the energy and forward drive in the sound are greatly enhanced, as is her overall technical facility.

- Wendy learns very fast and her ability to copy expressive gesture is unusually good, but she does struggle to ‘care’ about details of rhythm and notational accuracy.

*Lesson 2: 2 March 2014*

A frustrating lesson but hopefully, ultimately productive. It was one of Wendy’s ‘slack’ weeks where she hadn’t practised much at all. There was lengthy discussion regarding the need to take responsibility for one’s own learning, and the need to respect the knowledge and experience of the teacher, the effort of the parent and the role that each of us need to play to ensure a relatively smooth learning curve. Nonetheless, we have been down this road before, so I really just reminded Wendy of what is expected. We temporarily abandoned the Mozart *Sonata* after working with the metronome, reviewing fingering and extreme dynamic contrasts (with some energetic conducting from me) and headed towards the Khachaturian *Sonatina*. There were many concepts covered, including partial practice, scaffolding, metronome use, teacher involvement, and aggressive aspects of touch and gesture. The lesson finished on a positive note, and I hope that Wendy will do some good revision this week. I asked her to replay the lesson in her mind on the way home in the car, and then set some goals for herself in terms of what might be achievable during the week. With direction, she is able to progress quite quickly within the lesson, and could improve rapidly if her attitude and practice were optimal. Even though I was fairly vocal in my objections to Wendy’s lack of motivation and autonomy, I hope that I was able to reason with her and maybe inspire her to work harder. In terms of musical detail, the challenge with Wendy is trying to get her to care about what is significant. While she has a very good memory, she still needs to put it to good use. She certainly seemed to
remember aspects of rhythm, pulse and fingering when I wrote them in. Perhaps I am assuming that because she is 12, she should do that for herself, but maybe she is just not mature enough yet, despite her age and ‘natural’ playing skills.

- I need to continue to help Wendy visualise what we did in the lesson and help her set herself small but achievable goals, as she seems to forget what is significant, and therefore what she should practise between lessons.
- Wendy may have tremendous natural facility and appear to be at an age where she should demonstrate greater learning autonomy, but as the year progresses, she will need further encouragement from me to develop her independence.
- She needs written reminders of basic rhythm, pulse and fingering just like any other student, despite her apparent ‘gifts’, i.e. even ‘gifted’ players have areas of limitation that need development.
- My own involvement through conducting and expressive gesture really seems to energise Wendy and give her the confidence to ‘go for it’.
- Gesture appears to be useful in promoting a more aggressive, percussive type of playing too. The take-home message? The physical gestures that the pianist employs should embody the character and shape of the musical gestures, i.e. physical movement should reflect what is going on musically.

Lesson 3: 9 March 2014

Wendy had done some good practice this week, although it’s hard to tell, as she seems to be one of those people that does amazingly well with very little effort. She looked as though she was about to cry, at which point I quickly said that I wasn’t displeased, but I just believed that she was probably more clever than she gave herself credit for, and that she had certainly improved over the last seven days. The Mozart is now workable up to the end of the exposition, and we did some great partial practising and chaining at speed, culminating in a very orchestral sounding duet, which I could tell Wendy found exciting. I must remember to bring the score next time and play with her more often, as it seemed a great way to build a sense of excitement, while helping Wendy to ‘absorb’ textural contrast and dynamic extremes. It also seemed to help her to keep the compound duple lilt alive and uniform. A lot of progress had been made at home and continued within the lesson itself. Wendy is remarkably resilient; I can be quite pushy with her and she responds well. I asked her to do a few pages of the development for homework. We then moved on to the Sonatina by Khachaturian,
which has so much potential, though I felt that Wendy was being a little too lyrical
with it. We bolstered up the tone and started learning more in the lesson itself, where
aspects of expressive gesture were very handy when it came to passagework and to
the broken D-flat Major chord. We experimented with various fingerings to decide
which was going to best facilitate expressive gesture, and ultimately sound and ease
of execution. I asked Wendy to complete the first six of 12 pages for homework.
While she had barely started the Chopin, I commented on the descending left-hand
passage on line two, and how the upper arm stays engaged so as to ensure that the
tones are lyrically elasticised rather than ‘poked’. Following that, we covered the E-
flat group in the technical work. Wendy does have a tendency to dip her head and
over-arch her back, much the same as Adrian. I think Wendy will have a good week
of practice and I look forward to hearing her progress. I saw Hayden waiting in the
car, and I asked him to help Yana fill out the forms for the upcoming eisteddfods. I
had earlier suggested that it would be good for Wendy to have an external goal, as she
tends to be a bit lazy and unmotivated otherwise.

- Wendy is remarkably resilient, and seems to enjoy a very direct, almost
  ‘pushy’ approach, but it may be that she likes to know exactly what is
  expected of her. This observation goes a long way in demonstrating that no
two students are alike, and that there is a real need for a pliable teaching style.
- It may be difficult for the student to digest gestural choreography of fast
  passages if they are always played at a reduced tempo. For example, to get a
  real grasp of the gestural interplay, it may be more effective to partial practise
  smaller amounts of material at full tempo and then chain them together as
  confidence, facility and gestural fluidity increase.
- Teaching within a two-piano ‘ensemble’ seems to facilitate collaborative
  learning and an ‘orchestral’ environment, perhaps making concepts of texture,
  dynamic contrast, rhythmic vitality and harmonic excitement more tangible,
  accessible and musically relevant.
- Effective fingering reduces the amount of work the fingers need to do!
  Fingering requires individual experimentation in order to ascertain which
  combination best eliminates stretching and twisting, facilitates total fluidity of
  the arms, and ultimately results in ease of execution, allowing the player to
‘roll’ through the keys, enhancing expressive tonal shape and a sense of embodiment.

- Gesture really facilitates speed and ease of passagework, perhaps due to work being redistributed to the larger, proximal muscles while taking the load off the smaller, distal muscles of the fingers.

- Gestural movement that is initiated from the upper arm does seem to allow for a less ‘prodded’, more ‘elasticised’ sound, enhancing the tonal shape and direction of the broken chords in *Nocturne*.

- Wendy needs regular performance goals to help keep her motivated.

*Lesson 4: 16 March 2014*

Wendy and I had a good lesson, even though I wish she would practise more thoroughly at home, but then again, this is only her second year with me and she still needs coaching with which strategies to use. I could tell that she had done some practise, but I guess I need to remember to be more patient and systematic, those same skills that I am trying to teach Wendy. She had an awards night the night before last, and was awarded a gold medal for the highest exam results in Queensland. However, I was very happy for her and she was clearly motivated, especially by the medal and all the praise and attention that she got from various members of the public who were there. She said that being told she is good at the piano makes her feel happy, and I want her to experience the feeling of success at competitions and similar, as I think that it will boost her confidence. For me, the biggest highlight of the lesson was all of the discussion regarding a ‘connection’ to the piano, where the division between person and instrument is blurred, and it is hard to tell where one stops and the others starts. There were a lot of references to this concept, particularly towards the end of the lesson, and the concept of being ‘comfortable’ when playing was a great way to describe successful, expressive and confident playing. I basically asked Wendy to practise what she was assigned until it felt ‘totally comfortable’. I helped her organise the Khachaturian *Sonatina* into three sections, and we looked at the first six pages, as I had assigned these last Sunday. She had definitely improved in aspects of fluency, especially with regard to the semiquaver flourishes, but there is still a lot to do. She seems to leave sections that are obviously messy to fix up ‘later’. We worked a lot on the fifth bar and strategies that can help with technique, expression, fluency and confidence. A big part of this piece is technical freedom that can be ‘forced’ into the
piece relatively easily if you know how, and I told Wendy that I was happy to help her do so. It was a longer lesson than usual, so we had plenty of time for detail. There was another interesting part on page six, where a fluid tone is achievable with a fluid technique, and I showed her strategies of rotation and coordination to achieve this. An interesting analogy was the idea of being an octopus and ‘sucking’ the notes of the keys instead of pressing them inwards which I though worked well, as weird as it was. The lesson ended with fingering for the first part of the exposition of the Mozart Sonata in F Major, which Wendy seemed to grasp quite quickly. It really suited her hand and seemed to facilitate the rotary movements required to play quickly and confidently, the goal of effective fingering really. I wish I could give Wendy two lessons per week, but she lives at the Gold Coast. Yana said that there were other teachers that were closer, but she values my input with Wendy and I thanked her for her support.

- Wendy is still a relatively ‘new’ student, and it’s really my responsibility to induct her into more effective and efficient ways of learning, thinking and playing over time.
- If I model patient, methodical and systematised practice techniques in the lesson itself, perhaps Wendy will ‘catch on’ and learn through doing, rather than telling.
- Wendy loves medals, winning and public adulation, but not necessarily competitions themselves, but I think that this is where she will really bloom.
- It’s important to foster conversation that promotes an embodied approach to learning and playing, where the lines between instrument and person become blurred.
- Striving for physical and mental ‘comfort’ seemed to resonate with Wendy, as that’s when her playing seems to be most expressive and confident.
- Wendy learns very quickly, and is good with the ‘big picture’, but needs help in the lesson to organise details of what to partial practise, for what purpose, and what she might do to get there as efficiently as possible.
- A confident, fluid sound and expressive tonal shape appear to be by-products of a fluid technique. Strategies that foster rotary freedom and coordination can be learnt within a gestural framework, and implemented relatively easily if taken one step at a time.
- What is ‘technique’? It appears to be multi-faceted, and perhaps difficult to tease apart the interdependent relationship between fluency of execution, muscular comfort, and the ability to shape the music with confidence and expressive intention.

- Octopus analogy: ‘Sucking’ the notes up and out, rather than pushing them down and in.

Lesson 5: 23 March 2014

I think that there is little point just ‘assigning’ work for Wendy to learn, as she still seems to need me to go through the detail of fingering, rhythm, gesture and sound with her first. We had a good lesson, but I forgot to record the first 15 – 20 minutes. In terms of sound, fingering and related gesture, there was some good material within Nocturne in E Minor. One particularly good analogy was that of a flower opening slowly instead of suddenly, just like the hand might when preparing for a new group of notes. If the hand opens suddenly, there appears considerable likelihood that a tonal bump would occur. We covered the first one and a half pages of the left hand in detail, editing all fingering and working on sound to reflect the harmonic colour, mood, melodic interest and overall structure of the writing. We started on the right hand but didn’t get much further than the first half page. I felt that it was better to move on to another piece, both in terms of lesson time and Wendy’s memory. Covering less material is probably best, as she tends to ‘forget’ detail. We came to the Khachaturian Sonatina, which had really shown exciting improvement in terms of coordination with the opening section, general tonal balance, overall clarity of sound and facility of finger work. Again, I decided not to overload her too much, so we worked on fingering and fluency for the ascending semiquaver broken chords, and also coordination and sound for the next section. Wendy had asked me to help her specifically with this section; very heartening to see her initiating tasks. She mentioned that she had a performance to do at school in a couple of weeks and asked me if she could play Hunting Song by Mendelssohn, which her theory/piano teacher at school had given her. I suggested that the timeframe was too tight to be starting something of that difficulty, and said that she should aim to finish learning the Sonatina instead. She had also given Wendy Pieczonka’s Tarantella, which I agreed would be a good choice. We also discussed the upcoming Ipswich Eisteddfod and the extra concert on 4 May. I gave her Rondo by Czerny, which is the set piece for the
Junior Championship, and she read through a little at the beginning of the lesson while I did a preliminary sort and pack up all of my teaching gear.

- Flower analogy: Open the hand slowly like a flower, and move ‘in due course’ so as to avoid tonal bumps. What is the point of arriving early anyway?
- Yana clearly values the lessons, as she travels weekly from the Gold Coast.
- Fingering facilitates the rotary aspects of gesture, which in turn shapes the sound, i.e. the sound is a by-product of gesture, rather than gesture being a by-product of the sound. Perhaps this ‘top down’ approach is easier for some students to grasp?
- Using sound and tonal shape to reflect harmonic colour, melodic interest and musical structure = expression?
- ‘Less is sometimes more’ with Wendy, as her ability to remember details is still developing.
- One thing at a time, over time …
- Wendy needs an inordinate amount of direction and support at this time, considering the advanced level of her playing skills.
- Realistic goals are necessary.
- Wendy is starting to realise what areas need development and her asking for help demonstrates burgeoning responsibility for her own progress.

Lesson 6: 6 April 2014

This was a great lesson; we covered a lot of material in the 90 minutes together. We started with the Czerny *Rondo*, the set piece for the upcoming Ipswich Eisteddfod. Wendy had made a terrific start and I can see that if she implements good practice strategies with the sections she can’t play easily already, she will play the piece extremely well. Apart from a few suggestions, such as playing the piece with a ‘bright and bubbly feel, just like your personality’, keeping the first note of the right hand above the sound of the left-hand quavers, and some extended work regarding the tonal uniformity and integration of fourth fingers in the descending scale passage towards the middle of the second page, Wendy is really shaping the music beautifully and this allows the harmonic colour and anticipation to build and recede in an alluring and satisfying manner. Using spoken ‘text’, I coached her to find direction with repeated notes by using the lid of the piano before ‘putting the notes back in’. This has proven helpful for a number of students recently. Next we moved to the Chopin *Nocturne*,
where there was a focus on the overall ‘meaning’ of the piece. I offered Wendy a suggestion regarding unrequited love, and the despair that one can feel when love is not returned. I didn’t dwell on this too much because of her age, but I just wanted her to get a general idea that the piece isn’t necessarily ‘just sad’. I suggested that the pianist’s role is really to manipulate the sound to perhaps invoke feeling within those listening. A fair bit of time was spent on basics such as fingering and notes, particularly in the trill section. Within the final page, I mentioned that the octaves could well sound ‘quite angry’. I coached her with the use of expressive gesture when shaping the phrases within the middle section, ‘which notes belong with which phrase’, and the importance of ‘illustrating’ the pathos at end of the middle section, where the left hand takes over from the right hand and ‘descends into despair’. In Tarantella, we spoke of gesture’s role in driving the whole piece forward when shaping melodic material and left-hand slurs. Another interesting point was the analogy of ‘little flashes of light’ with the top the notes. I suggested that these might be best achieved through double rotation from the thumb, essentially propelling the hand towards the fifth finger with greater momentum, volume and brilliance. Lastly we spent a small amount of time working on the first four pages of the Khachaturian Sonatina, which did show good improvement. I reminded Wendy that she only had a small amount of time to finish these pieces, and that no one would really know of her fabulous musicianship if she didn’t have the notes learnt. For easier execution and reduced volume, I suggested that she try ‘mixing cake’ for the right-hand semiquavers of the broken D-flat chord. It was a good lesson, comprehensive, positive, funny, collaborative and hopefully inspiring. I certainly enjoyed myself, and as usual Wendy looked like she was having the time of her life.

- Repeated notes in the Czerny Rondo: Using expressive ‘text’ and analysing the gestural sequence to facilitates expressive tonal shape on the piano lid before ‘putting the notes back in’.
- Discussion: ‘What is the pianist’s role in performance? To manipulate sound to perhaps invoke feeling within those listening, either felt or imagined’.
- Discussing and finding ‘what is this piece saying’ in an age-appropriate manner.
- Analogy: ‘Play the piece with a bright and bubbly feel, just like your personality’.
- Analogy for descending broken chords: ‘Descending into despair’.
- Analogy: ‘Technical ease and musical expression are like salt and pepper – they go together’.
- Analogy: ‘Little flashes of light’ for a brilliant shine to top notes in Tarantella.
- Wendy’s use of tonal shaping allows the harmonic colour and the anticipatory nature of the writing to build and recede in an alluring and satisfying way.
- ‘Cannibal phrasing’: Which notes belong with which phrase and where should we breathe? e.g. Let’s go and eat, Grandma/Let’s go and eat Grandma.
- The expressive potential of the left hand is often overlooked, but using a gestural approach to shape the bass can really help to outline the harmonic material and drive the piece forwards, i.e. expression isn’t necessarily limited in definition to a slow, lyrical cantabile melody, but can be an exciting, forward-driving bass line.
- The use of double rotary movement on the thumb within the broken octaves of Tarantella seems to increase her ability to propel the hand towards the fifth finger with greater momentum, increasing volume and tonal brilliance.
- ‘Illustrate’ the piece’s highs, lows and formal structure.
- ‘Mixing the cake’ analogy for elliptical gesture that passes from one hand to the other.
- Mutual satisfaction and enjoyment from teacher and student.

Lesson 7: 13 April 2014

Terrible lesson! Wendy hadn’t practised and showed barely any progress, which I found extremely frustrating. The only thing that was probably of value here was a talent versus effort discussion, in that Wendy can learn more quickly than an average student, but an average student is likely to surpass Wendy’s achievement because they have a superior work ethic. Nonetheless, pieces covered included the Mozart Sonata, Nocturne and Rondo.

- Talent is a great attribute, as is the ability to learn quickly, but working hard over a long period will get you further in the end.

Lesson 8: 17 April 2014

I thought that I had completed the reflection for this lesson, but as I look now to do the next one, I realised that I hadn’t. I will do my best to recollect some memorable
moments. What I do know is that it was a very long lesson, as I have been having trouble trying to make a DVD copy of it. Some features within Nocturne included voicing and shaping of octaves, voicing and tonal shaping of the ‘duet’ on page two, and lots of gestural work generally with the treble. Actually there was so much that it probably would be good to look back on this lesson again. All I know is that Wendy is really moving forward now, perhaps because I have been absolutely explicit with what I want her to achieve before the next lesson, and also having so many lessons in quick succession. There was a good segment on how analysing the movement trajectory of expressive gesture can used to shape double thirds and repeated notes, rather than relying solely on aural imitation and demonstration, i.e. instead of stating what is required, it’s important to explain the physical mechanism by which this might be achieved.

- Many lessons in quick succession may suit some learners better than others. Wendy is able to make quick progress with smaller, more achievable goals
- Explicit direction really seems to work well here.
- How inseparable are technique and expression? For example, how much of voicing and shaping of octaves and ‘duet’ playing between the hands comes under the umbrella of technique and how much can be categorised as expression?
- Another example of the interdependent nature of technique and expression is demonstrated in the way that using gesture really helped Wendy to make her double thirds easy, while simultaneously giving them expressive shape.
- Sometimes it may be more effective to give explicit direction from a gestural/movement viewpoint rather than by aural demonstration for the student to copy, i.e. instead of stating what is required of the student, it may make more sense to give the means by which this might be acquired.

Lesson 9: 19 April 2014

A very good lesson with a KFC lunch break! It was obvious that Wendy had tried very hard in the last two days, and is moving in the right direction. I heard her play the whole of the Rondo, and while she did fairly well overall, the last section was rather messy in terms of coordination, accuracy and fluency. I used an interesting ‘fragrance’ analogy, in that I suggested variation in tonal shaping was like the difference between a farmed rose without fragrance, and one that is home grown,
smelling beautifully ‘real’. There was also a really interesting comparison between a ‘thorn’ and a tonal bump, which made Wendy laugh. We also worked on the idea of using the breath and trunk simultaneously to enhance crescendo and decrescendo. We then moved on to Nocturne, which I heard all the way to the end for the first time. The first two pages have really improved, and we further developed the second line of the treble at Wendy’s request. There was some very good material regarding the use of ritardando for structural definition, and rubato for moments of expressive significance. It was interesting how I coached Wendy to use the breath and forward/backward tilt of the hips, so as to highlight what her arms were doing, thereby defining expressive moments both aurally and visually. There was a very good demonstration of scaffolding the ornamental cross rhythms on page three so as to ensure a more natural result, and also using gesture with ‘random’ notes, before implementing that gestural information back into the piece with the actual repeated octave B’s on the final page. The Mozart is definitely a tricky choice for Wendy and judging by what she said, she may be starting to realise the immense challenge ahead. I suggested that for the May 4 workshop, she should probably aim to have the exposition polished. I guided her through many useful drills in order to make passagework effortless and therefore, much easier at full speed. The real thing that is emerging with most of these lessons is the importance of having a good grip on the notes, and then building expressive self-confidence into the piece through the systematic implementation of expressive gesture, breath, and body movement. That is to say, careful scaffolding of tasks throughout the learning process seems to build confidence, leading to an authentic and expressive outcome.

- KFC lunch: Learning is embedded in a social context.
- Fragrance of roses analogy: ‘Real or fake?’ I suggested variation in tonal shaping was like the difference between a farmed rose without fragrance, and one that is home grown, smelling beautifully ‘real’.
- Thorn analogy: ‘No bumps’.
- ‘Cannibal phrasing’: Using flexibility in the time to mimic the rhythm and inflection of spoken language and to highlight broader formal structure.
- Simultaneous use of the breath and forward/backward movement of the trunk really seems to highlight the effect of crescendo and decrescendo.
- Using the breath and forward and backward movements of the trunk that are initiated at the hips seems to help illustrate moments of expressive significance both aurally and visually.

- Once again, Wendy is seeking my input with specific questions that she has clearly thought through prior to the lesson.

- Using expressive gesture to enhance the directional shape of the music appears to have the added benefit of technical ease and a sense of effortlessness. If fast passagework is practised at full speed, adding one note at a time with an awareness of the directional relationship between the notes, the overarching gestural choreography starts to take shape in a scaffolded way, and seems to result in an effortless, fluid, coordinated and expressively shaped outcome, i.e. slow practice of fast music is not always best.

- ‘The real thing that is emerging with most of these lessons is the importance of having a good grip on the notes, and then building the expression and therefore self-confidence into the piece by through the systematic implementation of expressive gesture, breath, and body movement. Careful scaffolding of tasks throughout the learning process seems to build confidence, leading to an authentic and expressive outcome’.

- Sometimes it is more effective to study gestural information without being distracted by notes, as movement can be more easily assimilated away from the instrument before ‘laying the notes over the top’, e.g. when teaching Wendy to free fall into the keys with increasing velocity to create an overarching crescendo with repeated octaves, it was more effective to remove the octaves and study the gestural movement as its own entity first, similar to the way a tennis player might practise their serve without the ball ‘complicating matters’.

Lesson 10: 21 April 2014

I’m leaving this reflection a bit late (4 days later), but nonetheless, a couple of standout moments are well worth writing about. The use of various down/up movements of the forearm in combination with dynamic detail and forward drive of the left hand within Tarantella are of interest. Usually the treble receives a lot of attention because it has the melody, but often the bass is responsible for driving the piece forward, especially in fast character pieces such as this one. Using rotary
movement to project and shape the melodic line within the middle section was also effective in enhancing both facility and luminosity. It could be that using partial practice to automate the shifts between chords and octaves in the bass reduces the cognitive load, allowing mental resources to be directed to secondary tasks (i.e. musical character and expressive effects). Another moment that stands out was during the Khachaturian Sonatina. I threw the music up in the air (and then a tissue) to emphasise the musical line ascending and the energy intensifying. I also talked to Wendy about the ‘tarantula’ opening, and then gave her a big scare; she found both of these dramatisations funny. We employed chaining and scaffolding in order to increase confidence and automation of the motoric aspects of the ascending broken chords in the Khachaturian, essentially matching these musical gestures with physical gestures, enabling ease of execution and expressive, exciting sound (see chapter in Music and Gesture, where, through a case of embodiment, a case is given to use the term ‘gesture’ instead of/or as an alternative to ‘motive’ or ‘figure’).

- When working on Tarantella, encouraging Wendy to adopt down/up gestures in combination with lateral ‘swing’ really seemed to enable her to ‘capture’ the restless spirit of the music, enhancing tonal nuance, forward drive and musical purpose.

- During the middle section of Tarantella, the use of ‘elliptical rotary movement’ is effective in injecting luminous melodic shape without undue accentuation or the tendency to ‘work too hard’.

- If leaps and other technical demands can be overcome and automated through directive partial practice, it seems to reduce cognitive load, thereby allowing remaining mental energy to be directed towards tasks of a more expressive nature.

- Analogy: ‘A spidery opening’.

- Physical analogy/dramatisation: I threw the music and then a tissue into the air as I was talking about the musical line ascending and the energy intensifying.

- Are ‘musical gestures’ the aural equivalent of ‘physical gestures’, and can embodying the music in a physical way bring these musical gestures to life? That is to say, using physical gesture appears to really facilitate notational execution, and illustrate the bold and exciting sound of the musical gestures in the Khachaturian’s ascending broken chord semiquavers.
- Teacher demonstration of practice and performance techniques: Show, don’t tell.
- The research process is helping me to understand, intellectualise and therefore better explain to my students concepts that I already ‘know’ instinctually through experience.
- Can scaffolding and ‘add-a-note technique’ be helpful in learning gestural information as well as ‘learning’ technical freedom and mental confidence, or are those qualities something that ‘you are born with’?

Lesson 11: 26 April 2014

This wasn’t the greatest lesson in terms of expressive gesture, but one mainly focused on pushing Wendy to finish the Khachaturian Sonatina and Nocturne. I asked Wendy what she would like to work on first and she was the one who suggested the Khachaturian. Actually there was some good metaphorical talk regarding the climax of Nocturne, much like the ‘best part’ of a roller coaster. I also referred to Sonatina being a celebratory piece, full of excitement, drumming and ‘fairy dancing’ (cantabile section) like at Burleigh Heads on Sunday night. There was an effective use of weight/speed of descent for a uniform volume/steady crescendo that is then transferred to notes. A common theme of this lesson and others today – accuracy, fluency, confidence and expressivity are usually mutually exclusive. Certainly you can be accurate and fluent, but not necessarily confident or expressive. However, confidence and expressivity are often by-products of a performance that is both accurate and fluent.

- Firm expectations for a strong personality!
- Rollercoaster analogy for climactic points in the pieces, i.e. ‘which part of the ride is the most exciting and/or scariest?’
- Student-centred learning: ‘What can I help you with today?’
- Linking pieces to real-life scenarios and analogies, and using them to characterise musical structure.
- To what extent are accuracy, fluency, confidence and musical expressivity mutually exclusive?
- ‘Starting with the gesture first, laying down the notes second’.
Today I heard the Khachaturian *Sonatina* all the way from beginning to end, a big achievement in itself. We have been working very hard the last couple of weeks, and the results are starting to show. I told Wendy that we were getting much closer ‘to the finish line’ with both the *Sonatina* and *Nocturne*. She had a fairly long lesson, probably about 75 minutes, most of which was spent on the *Sonatina*. Being such a ‘confident’ type of piece, it’s essential that all passagework is confident, strong and extroverted. There were excellent examples of chaining in this lesson, not just for fast fingers, but also for a fast mind. Something I said to Louise today comes to mind: ‘If you improve your confidence, your sound will improve in confidence’. *Nocturne* is really coming along now; the first two pages are just beautiful, and quite mature in delivery. A few things come to mind, one being the right hand riding on ‘a blanket of sound, that wraps itself around you’. We worked on the last page extensively, where the cadential climax, coda and ultimate harmonic and narrative resolution dictated the expressive realisation. The old adage of not fixing everything at once was applicable, working slowly but surely, laying foundations, both physically and metaphorically, and providing a scaffolded approach where expressive gesture becomes part of the kinaesthetic memory.

- With Wendy, the confidence and fluency needed for expressively confident playing really seem to stem from mental and physical agility, both of which can be practised *into* the piece by chaining notes together in a confident and fluent manner, one step at a time, i.e. ‘If you improve your confidence, your sound will improve in confidence’.
- Blanket analogy for left-hand broken chords of the Chopin *Nocturne*: ‘The right hand rides on a blanket of sound that wraps itself around you’.
- The harmonic structure of the Chopin *Nocturne* really dictates the expressive decisions here, and reflects the narrative nature of the writing, i.e. ‘storytelling in song’.
- ‘The old adage of not fixing everything at once was applicable, working slowly but surely, laying foundations, both physically and metaphorically, and providing a scaffolded approach where expressive gesture becomes part of the kinaesthetic memory’.
Lesson 13: 11 May 2014

This was Wendy’s last lesson before her first round of eisteddfods, starting next Wednesday. I heard the four pieces that she has been working on and gave detailed suggestions regarding expression, touch and tonal shape. There were some excellent imagery, ‘theatrical’ involvement from me, and the linking of gesture with sound, technique and storytelling in *Tarantella*. Something just wonderful that I could have easily overlooked was that fact that Wendy wrote in her own gestural directions, the small and big circles with the right hand of *Tarantella*. I said to Wendy that she is starting to develop her own ‘expressive gestural vocabulary’, and I think this may well be the first time that I have mentioned this terminology to her, and perhaps the first time with any of the students involved with the study. With regard to *Nocturne*, there was talk about ‘showing’ key changes through the use of sound and flexibility in the time, and how to ‘end’ a piece so that it seems as though the piece doesn’t truly end. It seems that a constant theme is the linking of gesture with harmonic colour, surprise, novelty, resolution of suspensions and the often, significant structural points that they highlight. In the middle ‘aspiramente’ section, there is some excellent material with regard to keeping a long note alive with gesture, while using that extended gesture as the preparatory movement for the following chord, giving the physical effect of a long melodic line that is both visually sustained and functional in terms of tone production. In this lesson and others this week I was reminded of how important it is to have lessons and concerts in a ‘musical’ environment, where students can bounce off and inspire each other. Particularly, the use of two pianos in the teaching space is invaluable, as demonstration is quick and the students learn visually as well as verbally. At the end of the lesson while we were talking outside, I gave Wendy *Counting Stars* and *Let it Go* as some ‘junk food’ songs, which she was extremely excited about. Wendy gets excited by just about anything, especially new material to learn.

- Teacher’s expressive vocalisations, expressive gesture and ‘theatrical’ involvement: Could a mentor’s expressive ‘behaviour’ contribute, in a positive way, to a student’s expressive development?
- Use of imagery and linking gesture with sound, technique and storytelling in *Tarantella*.  

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- Today, Wendy wrote in her own gestural ‘shorthand’ – the small and big elliptical movements within the right hand of *Tarantella*, and I introduced her to the term ‘expressive gestural vocabulary’.

- Linking gesture with harmonic colour, surprise, novelty, resolution of suspensions and to highlight points of structural significance.

- ‘Illustrating’ harmonic changes with tonal nuance and rubato.

- In certain circumstances, expressive gesture appears to serve a dual role: It can keep a long note ‘alive’ in terms of its visual effect, whilst functioning as a preparatory movement for the tone production of subsequent material. In effect, movement is ‘recycled’ from one note to the next, e.g. in the B Major chord at the beginning of the *aspiramente* section.

- Wendy enjoys popular repertoire that utilises chord charts such as *Let it Go* and *Counting Stars*, so offering her easy arrangements as ‘junk food’ songs to supplement her ‘serious’ repertoire seems to keep her happy, as she is very excited by having new material to read through. At any rate, this seems good for her overall development as a rounded and skilled musician, and as a whole person.

- I have been reminded in several lessons this week, here and otherwise, of the importance of conducting the lessons, rehearsals and concerts in a ‘musical’ environment, where students and teachers can inspire each other to greater heights in an atmosphere of ‘friendly competition’. Of particular importance is the two-piano, ‘ensemble’ environment, as demonstration and imitation are powerful learning tools, where students learn visually, aurally and verbally.

*Lesson 14: 18 May 2014*

Wendy did well in the Redlands Eisteddfod, receiving first for the Czerny *Rondo*, Highly Commended for *Tarantella*, and Highly Commended for the Junior Championship playing *Nocturne* and *Sonatina*. I saw her Czerny in person and watched recordings of the other sections on Yana’s phone, feeling the results were fair. In yesterday’s lesson, we reviewed the written feedback, which was very useful. I tried to emphasise the fact that Wendy had done well to get her pieces up to a ‘highly commended’ standard in just a few weeks, when compared with those who won, particularly Mimia’s students Jeremy and Grace, who would have been preparing their pieces for a number of months. I’m becoming increasingly pushy with Wendy,
because I think that she can cope with it. I reiterated that she has a lovely basic sound, but makes far too many mistakes, and that really can make all the difference between receiving highly commended and being awarded a prize. Anyway, I think it’s been a valuable experience for her, and it was particularly fortuitous that I was there in the audience last Wednesday to see her and Khoa play (he came third). I was able to advise her that performing is not playing or practising, as it takes experience to focus on the details and character of the music without becoming distracted. She played the middle of her Czerny piece far too quickly, and it became quite messy and uncoordinated with a heavy thumb. I think that she was very lucky to receive the first place, as Nina came second playing the Montagues and the Capulets quite well. In today’s lesson we went through the Tarantella, the Nocturne and the Sonatina, working through the feedback, one point at a time. There is a lot of good material here, particularly with regard to using expressive gesture, but not sacrificing finger clarity in the process, as is often the case with the left hand of Nocturne and with the right hand quavers of Tarantella. At the end of Tarantella there is good discussion and demonstration of playing big chords by starting on the keys rather than dropping into them, as might be appropriate in other sections of the piece. A good metaphor about the night and stars for the opening of Nocturne, ‘filling in’ the middle part of the bar with left hand intensity at the return of the main theme of Nocturne, creating drama at the end of Sonatina by ‘reworking’ the phrase structure and providing a different colour by using voicing, and employing a small amount of rubato at the first harmonic transition in Nocturne were all good examples of ‘creating and enhancing’ expressive impact seen in this lesson. I have made copies of the eisteddfod reports for future reference, with the main message being that careless mistakes would likely lessen the impact of any expressive devices used.

- I seem to be able to be more demanding with Wendy as time goes on, as she is remarkably resilient, copes well with criticism and doesn’t take it personally.
- Can too many careless mistakes lessen the expressive impact of any expressive devices used in the performance? If so, how can these errors be minimised?
- Wendy had some success in the Redlands Eisteddfod: A first and two highly commended. We reviewed and summarised the feedback together: ‘A lovely basic sound, but too many mistakes’.
- It seems that expressive performance is a skill that takes practice. Wendy seemed to become distracted by the situation and appeared to ‘forget’ to be expressive.

- Fundamentally, finger clarity and expressive gesture are ‘two sides of the same coin’, and one should not be sacrificed in favour of the other, e.g. the left hand of Nocturne and the right hand of Tarantella.

- Rather than dropping into the keys for a ‘rounded sound’, a ‘quick snap’ from the key surface facilitates a ‘ringing sound’ when executing large chords, and forms an important part of the student’s gestural vocabulary.

- It seems that ‘creating and enhancing expressive effects’ can to a large extent be taught, e.g. utilising one’s tonal ‘palette’ at points of harmonic and structural transition through voicing and rubato.

- Extending the dramatic potential within the final pages of Sonatina was achieved through ‘reworking’ the phrase structure, i.e. ‘no cannibal phrasing’.

- Analogy: ‘night’ for left-hand broken chords/‘stars’ for right-hand melodic line in Nocturne.

Lesson 15: 25 May 2014

There was a big emphasis on technical work in the lesson today, as the Intermediate technique exam is next weekend. We haven’t focused much on scales and arpeggios this year, but today was a good introduction. When discussing the need to unify the volume across all registers, there was an interesting analogy that I made regarding swimming and ‘walking while talking’. Actually, this was a very good lesson in terms of a mini ‘masterclass’ on technical work. Elements of forearm pronation in similar/contrary motion scales and arpeggios, as well as lateral adjustment of the trunk, bracing of the abdomen and support with the legs and feet were all reviewed. In terms of extreme dynamic contrasts to build excitement, there was some good work on Sonatina. Using arm alignment and tonal shape in order to let fast notes ‘speak’ in Nocturne was of interest.

- Analogy: Swimming/‘walking while talking’ (listening for tonal uniformity across all registers).

- Similar/contrary motion scales and arpeggios provide the opportunity to improve concepts that are ultimately utilised in ‘embodied’ playing, e.g. rotary movement and pronation of the forearm, lateral adjustment of the trunk,
bracing of the abdomen and overall balance and support provided by the legs and feet.

- Extreme dynamic contrast builds excitement, giving the music purpose and a ‘life-like’ quality.
- ‘Let the notes speak’ analogy: Forearm alignment, physical freedom and mental agility seem to allow for tonal shape to flourish, leading to a more convincing declamation of fast notes in the climax of *Nocturne*.

**Lesson 16: 1 June 2014**

Wendy came in after her technique exam seeming fairly pleased. I saw Angela in the corridor and briefly had a chat to her about Wendy’s exam and how all the students went. Apparently Wendy didn’t do so well with her scales, but she did play the two pieces quite well, though the Chopin was a bit loud overall, and there were several chord misreadings in the Khachaturian. Yana seemed slightly annoyed the whole lesson, I think because Wendy is always laughing and not necessarily taking things as seriously as she could be. It may have been that I was outside with Angela while I should have been teaching, or it could be that Wendy doesn’t play her best when under pressure. Actually, there have been many discussions about performance anxiety and its impact on a true and expressive performance this week. The muscles tend to tense up and then it becomes more difficult to use movement and employ expressive gesture. We did work with the opening left hand of *Study in G Minor*, including using rotary movement and discussion/experimentation of fingering in order to achieve a seamless legato in passagework. Obviously this type of rotation is important for building in tonal shape and musical tension as the semiquaver triplets ascend and descend. We also looked at further shaping and subtlety of the broken chords in *Nocturne*, as it’s one thing to use gesture, but within that gesture, what are the fingers doing? Is there a seamless legato? What does it sound like without the pedal? Does it make ‘sense’ as a melodic idea in its own right? These are all good questions to which I think that we found some answers. There was an interesting use of a ‘purple light’ idea (perhaps a laser beam?) for the ‘penetrating’ melody in the treble. Wendy was laughing a lot and I asked her to calm down, think more seriously and aim for a sad mood, but she said that she doesn't like to feel sad. This seems to a problem generally for young students, as a lack of maturity can make a deeper connection with these high level pieces somewhat problematic. I made a resolution...
that we would attend to scales and arpeggios more during this next phase of lessons, and we started looking at chromatic minor thirds, Major sixths, as well as A harmonic minor. Tonal uniformity, clarity of legato, and connection to the notes were main features, and it is certainly interesting that this will tie in with the main theme of Study and the Mozart Sonata, the next two pieces on the ‘to do’ list. I gave Wendy a medal and reiterated how much she had improved, but I implored her not get lazy, and I asked Yana to follow up with her and make her do the practice. I gave Wendy a practice test tube sheet, but I made each increment two hours. As I was likely to see her on Friday night, I suggested that she should complete 10 hours of practice before then.

- Attention to the overall gestural choreography of the arms and trunk is clearly important, but are the fingers ‘doing their job’ too?
- It seems that with Wendy and other students this week, performance anxiety may impede a person’s ability to utilise their gestural vocabulary and expressive templates, as the muscles and mind are susceptible to ‘freezing’ and ‘choking under pressure’, perhaps emanating from a self-conscious mindset where it becomes challenging to be emotionally and physically ‘free’ in front of others.
- Wendy seems to be always laughing, which is fantastic, but sometimes she seems to not necessarily take the lesson as seriously as she could be. Is this a realistic expectation at this level? After I asked her to calm down, think more seriously, and aim for a sad mood in Nocturne, she replied, ‘I don’t like to feel sad’. Can a lack of emotional maturity be problematic for children who are physically able to cope with advanced repertoire and enjoy playing it, though it is not necessarily suited to them on an emotionally expressive level?
- ‘Guided, collaborative learning’ regarding fingering, sound and rotary movement in Study in G Minor.
- Technical work seems to provide a great training ground for skills utilised in the repertoire, e.g. tonal uniformity, clarity of finger legato and a ‘connection’ to the notes that is real and confident.
- Teacher and student ‘in lesson’ reflective practice and goal setting appears to be a common theme – ‘It’s a team effort!’
I really enjoyed this lesson, not least because Yana brought me freshly made dumplings. We did quite a lot on the Moszkowski Study. Wendy said that she had learnt the whole piece, so we started at the end and worked backwards. During this whole process, it has become very obvious that pieces of advanced level really cannot be executed without gestural choreography, as it is so much a part of the actual physical execution and overall tone production. It’s therefore essential that such elements be covered early in a student’s training, not only to both prime the body for more and more demanding and intricate gestural combinations, but also for continued success in just being able to physically execute the material. We did lots and lots of ‘practice’ in the lesson and I likened it to good manners – if you never show someone what to do, how do they know how to do it? There is some good material demonstrating the need for elliptical movement in order to maintain flow, momentum and building of sound, but not at the expense of actual finger clarity. We then moved to scales and I really had to put my foot down and demand that Wendy faithfully practise her scales and arpeggios in order to sit the Grade 8 exam, probably in October at this stage. We made a plan that she should cover three grey boxes per day in order to cover all material at least once per week, and began to execute it, revising scales, staccato technique and tonal control. Wendy played very well in the recent concert, with several teachers and parents commenting on her terrific progress. Angela agreed that she had improved since undertaking the technique exam two weeks prior. Wendy has terrific potential as a pianist, and it is my pleasure to help push her in the right direction, wherever that may take her.

- ‘During this whole process, it has become very obvious that pieces of advanced level really cannot be executed without gestural choreography, as it is so much a part of the actual physical execution and overall tone production. It is therefore essential that such elements are covered early in a student’s training, not only to both prime the body for more and more demanding and intricate gestural combinations, but also for continued success in just being able to physically execute the material’.

- ‘Show instead of tell’: having the time to be able to take the student through the process of how to practise is so important. It’s like good manners – if
someone doesn’t demonstrate what’s expected and how it can be achieved, how would you know?
- Elliptical movement is just so useful in generating momentum and building of sound, but not at the expense of finger clarity.
- Expectations and goals need to be made absolutely explicit for Wendy, as she ‘doesn’t do subtlety’.
- Wendy played very well in the recent Intermediate Concert, and several parents and teachers commented on her terrific progress this year.

Lesson 18: 29 June 2014

We had a bit of an audience in the lesson today, as Yana has a lot of friends staying for next month or so. We spent the lesson ‘planning’ the expression in the Study, covering tonal shape, finger clarity, gesture and most importantly, comfort and technical ease, as this will help enormously with accuracy, speed and sound. I gave Wendy the music for Chopin’s Fantaisie-Impromptu, and I also asked her to keep working on the third movement of the Mozart Sonata K332. There was some talk (initiated by me) with regard to changing her List B piece, as she doesn’t seem to connect with it, though it’s certainly worth following through, as she has come so far. Wendy said that she had been practising her scales and had covered all of them over the course of the week.

- Gestural interplay can be laid down early in the note-learning process with Wendy, and at this advanced level, it seems critical to do so.

Lesson 19: 27 June 2014

Yana had brought me dumplings, so I ate them during the first part of the lesson. We got to work with Fantaisie-Impromptu. I have been thinking about Wendy learning this piece for quite some time. I think it will suit her, and she seems to like it too. There was some interesting work on the opening in terms of choreography/dividing between the two hands for maximum ‘embodied’ effect, where the long notes seem like they are actually ‘speaking’ for their full length. We also started exploring clockwise elliptical movement of the left hand (over and under) in order to create the necessary momentum to project the bass line over the broken chords for a three-dimensional acoustical effect. Small adjustments within the right-hand passagework were made through reworking of fingering, and I helped Wendy to learn the closing
bars at the end of the first section by utilising the second piano. We did some excellent work on the Mozart Sonata, and reworked the F minor melody in the recapitulation when it appears in octaves. Wendy showed me how her Mum ‘taught’ her to play the second subject (C minor) in the exposition by copying the gestures that I would use; it seems that Yana is learning too! There was a good segment where the idea of ‘question and answer’ was used, and the opening page received significant attention in term of theatrical polish and tonal detail using expressive gesture within the playing and the teaching. The lesson went so quickly, and I asked Wendy to work on the Mozart Sonata, the Moszkowski Study and Fantaisie-Impromptu, as well as technical work in preparation for the next lesson. I reminded Wendy that Nocturne and Sonatina would need review, as it was likely that she will be using both pieces in the upcoming piano competitions, especially as she has had some performance experience with those pieces already.

- In advanced repertoire, it seems important to study gesture as a fundamental aspect of physical freedom and expressive tonal shape.
- A good example of using elliptical movement to create the necessary momentum that facilitates bass line projection in Fantaisie-Impromptu (‘three-dimensional acoustical effect’).
- Within the right hand of Fantaisie-Impromptu, there is a good example here of ‘studying the micro-movements between the notes’.
- Good example of teacher’s expressive behaviour in the Exposition of the Mozart Sonata.
- Good example of refining the sound of the Mozart Exposition via the subtle refinement of gesture.
- Good example here of Wendy applying what she already knows to other sections of the piece – Yana ‘taught’ her as she is picking up the methodology too.

Lesson 20: 20 July 2014

Apparently Wendy hasn’t been doing a lot of practice again this week, averaging only about 30 minutes a day. However, Yana’s Chinese friends are leaving this Friday, so I asked Wendy to get back into her normal routine as soon as possible. According to her, she loves playing with the little kids and will happily go along with whatever is happening at the time, regardless of what else she could or should be doing. Yana
really wanted me to work with Wendy on Fantaisie-Impromptu first. Wendy played the middle section quite well and really seemed to enjoy playing it. There were some lovely expressive moments and it seems that she is able to apply her knowledge into new situations with more confidence now. We worked on fingering, double rotary movement and tonal shape, as well as metaphorical ideas of fantasy and dreaming, voicing of the bass line, as well as general ‘touch’ – i.e. the need to always be listening for and putting a little bit of yourself behind each and every note. After that we turned to the Mozart Sonata and Study in G Minor. I had emailed Yana and Hayden during the week asking that Wendy prepare these two pieces for the upcoming Gold Coast Eisteddfod, as I know that Wendy needs a deadline to work towards. That said, she really need much more practice, and I asked her to have both pieces in her fingers by next week. I suggested that she consider playing the Chopin Nocturne (really good discussion and demonstration of feeling lonely when playing the opening theme) and the Khachaturian Sonatina, as she had performed them several times before and each time, the polish, confidence and accuracy showed significant improvement. In effect, her confidence grows and therefore her ability to express the music increases in parallel. She expressed real interest in Fantaisie, but I suggested that she play what she felt totally comfortable with, and to continue working hard on the ‘newer’ pieces so that they might undergo a similar maturation.

- A good example of the way in which double rotary movement induces expressive tonal shape and voicing in Fantaisie-Impromptu.
- Good segment where I remind Wendy how important it is to ‘put yourself in the notes’.
- Wendy has tremendous ability, but for someone of her age and the level of difficulty of her repertoire, she might be expected to demonstrate greater industry, but this area of development seems comparatively slow.
- Her ability to apply known concepts to novel situations is improving.
- She seems to respond well to a deadline, but overplaying difficult repertoire ‘at the last minute’ is an area of concern.
- As Wendy’s confidence with the notation increases, so does her ability to get more involved in the character and overall spirit of the repertoire.
- Emotional analogy doesn’t appear to ‘click’ with her; it appears to be a bit abstract.
I asked Wendy to come for another lesson here at home tonight, as she could really use my input, but I did remind her of the need to take more responsibility for her own practice too. She needs me to hear *Study in G Minor* so that she can have some direction, as yesterday we spent the whole lesson on the Mozart *Sonata K332* (third movement). We worked through the Exposition with the metronome on quaver = 150 working upwards to quaver = 190, tidying up individual bits and pieces along the way. I suggested that she increase the tempo by increments of five until she approaches about quaver = 240, and then start apply that to the remainder of the piece, two pages at a time. I think that the piece is about 10 pages long, so she has about seven pages to polish, but I don’t think that it’s going to be possible in the short amount of time that she has left (about 10 days) until the Gold Coast Eisteddfod. Of concern, she was having considerable difficulty keeping the basic pulse uniform. In the opening bars, she was using too much gesture, and her fingers were not speaking clearly. I suggested that she ‘hang on’ to the notes, feeling for the bottom of each momentarily before rolling onwards to the next. It was good to see that she had fixed up the fingering as I had asked. There was an interesting section of the lesson where we were working on the end of the Exposition with the G7 to C chords. I was looking for a strong sound on the G7 chord and a softer sound on the C chord, so I suggested that Wendy play the G7 chord with a downward movement and then continue with a ‘underhanded’ ellipse, in effect facilitating an upward movement that lead to a softer C chord. Another really effective use of gesture came when the right hand has a strong – weak – strong – weak figure, but the left hand has the opposite. I asked Wendy to eliminate the notes and just work on the downward and upward gestures before putting the notes back in. It took a little while for success, but it was a very good example of using a ‘big picture’ approach, a kinaesthetic map over which notes are laid. What does strike me the most though, is that Wendy continues to write directions on the score based on what I have asked her to do, and she often asks me what kind of ‘symbol’ she should use to illustrate the gestural choreography being implemented. It’s a big shift for Wendy, even since this time last year, and I need to remember that she is still learning to be a musician and learning how to organise her practice. We continued to review detail, which I suggested that she continue to apply to the development section.
- Why is compound duple time so tricky for her?
- Yes, she does need to take more responsibility for her own practice and progress, but being negative may prove divisive in the long run.
- Good example of the two-note slur concept, but within advanced repertoire using chords.
- Good discussion regarding the avoidance of a waifish tone by using the bottom of each key to propel the hand towards the next.
- A good example here of learning the gestural information independently before laying the notes atop of the ‘kinaesthetic map’.
- A good segment where Wendy wrote the gestural ‘symbols’ into her score.

Lesson 22: 3 August 2014

This was an awful lesson unfortunately. Wendy hadn’t reviewed the Exposition of the Mozart Sonata except in the most superficial way, and as a result, there were still many errors with rhythm, note duration and fluency of finger work. I felt very frustrated. We moved on to the development and I asked her to practise slowly as she was missing many of the notes. It was all a bit of a waste of time to be honest, and I suggested that she is certainly not ready to play it in public, least of all in a competition. Study in G Minor was a little better, and considering that she hasn’t been working on it for very long, it does show promise and has improved. There was one section of interest, that of the ascending D Major arpeggio, to which we applied ‘add-a-note’ directional movement to assist with sound, speed and ease of execution. As we were finishing, a third year student Jack was leaving room 1.35 opposite, and so I asked him what he thought of K332, as he had just been practising that piece. He replied that it was ‘a beast of a piece to play’. Wendy looked genuinely surprised, and I said that even semi-professionals find the piece tricky and have to work hard and push themselves to achieve what they can ‘naturally’ accomplish without much effort. I also asked Jack how much practice he did when he was 12 – ‘about 15 minutes probably’. We had a quick conversation where he basically said that he wishes that he had worked a bit harder when he was younger and had the time. I could tell that Wendy was listening closely. It wasn’t my intention to embarrass her and I don’t think she was, but maybe hearing the perspective of a university student who was studying the same piece might help her to understand that she needs to be more mature and studious in her approach to the piece.
Lesson 23: 10 August 2014

On Wednesday and Saturday night, I drove down to see Wendy play in the Gold Coast Eisteddfod, and she did well overall. I spoke to her and Yana on Wednesday morning and apparently she was going to play the Mozart *Sonata*, even though I had advised against it. Yana said that she would like her ‘just to have a try’. I hadn’t had a good couple of days because of such a dreadful lesson last Sunday, and I tried to do other things after speaking to them, but I really felt like I had to be there and support Wendy. It turned out to be the best thing that I could have done, not least because I enjoyed listening to the eisteddfod, and the fact that we went out for Chinese dinner that night, but because I think that it made a difference to Wendy to know that I made the effort to come and see her; as I said, I still believed in her. I was actually surprised that she was able to play the Mozart *Sonata* all the way through with reasonable fluency, despite the fact that I don't think that I have ever heard it so. I certainly hadn’t heard the development section before. She received a very highly commended and a highly commended for *Study in G Minor* the next day. While I wasn’t there to hear her on Thursday, Yana showed me the video in the lesson yesterday. While it was quite fluent and fast, it really did sound too much like a study, and there was no melodic interest or overall shape to the piece, so that is what we reworked in today’s lesson. It represents a good example of using down/up movements in combination to achieve variation of articulation and dynamic contrast. There is an excellent part in the lesson where I quiz Wendy about which types of expressive gesture might be required for the melodic interest on page two. In order to find the phrase shape and harmonic interest, we went through the eight bars here using single notes before putting all chords back in, all the while analysing the gestural detail that best matches the expressive detail. On Saturday night, I drove down to see Wendy play in the Junior Championship. She placed third, which I thought was a fair result, though I did wonder whether second place would have been more appropriate. I had an interesting talk with her regarding why the other two competitors were placed higher, and I drew
her attention to the fact that while they had a similar level of skill and in the case of the second place competitor, a similar level of wrong notes and imperfect pedalling, they both were able to ‘perform’ the piece with greater intensity, flexibility and showmanship, without racing through and letting their nervousness make the playing seem introverted. In her lesson, I heard a bit of the Chopin and we worked on this concept, aiming to illustrate every left-hand note with intention, its significance to the overall harmony, and maximum timbral contrast in the melodic line. I also heard some of the Mozart in the lesson, and there is a very interesting part during the descending octaves on page two where I quiz Wendy as to which version ‘says something’. In other words, which version is able to be best understood by those listening and more likely to capture their imagination. She was able to pick which one and was also able to verbalise why, to which I replied, ‘Well do it then’. Apparently she has promised Yana that she will work hard at the piano and I feel that she will, eventually. As I reminded her during the lesson itself, ‘Well we are 20 minutes in and I hope that you have been paying attention to what we have been doing and will implement these ideas, otherwise you have just wasted $50 of your Mum’s money. You could shred the money in a shredder, or you could make good use of it; the choice is yours to make’. I know that Wendy loves and respects Yana, and put this way will hopefully induce a greater sense of responsibility and a duty to do her best. In the last five minutes of the lesson, we went through the list of the technical work for eighth grade, and I helped Wendy to systematise a schedule that she would cover all technical work twice during the week. This is a really long reflection, and I could keep going on and on, but in closing, this was a really important week/lesson/dinners and multiple conversations/text messages in and out of the car/eisteddfod venue and the lesson itself.

- ‘Kids go up and kids go down’.
- It’s important for Wendy to know that I believe in her; hopefully it will strengthen her self-efficacy.
- She placed third in the Junior Championship.
- A good example here of leading the student to consider what gestural detail might match the expressive detail in terms of melodic shape and harmonic interest.
- Good example of which version ‘says something’ to the listener.
Wendy came very late today. I was wondering if I had missed something, but it turns out that they were looking at display homes and lost track of the time. It was a good lesson, spent mainly working through technical work for the eighth grade exam. Actually we spent 55 minutes of 60 minutes working through the requirements. I could tell that Wendy had done some practice, but she tried to trick me into thinking she had covered everything which I suspected wasn’t the case, especially when it came to dominant sevenths. I reiterated the fact that she would need to spend an hour on pieces and an hour on technical work for the rest of the year in order for her to meet the exam requirements, and I helped her again to organise what she was to cover and how many times, and suggested that keeping a practice journal may be an option. I might bring that idea up again in the future if needs be. Wendy said that she found the technical work ‘boring’ and that is why she is a bit reluctant to do it. I said, ‘too bad’, and that everyone including me had to do it and she is going to be no different, besides it will do wonders for her playing in the long run. I also heard the first couple of pages of the Moszkowski as we were finishing, as I didn’t want the whole lesson to be another nagging session on my part regarding Wendy not practising enough. It really did sound more voiced, energetic and ‘demonic’, and I suggested that it wasn’t a sad song or even particularly angry, but perhaps ‘evil’. That said the second page hadn’t progressed in terms of voicing of melodic thumbs that we had implemented last week. Later on as we were talking outside, Wendy told me that she doesn't really partial practice, but rather plays the pieces through from beginning to end over and over. I was really surprised actually, and this explains why her progress is ‘slow’ and that she tends to ‘forget’ musical detail that has been coached previously. Maybe that’s part of the problem – perhaps she sees the lessons as me ‘fixing’ her playing without her actually needing to do much for herself, whereas they are actually directives of guided practice sessions that she is to expand on during the coming week. I was shocked that that was her interpretation, and as an example, we talked at length about paying someone to show you how to clean, what to clean in order to get things organised, but then spending most of the week doing your favourite cleaning task, for example, vacuuming, without spending hardly any time getting stuck into all of the other jobs. As a result, the ‘cleaner’ comes back and tells you that $xyz$ still needs more polishing, $abc$ needs a bit more dusting, but that the vacuuming is fine
and not to spend too much time on that. However, because you love vacuuming, you do mostly that again and ignore what was directed – this is what is actually happening and explains why the ‘house’ is quite clean, but will never really sparkle and will not win a first prize for the most organised and cleanest house. Wendy seemed to understand, and so did Yana, and I felt surprised that I hadn’t reiterated the importance of partial practice before, perhaps not so explicitly. Anyway, we walked to the wheel and talked again for a while before saying goodbye. Just towards the end of the conversation, Yana asked me how to make someone really ‘musical’ and not just ‘good’. I replied that Wendy really needed to do was to follow my directions, meet weekly expectations and the rest will fall into place, but ‘I’m not a magician and can’t do it alone’.

- Wendy said that she finds technical work ‘boring’.
- Wendy doesn’t partial practise – Why?
- Are the lessons really ‘directives of guided practice sessions’ for every student? We can’t force someone to be autonomous; it may be that it’s a guided process that is built and reinforced over time.

Lesson 25: 24 August 2014

I really enjoyed teaching Wendy today. Yana brought me a coffee, and that, along with the bottle of coke from Kelly, meant I was certainly in the mood for a great lesson. Today Wendy and I worked on various segments of the Moszkowski Study and the Mozart Sonata K332. My aim was to construct the lesson in a way that Wendy would understand that it was a lesson, and that its purpose was for me to direct her on what needs improving, how she might go about this, and how much time it might take her to achieve these aims before another lesson is necessary. I have been taking this approach with quite a few of the students the last couple of weeks, as being honest and upfront about my expectations seems to be what they need at this time. I asked Wendy to play Study for me and she didn’t get very far, maybe about half way through before we had some things to work on. Actually, it is starting to sound very dramatic and fiery, with a wonderful feel for the overarching melodic line, which is what we were working towards last week. She had clearly practised the voicing for the B-flat Major part, and was ready to move on to the pedalling stage. Actually we worked on pedalling for the ascending and descending arpeggios towards the end as well, ‘trying’ a few options along the way. I asked Wendy if there were other parts
that were of concern to her, and she drew me towards the broken octaves towards the end. It is clear to me that physically she can already ‘play’ those bars, but she needed some help with building confidence and total accuracy of the notes, which we worked on, at length, using deliberate partial practice, quavers 1-2, quavers 2-3, quavers 3-4, quavers 4-1, quavers 1-2-3, quavers 3-4-1 and then similar for the next 3 or 4 bars too. Of course the next thing would be to string quavers 1-2-3-4-1 together. Here and in other lessons this week, I asked Wendy to write down the ‘steps’ (as listed above) that I would like her to follow in order to gain total control, accuracy, freedom and comfort of the tricky bars. I explained that I couldn’t do it for her, but if she followed my lead, she would surely have success in a short period of time. We spent about 20 minutes of the lesson actually going through one of the bars as an example of what she would follow through on this week at home. This ‘list’ would become useful later, when she could transfer this kind of systematic approach to practising the other material, e.g. the passagework at the end of the recapitulation of the Mozart Sonata.

We then moved on to the Mozart and Wendy had the good sense to seek my advice regarding the end of the recapitulation, where she was having problems with the timing of the broken chords and similar. We worked through this together, and then turned our attention to strategies to improve the descending passagework as mentioned above. Part of this was ‘finding’ the spatial pattern/gesture choreography on which to ‘lay the notes across’, inducing maximum evenness of the fingers, total control of rhythm, freedom of execution, and rich melodic shape. Without these factors, ‘the confidence of the cadenza before reinstating the themes at the start of the recapitulation wouldn’t be completely convincing or showy enough’. Before the lesson finished, we started to go through the analysis of the entire piece and talk more about the function of each section, the basic key structures and how that harmonic colour needs to be at the forefront of the performer’s mind, so that the listener can grasp the composer’s intention of sonata form. Wendy might not have a lesson until after she plays for Sue Thompson next Sunday. I asked her to play the Mozart for Sue’s class, and then the study second, as I think that they will have a separate ‘performance’ too. I asked Yana to send the music for both pieces through.

- The lesson is to experience what, why and how, then ‘see how you go…’.
- Within the Study, there is good demonstration regarding ‘constructing’ the spatial choreography one step at a time.
- For maximum control of rhythm, freedom of execution and rich melodic shape, there is good demonstration within the Mozart *Sonata* of treating passagework as ‘spatial’ information over which the notes are then laid.

- A working knowledge of the harmonic language seems crucial in developing a sense of expressive tension and resolution.

*Lessons 26 and 27: 4 September 2014 and 7 September 2014*

Another fabulous lesson! I can tell that Wendy is really into it now, and with all of that natural physical ability to play that she has, there will be no stopping her. Wendy came to the house, and Yana brought me dumplings. We spent the entire lesson on the Mozart *Sonata*, picking up from where we left off on Thursday night, which now as I start this reflection, I realise that I forgot to write anything. I helped Wendy with how she might partial practise what was required, all the while listening and reflecting on aural detail. It was a very detailed lesson, and I let her have a lot of space to ‘get the idea’, and also stressed how important that she see the lesson as a place where I directed her with ideas to implement, how she might go about this, give her a bit of a try and then ‘carry on at home’, applying what she had learnt, rather than we do it at the lesson with a view that the work is ‘finished’. I really think that this lesson and the one on Sunday, have made a big impact on her, as she is finally realising what my role is, what her role is, what Yana’s role is, what the lesson is for, how she might make improvements in between lessons, and ultimately, how she might take control of her own progress. Without that technical security and total confidence in the notation, she is not really fulfilling that amazing expressive potential that she has, and I think that she realises that now. There was a really interesting part in the lesson where I asked her not to play quite so boldly with the bass chords, but then when she played it with less volume, all of the ‘excitement’ had disappeared, and Yana could tell too. I asked her to play it again with all of that ‘Wendyism’ back again. She did so, was able to control the tone while sounding very alive and exciting once again. There was also very good conversation regarding ‘Wendyisms’, how they were the best things about her playing, and that practice really provides a vehicle for those aspects of her playing to rise to the surface, and that no matter what, she should always aim to play ‘like herself’. Working hard and being diligent doesn’t necessarily mean sitting in a room for hours and being a tortured soul, as the best pianists/musicians are the ones who have a ‘real’ life, ‘real’ feelings, ‘real’ stories, ‘real’ frustrations, and ‘real’ laughter.
As I said to Wendy, working hard and being joyful don’t have to be mutually exclusive. There were some aspects of the lesson that directly relate to PRMD (Performance Related Muscular Disorder), and how important it is to be mindful and take preventative steps during the lesson and during practice sessions. I suggested to Wendy that she might aim to practise intensely for 20 minutes, followed by a five minute break to rest the mind and the body, and perhaps do the ‘wall Pilates’ exercises that I showed her to strengthen the back muscles so as to keep the head and neck aligned while seated. She had mentioned that her arms felt fine, but after a while, her neck became quite sore, not a good sign in my opinion. I also suggested that she could try combining her school homework with practice periods, and to alternate between one and the other rather than doing them both in ‘big blocks’. Wendy has the Queensland Piano Competition in two weeks, and I would like her to play the Mozart Sonata and the Khachaturian Sonatina. There was a really great segment of the lesson, only a few seconds long, where Wendy said something like, ‘so you mean that I should play the piano like this …’ and she then did some kind of action that summed up the whole idea of ‘being’ expressive that fits the ideology of embodied performance so well that words just can’t describe. She really gets it! I also suggested that she not play the piano, but ‘play the opera!’

- I think that Wendy needs more demonstration and working within the lesson, not just a list of more ‘things to do’ as this seems to disengage and become unmotivated.
- Yes, it is important to encourage an autonomous learning style, but ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day’.
- Be ‘real’ in your playing; aim to play as yourself; ‘Wendyisms’.
- Good example of ‘Piano Pilates’ in this lesson.
- It seems that without technical surety and confidence in the notation, she is not able to see the expressive ‘the big picture’ quite as successfully.
- There is a very good segment on principles of embodied performance during this lesson.

Lesson 28: 14 September 2014

Terrific lesson – one of the best ever. I really enjoyed myself and I can see the enormous potential that Wendy has coming to the surface. She really is playing at a very high level, both in terms of acoustical detail and technical precision developed
through gesture, wonderful sound and overall terrific energy and character – the whole package really. She has the potential to be a wonderful communicator, and now that her practice habits are more regulated, and ‘randomised’ rather than ‘random’, she will likely do well in performance, particularly in terms of accuracy and overall confidence. As with Adrian’s lesson, there were some interesting parts where the idea of ‘talk to me’ came up, particularly when the right hand has sixths, and the left hand has interesting chromatic melodic ‘spirals’. In fact, I asked Wendy to ‘write’ these gestural indications in, which she did. As usual, we worked on a number of small ideas that when put together, will lift the level of sophistication, and expressive intent of the piece to still a higher level. We started a similar process with the Khachaturian, but ran out of time before all ideas could be ‘workshopped’. At least I managed to verbally give Wendy direction for her practice over the next few days.

- Good example of ‘talk to me’ in the Mozart Sonata when the right hand has sixths and the left hand has chromatic melodic ‘spirals’.
- Good example of asking Wendy to write in the gestural indications within the score.
- Small refinements are ‘ironed in’ and mistakes are ‘ironed out’ = ‘progress on progress’ over time.

Lesson 29: 2 October 2014

It’s school holidays and Wendy came over to the house. She played very well in the Queensland Piano Competition a couple of Sundays ago, but unfortunately wasn’t placed. I was rather disappointed, as I did feel that she deserved a highly commended. Anyway, it has been a couple of weeks since, and I have realised that while she did play with impressive facility, speed and confidence, she really needs to find ‘more to say’ with her playing. The adjudicator commented that while the playing was very promising, there was a sense that it was all a bit fast, with the music needing space to breathe from time to time. We looked at the comments and worked through ways that Wendy might ‘own’ the piece by finding ways to ‘interpret’ the music in more sophisticated and subtle ways. For example, and as one example that might serve as a starting point for further exploration, at the top of page 131, I coached her on a few different ways to make the playing ‘breathe’, and we compared them via recordings on the iPad; a very useful actually. The lesson seemed to take its own direction and I just went with it. The lesson started with the Fantaisie-Impromptu, and somewhat
impressively, Wendy could play the vast majority of the piece from memory, even though I had barely helped her with it in previous weeks. I proceeded to rationalise a few changes of fingering and I demonstrated how she might begin to partial practise to build secure coordination of the polyrhythms, and modelled how a sense of spontaneity might be possible through time stretching and tonal nuance. I took the opportunity to relay Wendy’s strengths, namely her ability to learn quickly, her awareness of the intrinsic link between gesture and sound, and her improved ability to practise effectively so that her playing is more accurate and facile. I outlined her next challenge, namely that of ‘interpretation’ and the art of making the piece sound like it is being freshly composed right there and then in the moment. Wendy has a wonderful, buoyant personality, but at times she is quite immature for her age, and I tried to use the lesson as an opportunity for her to realise her strengths, where she can improve, and who she might look to for inspiration, e.g. her classmate Nina who was placed first in the 13 years and under section I mentioned earlier. As I said to Wendy, Nina not only plays confidently and expressively, but there is something deeper there, and you can tell that she is listening intently to each and every sound, weaving them together and drawing the listener in. I reiterated to Wendy that has come so far in the last couple of years and I really admire what she has achieved. I’m excited for her and what the future holds as she continues to improve her already impressive playing.

- A good excerpt in this lesson where the iPad is used to coach ‘space’ and ‘breath’ between phrases within the Mozart Sonata, followed with demonstration of how this might be applied to Fantaisie-Impromptu, inducing a sense of spontaneity through time stretching and tonal nuance.

- ‘Nina not only plays confidently and expressively, but there is something deeper there and you can tell that she is listening intently to each and every sound, weaving them together and drawing the listener in’.

Lesson 30: 5 October 2014

Wendy had another good lesson today, and in line with other recent lessons, ‘expression’ is starting to merge with ‘interpretation’, and the need for Wendy to now move to a new level of maturity in her playing, in effect, taking more ownership for making the piece her own. Within the context of Fantaisie-Impromptu, Wendy asked me where she should put in ‘the gaps’, referring to the use of expressive rubato. Actually, we spent quite a while talking about the Romantic period, why rubato is
used, what a fantasy might be, what an impromptu is, who else wrote them, and their essentially improvisatory nature of delivery. We of course covered efficient fingering, the interdependent relationship between spatial direction, gesture and resultant expressive tonal shape learnt through ‘add-a-note technique’ and similar, as well as imitating vocal phrasing through melodic treatment of thumbs and how that might be achieved through ‘volume numbers’ and corresponding speed of travel/speed of key descent. We covered a small amount of technical work, before Wendy said that she had some pain between fingers 4 and 5 on the right hand – not good! I suspected it was because of over-stretching with octaves and asked her not to practise octaves for any more than five minutes in any one day, at least until I could go through these with her at the next lesson to ascertain what is going on. I also gave her a couple of new pieces to read through, Chopin Etude Op. 10, no. 4 and Mendelssohn Andante and Rondo Capriccioso – she became extremely excited and jumped for joy. As usual, Wendy took notes, wrote in fingerings, added gestural indications and asked me to repeat a quote that she took note of – ‘The more freedom of technique that you possess, the more expressive options you might have’

- It seems that gesture and expressive concepts merge with ‘interpretation’ and taking creative ownership of the piece.
- Good discussion regarding the Romantic period and why we might use rubato.
- A good example of using ‘volume numbers’ and corresponding speed of gestural travel/speed of key descent in order to imitate vocal phrasing.
- Within Fantaisie-Impromptu, there is good demonstration regarding the interdependent relationship between fingering, spatial direction, expressive gesture and tonal shape, all learnt through the ‘add-a-note technique’.

Lesson 31: 9 October 2014

Wendy came to the house for another extra lesson, and we worked mainly on arpeggio and octave technique in the left hand, as she said that fingers 4 and 5 in the right are still feeling sore. After I saw her playing the octaves I can see why she may have strained her hand, but it is still a real worry. She later said that the pain is worse when she plays the Moszkowski Study, so I suggested that she stop playing that piece and we find her something else to do. Yana seemed quite resistant, and understandably so, especially as Wendy’s Grade 8 exam is in about eight weeks’ time. Anyway, after some coaxing, I managed to get Wendy onto the Prelude and Fugue,
Book 1, which I think will be achievable within that time frame. We went through the first page of the *Fugue*, and I explained the structure, the purpose of the piece and we started shaping and sculpting the sound. It will be a bit of a rush, but I said that I would give Wendy two lessons a week until the exam to help her get up to speed, but I really don’t think playing those large chords in the study is a good idea.

- While Wendy is able to ‘stretch’ the octaves and chords in the Moszkowski Study, it may be that it is not a good ‘fit’ and therefore needs to be abandoned.

*Lesson 32: 12 October 2014*

Wendy had done well to learn the Bach *Prelude*, so we talked, played together and I coached her on the expressive potential of the harmonic structure. Yana seemed taken with what I was saying, and said, ‘It is very beautiful’. Wendy and I spent the rest of the lesson working through the first page of the *Fugue*, voicing each hand, reviewing fingering and details of finger pedalling along the way. I reiterated that I am ‘trusting’ her with the piece, and that in itself is an indication of just how far that she has come this year, as this kind of piece is not to be played and then ‘practised’, but rather studied one step at a time. I told Wendy that I didn’t think that at the beginning of the year it was her kind of piece, but now I do. I think that it made her feel quite grown up. She really is a smart person, with immense potential and I am very happy to be her teacher. I told her that I loved teaching on Sunday afternoons, because it’s when my ‘favourite’ students come to see me.

- Within the Bach *Prelude*, there is a perfect example of expression being found within the harmonic tension and resolution, and not within melodic material.

*Lesson 33: 16 October 2014*

Wendy came to the house for another lesson tonight, and as usual, Yana brought dumplings for dinner. We had a good lesson, and Wendy stayed for about one and a half hours. We worked with hands separately on the first page of the *Fugue*, and it was extremely interesting and fortuitous how we were able to enhance voicing and tonal shape of the subject and answer by employing gesture through double rotary movement, despite some notes requiring to be held. It seems that gestural concepts may be applied to a piece that are traditionally played ‘with a quiet hand’. Wendy also commented that the principles of movement seemed to help her avoid, or at least minimise stretching, often a challenge with these contrapuntal pieces. At one point
she became quite distracted and seemed to just switch off, and really wasn’t paying attention to details of fingering, note length and voicing, but overall, she is moving in the right direction. I did remind her that while I was taking the time to help her grasp concepts during the lessons, it was really up to her to be directing herself in between lessons. We got talking about autonomy as a concept, and surprisingly, she didn’t seem to have thought about it before. I reiterated what the lessons were for, and the role that each of us plays in the learning process. She mentioned that her right hand was feeling better, but it started to ‘feel funny’ when she stretched or twisted inordinately. We then moved on to chromatic minor thirds, which I re-fingered and demonstrated how to practise, so that freedom, efficiency of ‘muscles on/muscles off’, and total alignment of wrist, fingers, forearm and elbow are built in to the exercise, in contrast to a scenario where one practises until things are easy. We moved to E-flat Major in thirds, working through octave by octave in two-note slurs for looseness and coordination, followed by the same octave hands together at full tempo. This was then extended to two octaves, then three, then four and I directed Wendy to apply this principle, in five-minute blocks to the remaining 23 thirds and sixths scales that she is required to prepare for the exam. We figured that that would be two hours’ worth, spread over the next three days until Sunday. I got her to write down what her practice goals would be and then called it a night as it was 9.30 pm and she has school tomorrow.

- Within the Bach Fugue, there is a good example of using double rotary movement with one part of the hand (while other notes are held down) in order to create momentum, volume and tonal shape.
- There is a good quote from Wendy with regard to principles of movement helping her to avoid or at least minimise stretching.
- There is evidence in this lesson of conversation revolving around autonomy: Wendy wrote down her own practice goals at the end of the lesson.
- There is a good segment where alignment of the playing apparatus is coached within chromatic double thirds.

Lesson 34: 19 October 2014

Wendy came to the lesson so well prepared – I was very impressed. She had completed the hands separately for page one of the Fugue to a very high standard and there was very little to do overall, but it was obvious the she really had understood my
expectations from the previous lesson. We continued with the second page, but for some reason I had forgotten my copy of the ‘coloured’ fugue, which made for very slow progress, as it was difficult for me to conceptualise the parts and therefore the fingering, articulation and sound. After speaking about the significance of ‘The Forty-Eight’, we moved to thirds and I sat alongside Wendy and ‘practised’ with her. This was a real highlight of the lesson actually. There was a feeling of camaraderie, and it felt like we were part of the same team. I will have to ask Wendy if she enjoyed the process at the next lesson. I did a masterclass for eight of the Young Beginner piano students from 1–3pm today in the Ian Hanger Recital Hall and that was a very fruitful experience, hopefully for the students and teachers of course, but similar to the MTAQ masterclass, it was very good to see how the application of principles of gestural movement could make a difference to the tone quality and expressive impact of the playing, sometimes in a very stark way. I took Iliana and Luie along, but my colleagues offered six others. I think that it was interesting how in each case, I started with the title of the piece, and found a ‘way in’ to the sound world, using imagery, imagination and oftentimes analogy. Highlights included the warm, broad tone for Kinabalu Sunrise and the importance of ‘staying in the air’ and then dropping into the keys for a rounded sound without any ‘wood’, ‘frog’ staccato for The Greatest Show on Earth, not over-pressing for ease of execution and a more mysterious touch in Whirlwind, ‘posh’ gesture and articulation for Minuet, i.e. we are eating and being entertained at the Marriott rather than Sizzler, harmonic colour and a ‘green sounding G Major’ in Greensleeves, laying the notes over the top of the movement and a heavenly sound in Celestial Hymn, not ‘freezing’ the forearm in staccato and aiming for a duple lilt by way of actual partner dancing away from the piano in Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy, scaffolding of material to build confidence, tone and rhythmic fluency in Addams Family, and free fall into the first note of the phrase without ‘stopping’ beforehand, similar to how you would throw a tennis ball and ‘scratch-the-nose’ technique for an alert and touch sensitive fifth finger.

- The title of each piece is significant and can be used in a much more creative way.

Lessons 35 and 36: 23 October and 26 October 2014

After reviewing many of the ideas from the first page of the Fugue, I gave Wendy a mock exam of the technical work, which did exactly what I thought it would; it
showed me that Wendy hadn’t actually been practising as she said she had. Instead of asking me for help with thirds, sixths, arpeggios, dominant sevenths, and diminished sevenths, she decided to pretend otherwise, which of course made me quite annoyed. Anyway, I helped her to ‘practise’ them in the lesson, and then asked her to do so in her own time away from the lesson. Apparently, she had only done an hour and a half practice from the Sunday lesson to the Thursday lesson, which in my opinion doesn’t warrant an extra lesson. I asked that she either do her practice as required or just leave it at one lesson a week. Yana, Wendy and I discussed it and apparently Wendy is having trouble completing homework tasks, whether from procrastination or otherwise. However, I think that she genuinely has trouble prioritising tasks and completing her work one step at a time in a systematic manner. This would of course go a long way to explain why she doesn’t always complete piano tasks as required, even though she has the ability to learn quickly and play at a very high level. She is perhaps a big picture person, and maybe has difficulty achieving one thing at a time. It’s not to say that she can’t learn how to do that, but it will take time. I just got off the phone from Jane and Oliver, Neil’s parents, and the similarity between that situation and this situation is quite striking. Neither child seems to see the importance of doing things that they are not immediately interested in, but they are clever and can learn very quickly if they are keen to do so. They seem to be having trouble prioritising work and breaking tasks down into a sequential list of smaller goals. Finally, both children are reluctant to ask for help for fear of looking foolish, and would rather pretend that everything is fine. Anyway, Wendy came for another lesson yesterday (Sunday) and she had done very well with the first page of the Fugue, so we attend to all fingering of the right hand on the second page, the left hand we will leave until next time. We also covered aural tests before she left.

- It seems that Wendy is very capable with the ‘big picture’, but needs to refine her ability to zoom into the ‘small picture’ and back out again.
Appendix 2: Key Factors That May Foster Expressive Performance

Within my Reflective Journal and the video recordings of one-to-one lessons, it was my initial intention to source evidence of the factors outlined below.

A2.1 Physical/Playing-Related Factors

1. **Gesture** – elliptical movement of the hands, choreography, preparatory movement/in breath, ‘the basic stroke’, follow-through movement such as in sport, release muscles in and around the wrist on impact with the keys, rotation, double rotation, ‘aim for the corner of the room’

2. **Body movement** – posture, muscular support of the trunk, momentum, coordination, muscle naming, anatomical function, muscle tension, connection to the instrument, ‘just let go’, ‘roll through the notes’, strong feet as your foundation

3. **Tone colour/touch**

4. **Musical structure/harmonic colour**

5. **Tempo/rubato**

6. **Phrasing/tonal shape/breathing**

7. **Rhythmic vitality, forward flow & musical purpose**

8. **Fingering that avoids stretching, allows economical micro-adjustments, provides effective alignment of hand, forearm and elbow and helps the hand to ‘rock and roll’ from note to note**

9. **References to spatial awareness, kinaesthetic memory, kinaesthetic imagery, neuromuscular programming and motor learning**

10. **References to ‘how does it feel to make that sound?’**

A2.2 Pedagogical Factors

1. **Audio/visual analysis**

2. **Demonstration (aural/gestural)**

3. **Scaffolding of tasks, especially when one hand has a different choreographic patterning and sound to the other (cognitive loading)**
4. Analogy/metaphor
5. Verbal reference to why humans might respond to expressive playing.

A2.3 Environmental/Relationship Factors

1. *Meaningful engagement, student-centred learning and collaboration – meeting students where they are and what they bring to the table (constructivism)*
2. *Evidence of elements of critical pedagogy and critical reflection in student and teacher*
3. *Verbal and non-verbal communication that work to establish mutual respect and a positive and safe emotional climate*
4. *Creation of opportunities for autonomy and self-efficacy*
5. *Transformative versus transfer pedagogy (Carey & Grant, 2014; see Figure 6.4.1 in Creech & Gaunt, 2012, p. 706). For reference, these factors are listed below:*
   - Welcome student views
   - Provide guidance but be responsive to student’s ideas
   - Collaborate with students in setting specific, achievable but challenging goals
   - Make sure your students understand the rationale for goals that are set
   - Devise tasks where your students can expect to succeed
   - Praise effort
   - Model and praise appropriate use of learning strategies
   - Provide feedback that emphasises factors that students can control, such as practice strategies and effort
   - Portray musicality as achievable through passion, effort and appropriate learning strategies
   - Emphasise mastery more than competition
Appendix 3: Lesson Synopses

A3.1 Case Study 1: Jade

Lesson 1: 15 February 2014

Reviewed 28 August 2015

- Jade shows me her report and the marks that she received from the two-week course she did at UQ – ‘a strong musician’. Julia mentions that she really took to the challenge and that if she applied that kind of enthusiasm to all areas of her study, she’d be ‘off and running’. I mention that like she did at the summer school, it would be good to extend her in the areas of theory and scales in piano this year. After Julia prompted her, Jade told me that she got choir captain at school. Julia said that she is first violin in strings. We talked about going through the 12 Major and 12 minor keys throughout the year. C Major: I ask Jade to play one octave of the right-hand scale and then hands separately for root position chords on each degree of the scale (chord 1, chord 2, chord 3, etc.). We move on to primary and secondary chords of the key. I ask Jade to write in the chord symbols in letter names focusing on the chord qualities (including diminished) and how to notate these in capitals/lowercase. We talked about how pop and classical music are really two sides of the same coin. I suggest that this keyboard harmony is a type of practical theory that will relate directly to the pieces that she is studying. I suggest a learning goal of one key per week, and that while we are studying the exam repertoire/technique, we could explore some pop and use the knowledge gained to improvise accompaniments and melodies (Julia mentions that Jade is into Katy Perry at present). I say to Jade, that this year I’m going to be relying on her to do quite a lot of your own preparation. As we have limited time it is an expectation that I will go through material with her in the lesson, but then she is to carry on at home between lessons as she has ‘reached that point now’. I mention that I have chosen three main pieces that I hope that she will like, as opposed to ones that she will likely hate (joke).

- Spanish Donkey Driver: I demonstrate the first half of the piece. I refer to the chords within the music that we have just been looking at. I mention that the difficulties with the piece lie with the pedal and the singing tone of the right hand (by using gesture
you will get a nice sound). I ask Jade to have a try of the right hand herself, which she does well. I compliment her, saying that this will be a great piece for her. I comment on the importance of fingering and the rhythm in the early stages of the learning. I mentioned that like in her summer school course, rhythm is extremely important. I write in the beat subdivisions and fingering and coach her while pointing to the score and counting. I suggest that she may have a bit more confidence to approach challenges now. She tries again and does quite well but seems a bit cautious. I mention that she has basically just learnt the entire right hand. I write in the chord symbols into the score referring to concepts earlier in the lesson. I introduce the rubato concept while demonstrating at the second piano, mentioning that it is a skill. I mention that the left hand is ‘like a guitar’. Jade tries first without and then with the pedal. I suggest that right from the start of the learning process, the gestural detail can be explored and implemented. I demonstrate (while standing) the drop/roll technique for the left hand, which she imitates very well while I use body movement and expressive vocalisation. I suggest that if she uses the gesture, it will help the piece to sound more ‘triplly’, which I then demonstrate with critical comparison – we don’t want a clumsy donkey. I introduce imagery of the donkey and the donkey driver, or perhaps the donkey driver with guitar sitting on the donkey’s back. Julia seems more verbal and enthusiastic about these concepts than Jade who continues to remain passive. I suggest that it’s a good idea to get the expressive concepts embedded into the sound as the notes are being learnt, rather than expression being ‘added on’ later. I suggest that Jade may enjoy the learning process even more if it is imbued with creativity each step of the way – she nods but doesn’t seem convinced. I suggest and demonstrate at the second piano that she might like aim for accuracy with the nuts and bolts within a small section, and that each subsequent repetition, she becomes a little more free to explore the expressive components of the material; ‘with knowledge and organisation comes freedom – the more you know the notes, the more confident you’ll feel to be creative’. I suggest that Jade could set a learning goal to the finish the whole piece within a week.

- Festival Rondo: I suggest that Jade could aim to complete this and Donkey Driver by the end of this term. I demonstrate while Jade watches. I mention the historical context. Jade starts to play the opening by ear without seeming to realise. I mention that Julia purchase the AMEB technique and sight-reading books. Jade is playing
random notes while I’m talking. I ask Jade what she thinks is a good goal to meet practice wise, but she doesn’t answer so I set goals for her. *Spanish Donkey Driver*, learn both hands all through and look at right hand for *Festival Rondo*. ‘I want you to know it well enough that you are not just sight-reading but are prepared well enough to learn how to shape the music – I want you to step up the pace a bit so that we can cover everything in time’. She seems to agree albeit reluctantly. Julia asks what her daily practice time should be, to which I suggest at least 45 minutes per day, but if you did an hour that would make a huge difference – ‘piano is a feeling instrument – you need to play it a lot to get the feel, a bit like singing – you can’t be a singer unless you sing – piano, even though you’re pushing buttons, it requires a certain feeling to get the right sound, and you can only do that if you know the notes well – well, you can, but it’s much easier for me to teach you how to make it sound good if you know your notes well – apply those skills that I went through with you in the lesson’. Julia mentions that Jade sometimes stops herself from practising or going further because she is scared that she will do it wrong, but I suggested that it’s better to just keep going, even if it does end up having a few errors. Julia appears to want me to hear that Jade questions herself and worries, when she is probably doing OK. ‘Do something and you’ll get somewhere, but if you do nothing, you’ll get nowhere’.

*Lesson 2: 22 February 2014*

Reviewed 28 August 2015

- We talk about the confirmation seminar practice and backing up multiple copies of data. *Donkey Driver*: ‘Show me a confident face’. Jade plays hands together having added the pedal, albeit a bit blurry. ‘Yay! That’s awesome, you’ve finished the whole thing’. When I ask her if she like the piece Jade said yes. I said that I thought that she would like it and that it would suit her naturally expressive way of playing, also I thought that she would find the harmonic structure relevant to other material we are currently covering in lessons. I complimented her (using expressive gesture and vocalisation) on the way that she used gesture to ‘illustrate’ repeated notes. I asked her if she meant to do that (‘it sounded like it – really musical’) and she shook her head no. We went on to further explore this, I demonstrated ‘up, down, around’ which she did well. ‘The way you roll through the semiquavers makes it sound … very roly’. I wrote the choreographic information on the score here. I move to the second piano and do a critical comparison of the phrase with/without gesture – ‘the way you
lift your arm … was that an accident?’ Jade nods yes it was, perhaps meaning that she is starting to implement a gestural approach as her default way of playing. Nonetheless, I review the gestural shape with her, one note at a time – ‘just roll forwards there’ to which she is able to refine receptively. We repeat this process and she is able to imitate very well, and I complement her. I then ask her if we did a strong-weak-weak feel for the left hand last week, where I further suggest with critical comparison, demonstration and expressive gesture that we don’t want the corners of the ¾ triangle to be sharp and jarring. I further demonstrate with a circular motion of the right hand while playing the left hand that ‘we want the corners soft’. I ask Jade to play again which she does with hands together for page one. I go to her score indicating that here is another spot where she could go (singing expressively) ‘up, down, around’. I take her hand and show her to ‘play this one on the way up and this one on the way down and you’ll give it more weight, it will be louder’. She plays beautifully – ‘nice’. I then play an overall gesture without notes and ask her to copy, then we add the notes back in. I sit at the second piano and we play together – ‘come from a height and just let it free fall … now collect the C … and roll up’. I then move over and take her hand and review the movement with expressive gesture and vocalisation. We repeat, this time adding the pedal, all the way I am coaching her with expressive ‘conducting’ and vocalisation. ‘Stay in the air and then drop… free fall … don’t worry about errors … well, worry a little bit (Jade smiles) … if you stay in the air and then just let it free fall you will get a better ring in the sound’. I then do a critical comparison at the second piano. I ask Jade if she understands (she nods yes) – ‘then the bass sort of has its own life’. Jade plays the left hand again and I ask her to play the notes smooth and connected in a single gesture – ‘excellent … that legato allows you to roll onto the note, rather than … good, all these little things’ (all the while I am gesticulating a rolling movement with my body and arms. I compliment Jade that she has done a very good job independently. I write, ‘stay in the air’ in the score. I ask Jade what it looks like when I use the ‘stay in the air technique’ while I demonstrate at the second piano. I don’t really give her much room to answer before I suggest that gives the impression of being quite languid, almost like a hot day (dramatises). I ask Jade if she knows what languid means (she shakes her head no) to which Julia and I suggest ‘slow and laid back’. I ask Jade if she thinks it’s a happy or a sad song, she answers sad and when I ask her what happens at the end and she suggests that the donkey dies. I play a little of Ibert’s Little White Donkey which I
suggest would suit Jade – ‘I would like to give yourself a big push this year to get to that Intermediate level… You can do this – and you did’. Before moving on I ask her to set a goal to review the ‘stay in the air’ technique and the other gestural sequence that involved repeated notes.

- Festival Rondo: ‘You can do this – just do one bar at a time’. Jade plays the right hand first section. I ask her if she got the link for the orchestral version (Julia missed it). I ask her what minor key has one B flat. We go to the circle of fifths and I coach her on cousin keys.

- Scales: A Major 3 sharps. Jade plays right hand, I mention we will cover four octaves eventually but will stay with two octaves for now. I coach her with rotary thumb movement and upper body adjustment so that the elbow is aligned with the upper register. Jade then plays the left-hand two octaves but I’m not watching here. E Major – I give her instruction on how to find the page number. ‘We add another sharp’. I coach her on the thumb roll. For the newer scales, I ask her to put the metronome on 80 with one note per beat ‘it gives you a bit of time to think’. We then try it on 70 one note per beat and I play it in sixths at the second piano which she seems to enjoy, albeit a bit distracting. I ask her to practise two per week and revise what we do in class. I show her the final goal for speed 72, four notes per beat. ‘It’s not that hard if you know the notes – speed and confidence comes from knowledge – confidence comes from within when you know that you have worked hard and have the skills to prove it’.

- Festival Rondo: we work on the rhythm, fingering and in/out movement. I ask her to fix up the rhythm this week (how would you count the subdivisions if you were in choir?) How much will you cover this week? (I write goals for technical work, sight-reading and pieces in her notebook).

- Don’t try to do everything, just do one thing at a time. Get to know your notes and your fingering so that your confidence grows.

Lesson 3: 1 March 2014

Reviewed 8 September 2015

- Talked about Jade being ‘purple’ USB.
- *Festival Rondo*: She is hesitant to get started and needs to be prompted by Julia. She says she is still having trouble with the notes. I suggest to Jade that she could try writing some reflections on her lessons and she says she has to do this for school. I say to Jade, that she seems a bit more grown up this year and not as afraid to give things a go. She said that she got into choral honours at school this week and says that she likes choir. I ask her what she wants to be when she grows up. It takes a good four or five minutes before we start looking at the left hand, as she wasn’t sure what to do with the overlapping notes. I help her rhythm and notes with the bars leading up to the first cadence. We try MM=50, but after multiple attempts she is still slow to understand, but seems better when bars are taken one at a time. I liken the writing to cellos and bass weaving around each other (gesturing and conducting). She gets the two bars now but keeps touching her nose (nervous twitch?) We continue on as I write the fingering in and coach her with rhythm (lots of numbers here – fingering, counting, bars). I ask her not to ‘run’ the whole piece, but rather take the information on in manageable chunks. She starts to have success and I encourage her, but she doesn’t seem as pleased as one might expect. I ask her to draw in the arrows for pedal points. ‘Go easy’ – pizza analogy, one slice at a time until it’s all finished. We talk briefly about Tristan. Octaves – ‘Here come the tubas and trombones!’ Jade says, ‘It’s colourful there’. I take my copy of the music to the second piano and play with her from bar 11 but I notice she starts touching her nose again. I ask her what it might sound like with the pedal but it’s probably too early. I ask her to focus on page one of the left hand this week, doing ‘less but more, as it will stick in your head easier’. I give a model performance with the hands together at the second piano. ‘Focus on getting a confident sound, not just the correct notes’. I ask her how she went with the right hand, which she then plays quite accurately. We review staccato and then I suggest tonal shaping to allow the music to go forwards (softer on the second quaver). I demonstrate the concept vocally (imagine in your choir) to give it broader meaning, which she seems to understand (lots of smiling here). We team play here at the two pianos (Jade right hand and me left hand). We want a rich texture like an organ. Jade plays through the rest of the right hand page one but seems very timid. I suggest that all of those phrases need to sound nice and extended which I then demonstrate gesturally and ‘take a breath’ and imagine your choir getting higher and higher (try and think of your piano music like voices and instruments). ‘Try to equate the increase in dynamic intensity with gestures becoming more and more vigorous …
drop into the phrases with more intensity for a more energetic sound’. A good section here when I encourage Jade’s arm movement while singing ‘take a breath. I coach her with the mordent at the end of the section but she keeps pulling her hand down and away from the notes (into her hap) as she finishes, like she isn’t fully interested or confident, though I know that she is. I suggest that Jade not wait until she was good at the piece to start exploring the expressive concepts within the music. ‘Icing on the cake’ is a bit old hat these days. Jade seems tired and low on energy, but is quite fidgety. I helped her set some learning goals for scales and pieces. Julia thanks me for the scale links (she has watched them but Jade hasn’t). I coach her with B-flat Major but she is unsteady with the arms and consequently, is leaning on the keys. I set an expectation that this scale will improve during the week. She tells me she has been doing sight-reading and she shows me where she is up to. I once again emphasise the importance of diligent weekly preparation for maximum improvement and effective use of the lesson time.

Lesson 4: 15 March 2014

Reviewed 9 September 2015

- She has been on camp and has been sick. The lesson starts with reviewing the left hand of Festival Rondo. Voicing is achieved using down/up gesture, a variation of the two-note slur. We work at matching the gesture to enable the sound (a slight swing to the left so that you get a loud sound: double rotation, but in a harmonic context here). I’m standing at the second piano. She gets it eventually. I ask her why study the movement and she says, ‘it helps’ but she doesn’t sound very convinced. We explore the movement for octaves and then put the notes into that. I suggest that she puts pedal in for the octaves now. I am working hard to be positive and enthusiastic, but Jade is tired and disengaged today. When I ask her what she enjoys about piano playing these days she just shrugs her shoulders. While I’m writing the homework tasks, she attempts to play the hands together but the tone is vacant and she fails to take pride in the playing. I ask her to play the left hand again and we review the voicing, notes and gestural shape, but she doesn’t seem to remember the detail from earlier in the lesson and previous weeks. I ask her to pull the hands apart and keep practising during the week. While I’m at the second piano, I ask her what kind of gesture for loud/soft notes and I then give her a model performance with hands together, with and without pedal. She seems to understand the concepts but I’m not
sure that she is willing to ‘do’ the detail. I spend a lot of time playing it for her in an attempt to provide inspiration, but ultimately it’s up to her. She is resistant to applying the right-hand fingering that will allow her to roll upwards at phrase ends – it seems that she hasn’t practised from the previous lesson. I continue to encourage her, guiding her hand through the choreography. There is a good part where I guide her through the tonal shape of phrase by chaining. ‘The higher you lift, the more momentum you will have to make a louder sound’ – she understands intellectually but physically, it’s a lot harder for her.

- *Elfin Dance*: I write in the right-hand fingering for her and then suggest that she practice two-note slurs to really get to know the fingering (via chaining). I review the concept of having the finger and arm adjusting to meet each other laterally. I seem to be doing a lot of the writing of notes and fingering here, when maybe asking Jade to do so may be more effective. I am also writing in her homework diary. I sit down and play it for her. I suggest that she ‘lay down the foundations’ with the notes using chaining of two slurs this week.

- *Scales*: we review the four-octave compass with A Major using coloured spots to define the geography. I help her tilt her body to meet the extremes of register (hold feet firm). I gently suggest that the more she can practice between lessons, the more you will get out of the lessons, and foundations can be built on at the next lesson (builder analogy): ‘Do you come to lessons to practise, or practise to come to lessons?’

*Lesson 5: 22 March 2014*

Reviewed 15 September 2015

- *Elfin Dance*: she says that the recording is very fast and seems a bit intimidated. I ignore her concern and refer to the fact that the speed is indicative of the elf running about the crisp forests of Norway. She plays through the right hand tentatively while I correct notes and fingering, demonstrating and directing while sitting next to her (I seem to be working very hard here but perhaps she should be doing more for herself). I ask her to get the fingering into her working memory this week, which she says she will. I sit down and demonstrate the hands together. I suggest that the fingering will allow easy rotation and speed. I play a little of *Puck* to show her the similarity between the pieces, both drawing on aspects of fantasy. We go through the right hand
again, but the fingering and notes doesn’t seem to have ‘stuck’ since the last round of repetitions. I suggest that if she played it 50 times, she would know it 50 times better than at present (50 times each day – she doesn’t seem to show much interest though). Joanne suggests that the piece would be good at school assembly. Jade starts the right hand of the piece again, but she has trouble ‘remembering’ the notes and fingering. I draw her attention to the underlying harmonies (chords). I write the chord symbols in but perhaps I should be asking her to do so. I ask her to play the block chords with the right hand but she seems timid to do so, as her body language is one of outstretched arms, not moving into the black keys even when encouraged to do so, and she doesn’t leave her hand on the piano for long before in drops into her lap again. Once again, I write her homework in the practice diary. She practises the chords multiple times (with encouragement), but she is still slow to recall them with confidence.

- Keyboard harmony – I remind her that we did C Major chords last week and that G Major is today’s ‘key’. I ask her if she has the circle of fifths sheet, which I then give her. I demonstrate all scales according to the ‘time’ on the clock which I ask Jade to cue for me. I coach her with the primary and secondary chords of G Major (root position), and I ask Jade to write in the chord symbols as we go. I ask her if she finds it fun, but her facial expression and lack of enthusiasm tell me otherwise, not that I give her much of a chance because I fill the silence with my own learning history. I tell her which chords are major and which are minor, and for the first time in the lesson, she asks me a question – ‘What about chord 8?’ I ask her if she can memorise all of this material and she replies ‘no’. I play Can You Feel the Love Tonight and Let it Go while singing the chord numbers to give practical examples of the concepts covered. I then give a chord analysis of Elfin Dance at the second piano. Jade is very restless, constantly moving her feet and swinging her arms (yawns).

- Festival Rondo: she picks at the piece with hands separately. The left hand still has errors with flats. I try to ignore this and draw her attention to the chord qualities instead (which is why we have to have to include the flats). I ask her to play the right hand of the F Major section but it shows no improvement. I quietly suggest that it sounds like she needs more practice here. Phone rings. My response is to overcompensate by writing in more fingering and notes. We review the gestural detail to evoke a bold sound (F Major). I put a lot of effort into coaching her with expressive conducting and vocalisation but she seems disinterested, even though I suggest she
needs to get more confident with the notation (spend a few minutes on each phrase when at home practising). I ask her where the ‘high’ point of the phrase and coach her with tonal shape. She seems withdraw – ‘Come on, talk to me’. I ask her, ‘You will practise this won’t you? (She nods) Will you practise one phrase at a time until it’s more confident?’ (Uh huh). She has the ability to shape beautifully but only when constantly reminded. Her body language is one of detachment, her pose is casual, her arm is outstretched and the tone is soft, even though I remind her of the dynamics. I tell her that while she might be a shy person, she must play confidently. I encourage her to be bold, but she can’t and stumbles with the fingering. I start to lecture her about not practising and my tone turns to annoyance. I gave her firm expectations – ‘If you want to sound confident, you have to practise until you are confident with the notes’. I am surprised when she says she did five days practice, almost an hour each time. I tell her that something isn’t right then – ‘Take one thing at a time and do it over and over until you know it, otherwise things will drag on for weeks and weeks’. She asks me on the way out whether she should do any new scales. I reiterate that she has already had 10 minutes extra time and that we have run out of time due to revising material that can and should be covered between lessons.

Lesson 6: 5 April 2014

Reviewed 16 September 2015

- Jade is picking away at Elfin Dance as I’m getting the camera set up. I give Jade a pack of AMEB aural tests and then we listen to five examples on the computer (Jade has a look of apathy on her face and doesn’t seem too concerned, she doesn’t even clap the examples unless prompted). Whatever she does, it is with a sense of being defeated before even starting.

- Elfin Dance: even though the rhythm is a little wonky, the right hand has definitely improved which I give her praise (she seems pleased). We work on the final bars – she is over-flexing the fingers. I show her how to improve it in a scaffolded manner and ask her if she would be able to ‘retrace her steps like Hansel and Gretel’, i.e. can you recreate these steps (or similar steps) back and forward to build the skill (motor program) when you are working independently? I am trying to encourage a reflective, metacognitive approach to problem solving here rather than mindless repetition – she seems to understand. I then ask her to make the main quaver motif ‘really melodic’.
She tries but pushing on the wrist is inhibiting her ability to produce a ‘rounded’ sound. I ask her, when you hear the tone ‘dip’, do you know why? I suggest that it could be not because she ‘isn’t musical’, but because the momentum has been lost (‘the rolling has stopped’) – she seems to understand the concept. I explain that we can do the add-a-note exercises to encourage the ‘rolly polly’, which I then do with her from the second piano. She does well but pressing on the wrist is a problem that I don’t seem to pick up on. I tell her that I’m excited. I ask Julia why the tone drops out and she replies either the fingers are stiff or the hand has stopped rolling. I agree and suggest that it usually comes back to confidence, but these drills can help to build confidence in touch, step-by-step. I suggest that if I were playing this piece, I would try not to ‘hang onto the notes’, but rather ‘roll through the shape’ which I then demonstrate. I try to reiterate to Jade that the piece will need constant care and attention, and that if in two weeks the rhythm sounds wonky or the tone dips in and out, she can always retrace her steps using the add-a-note technique to find the exact combination of arm and finger involvement (momentum) that produces a confident and melodious sound. I suggest that she doesn’t have to be a genius; if she puts in the time to build her confidence, she can rely on that, or as Julia puts it ‘back work’. You can rely on your body; your body won’t let you down, but your brain might. I praise her for having the notes ready so that we are able to move through to the next stage of motor learning (perhaps coaching students in the three stages of motor learning would be helpful for them to understand what mechanisms are being activated when they practice? We then turn to the left hand. She reads and plays while I am writing in the fingering. When she doesn’t get the notes straight away, I am (concerningly) rather quick to provide the correct answer, perhaps in an attempt to save lesson time. Nonetheless, she does seem to then ‘get on with it’. Once again I am writing her assignments in the homework diary for her. I ask her, as we are coming up to finishing, are there any questions she wants to ask me. She is very quick to ask about the rhythm and fingering for the final bars of Festival Rondo. I coach her and even though I give her lavish praise, she doesn’t react. Scales: I ask her to do E-flat Major. I give her the 12 Major and 12 minor ‘picture scales’. She tries the right hand of E-flat Major.

- Czerny’s Study in C: When I say that Julia would like you to learn this, Jade glares at her and Julia laughs. I ask her to get started with the left-hand scales. I mention that
I feel like Jade is getting back on track with her practice. Julia agrees, and mentions that she spoke to Jade’s schoolteacher, who said that she is having a great start to the school year.

Lesson 7: 8 April 2014

Reviewed 17 September 2015

- Greeting Holly and discussing interview time with more fussing over Holly. What do you want help you with? Jade answers, putting the hands together for Elfin Dance. I answer … yes, maybe somewhat surprised as to why she is asking me – it’s not that hard after all. I begin to show her and discuss. Jade tries and has some success, but I do seem to be doing quite a lot of coaching and note reminding here. ‘You’ll be right, it just takes a little bit of fiddling around’. I ask her to play the right hand for the opening, after which I ask and demonstrate to move further in, so that the thumb is near the black note – ‘The further in you are the easier it is not to twist’. I mention the ladybug. Jade says the dog ate hers, so I gave her another one. We use it to ‘get the dome of your hand’ and then try playing broken chords without it while still maintaining the arch. She finds it hard to readjust her hand. ‘The flatter the thumb is, the harder it is to round the knuckles … See how it’s on the diagonal?’ Jade answers, ‘yep’. On top of the piano, we do hand position exercises bracing the fingers and knuckles but not the wrist. I mention that the sound is much better this week and I ask her to keep going. She continues with the right hand but is still hesitant and it takes numerous attempts to get going. We do the dropping into the piano without actual notes (the ‘couldn’t care less technique’) for arm staccato. In order to avoid any twisting, I make a suggestion to change fingering which we try but she is very slow to bring it to actualisation. I talk to her about cutting her body down through the middle and then pronate in towards the middle of the body (thumb out and five in – ‘That’s a really good position for the hand’). I ask her if she has thought not just about what fingers to use, but where they might sit on the keyboard for maximum technical efficiency. Jade shakes her head somewhat unsure. I demonstrate using a tremolo in the lower register and say, ‘Anything’s possible, it’s just whether it feels good’. We continue to review the fingering mentioned earlier (1-5 where thumb is on the edge) and she is still slow to understand and implement the fingers that I am asking for (does violin fingering confuse her?) Finally, I say that it doesn’t suit her hand anyway. She seems more comfortable and I ask her to ‘work on that for me’ (She replies,
‘yep’) ‘I wouldn’t get you to do it unless I thought that it would help you’. Jade yawns. A good demonstration (I play and Jade copies) following the physical shape of the musical gesture and ‘digesting’ fingering using ‘add-a-note technique’ and ‘rocking’. Find the bottom of the note and then roll from one side to the other (all using ‘add-a-note technique’) – ‘Keep centred on the note and then rock to the next one’. I hear the ending notes and comment on her improvement. ‘The elf dancing in Norway, in the cold winter forest’. I ask Jade if she think the elf is a boy or a girl and she answers a boy. I ask her to play the hands together from the beginning, but she gets only through one bar before momentarily giving up after making a few mistakes (she has a strong fear of failure), but I encourage her to keep going. ‘I can see it’s all happening’ and that seems to help boost her confidence. She goes well after that, at least until she arrives at the broken chords. ‘That’s really improved since Saturday’. I continue to coach her with the fingering, but this time in the left hand. I take her left hand and help her ‘play’ the fingering and tonal shape. What follows is some coaching on dropping into the F# and rolling away on the B (I play and she copies here – I take her elbow to guide it and say, ‘keep circling the arm around’). I show her what it will sound like with a ‘still’ approach (‘you’ll get a fake sound’). ‘Use momentum to play the fourth finger … very good … It’s got this lovely shape’. I then improvise some funny words that the elf might be singing expressively (in falsetto) at that point in the piece which makes Jade smile a lot. I ask her what the elf might say to her. I mention that maybe it’s a Tristan elf – ‘cute but naughty’. She smiles but doesn’t answer. I ask her if I can have a little turn. I play the piece hands together, becoming faster and faster. I mention that the thing I like about the piece is that once there’s no twisting, it feels really good to play. I demonstrate some partial practice along the way. I ask her to keep practising and briefly review which sections, how and for what reason. I mention that she has a really good hand, but to keep working on her confidence – ‘How do we work on confidence … We work hard and build confidence into the piece every step of the way … To do that you have to come to lessons prepared’. Jade starts that thing where she swings her arms back and forth, but she is making eye contact and smiling knowingly. ‘In the lesson we have to have a positive time rather than reviewing older material that should have been prepared … That erodes people’s confidence and I depend on you to do your work … Everything moves forward smoothly … and that’s why this part of the lesson has moved
smoothly, because it’s improved since Saturday … Do you feel good?’ She nods and says yes, but appears unsure.

- *Festival Rondo:* I ask her if she has any questions. She plays silently on the keys for some time before answering ‘no’. I ask to hear the right hand, which she plays somewhat more confidently. My tone of voice is quite different when I am teaching Jade – it sounds like I am teaching somewhat much younger. I ask her to lift up at the end of the phrase so that she can come down heavily, which I then demonstrate to the end of the first section and ‘talk her through’ in terms of lifting the hand at the end of each phrase. ‘In order to have a loud sound, you need to have a good preparatory movement’. Jade starts to play some of the *Eflin Dance (?)* while she fiddles around playing the right hand of *Festival Rondo*. I ask her if she ever dreams about her piece (no), does she ever play it on the table at school (I dunno), do you ever visualise yourself playing at the concert (shakes head). I mention that visualisation is an effective way to feel more prepared on the day, but she says, ‘I can see what goes wrong’, which seems to point to a pessimistic mindset and/or a fear of failure. I mention that everyone gets nervous, but if you can stay positive and keep working hard over a long period of time, when it comes to the concert, it’s much easier to get out there and do a good job (she nods reluctantly). Piano playing is half physical and half believing you can do it, so rather than me saying be confident, we’re going to build confidence *into* the piece. I resume showing her the gestural choreography for each phrase, sometimes taking her arm and guiding it up and down, and at other times vocalising and conducting expressively. We then do an interesting activity where I ask Jade to tap the ladybug sitting on top of the piano at the end of the phrase, presumably to get her to be more deliberate with the upward movement (even here she is cautious and moves her arm as if it’s about to be eaten by a shark). We then follow the physical direction of the phrase by adding a note in turn while finding the centre of each note – ‘Really feel good … oh that’s a brilliant sound … that’s it don’t be frightened, be a bit bangy’. I keep reminding her to roll through every note. ‘The reason it doesn’t sound as confident as it could be is because even though you know the notes now, you aren’t lifting as much or rolling as much as you could be … but we can build that in’. We resume with the ‘add-a-note technique’ – ‘That is an awesome sound!’ I demonstrate and ask her to do double rotations on each note in bar one. I direct her using gesture and acoustical analysis to slightly soften on the C# at
the end of the phrase, but when she tries, the whole phrase is weak in tone. I mention that she has a great hand for piano playing, chunky with a wide palm and solid fingers, able to produce a good sound. When she drops into the note with a bang, I direct her to drop into the note with a follow-through movement, lest she will get ‘a thud’. There is a great part here where I ask her to use double rotation (rock) to enhance the sound of the phrase’s top note. At this time I am bobbing up and down, vocalising and conducting expressively, while Jade (even though she is doing well) constantly rubs her nose nervously. I ask Julia if she thinks it sounds different and she answers ‘vibrant’. We have a break where I am talking to Julia about administrative tasks and Jade ‘talks’ to Holly. I give Jade a CD to borrow (tracks 24 – 30) giving her some background information. We then resume with the F Major part, mentioning that the same principles apply, though she will need to lift and drop more often. After she plays it and I coach her with the inherent crescendo through the melodic/harmonic sequences, I mention that she has really improved. We pause to talk to Holly (only this time last week you were off the oxygen). Jade plays the right hand and I play the left hand. I mention (and demonstrate) not to rush or squeeze, but use double rotation on the tonic triad crotchets to which Jade demonstrates and says, ‘Not bang’. I say, ‘Rock to the left and then rock to the right and then lift’. She has a few wrong notes so I mention it’s probably worth going through those (phrases) individually which we do in an imitation, add-a-note, with gestural direction manner. ‘Roll through the notes rather than attacking them (with fingers) … lift up and parachute down … So remember, to make a loud sound, you just roll faster … If you drop and use the momentum, it will roll through … Don’t use your body, just use your arm… just fall … Well done … Try not to over-flex … Sometimes when you play the fourth finger, this one (second) comes up … that’s it … It’s usually because you’re trying to articulate the notes rather than using a looseness of the arm, I think … I don’t know, I’m not a doctor … All I can tell you is that it sounds much better when you do that … and I can tell you’re much confident with the song because you’re able to let go of the notes and think past that … Why do you rub your eyes and nose so much?’ I then ask her to play the left hand, which she makes a few early mistakes and then gives up. I ask her not to rush and to pretend to ‘juice’ the notes to get the maximum sound out of them. She stops again after a few mistakes, but starts again, albeit quite softly. I ask her to drop randomly into the keys without pressing, which she does, to which we then add the notes back in (cadence in D minor). Rather than squeezing, let everything
go loose, lift up and then rotate forwards and to the left, and then drop (final D). I go on to mention that the cadences are a really important part of the piece (she doesn’t appear to know what a cadence is so I play examples). To encourage her to play louder and with more confidence in the sound, we do six or seven gravity drops, and then I ask her to put the notes into that. Cello analogy for the bottom notes to be strong. ‘It’s really improved, it’s going to sound just like the whole orchestra, which is the point… foot down… touch the earth… lots’ of good things there Jade, well done’. I ask her what she will play at the performance workshop on 5 May, but she seems unsure, so I suggest Spanish Donkey Driver and Festival Rondo, to which she points to the middle section and says, ‘I’ll have a go at putting those two (sections) together’. Push yourself now so that you’ll have time later. I give Jade a bit of a verbal plan that she might follow (might have been better to write it down? I explain that the May workshop is a mini-goal so that she has four weeks for the pieces to settle before the main concert. I mention that she does sound much better than seven days ago, so make sure not to go slack on the holidays. Julia mentions to Jade to ask if she has any questions to which she replies, ‘No, I don’t have any questions’.

- Czerny Study: Jade says that she doesn’t really like scales. I ask her to play the left hand, which she has some challenges with the fingering, but I draw her attention to the picture scales on the opposite page. ‘Don’t let all the dots on the page put you off’. Jade seems a bit restless so I suggest that we have a rest now. I ask her what she will do during the holidays and she mentions ice-skating with her friend at Indooroopilly. I sit down and play the study with hands together at a slow tempo (about MM = 65), then repeat the middle section. I ask Julia if she wants to record and she says that she has been recording the whole lesson anyway. I replay the piece verbalising the main notes that the scales start on. Julia mentions that it sounds like ‘a royal court’. I ask Jade to get the left hand working reasonably well first (no hands together) concentrating on uniform rhythm and touch of semiquavers. I am at the computer organising copy of CD while Jade plays with Holly. I ask if we can get her learning another scale. I look at the book and suggest chromatics – as we both stand, I explain and demonstrate the right-hand fingering for A, E and left-hand fingering B flat (Jade tries and then I ask her to tick them off and circle them in the book). Jade continues to wipe her nose. She mentions that she has done those scales in violin. I copy the CD cover and I suggest that her Grandad could make a CD. We then listen to the Dame
Edna CD. I write in her diary the learning goals for this week, but in retrospect, I probably should have asked her to do it, as there was plenty of time. Julia gives me a Choo-choo bar.

Lesson 8: 26 April 2014

Reviewed 13 October 2015

- We started the lesson with general conversation. I talk to Joanne regarding Holly and a lump in her neck. Jade has brought her Mum’s iPad to record the lesson. I ask Jade what she would like me to hear today?

- Elfin Dance: I ask Jade if we are going to have a good lesson today and she quietly replies ‘yes’. She takes quite a while to get started, and gently plays random notes until I ‘tell’ her to start. The opening goes quite well, but when she stumbles, she takes her hands off the piano, momentarily defeated. She resumes, and while slow, the playing fluent. She doesn’t look at the score at all. Everything is accurate and flowing until the last line where the triple lilt isn’t accurate. I say in a somewhat disinterested undertone, ‘Not too bad … it’s sort of improved … You have all the notes there now and that’s really good to see’. It’s hardly very encouraging. I watch Jade carefully and she seems non-reactive. When I mention that we worked on the timing for the last line in the previous lesson, her eyes widen with caution. I suggest that she ‘must have forgotten’ and that we had ‘better write it in’. I watch Joanne in the reflection of the piano and she puts her head down. I put the metronome on saying 1 and 2 and 3 and, but Jade immediately starts playing the piece again, though I ask her to show me the last line, the one that we’ve just been discussing. Throughout this process my demeanour is somewhat cool and detached, though not exactly negative. I sit down and play it with her and guide her through the right-hand notes that she is not confident with (double sharp bit) using pairs of notes in the direction of travel. I come over to the piano and point to the music, mentioning and pointing to the double sharp. When I ask her if she knows what the double sharp symbol means, I say, ‘Didn’t I tell you before?’ Jade shakes her head no. ‘You’re kidding me?’ Jade shrugs. ‘Why didn’t you ask?’ Joanne covers her eyes with her hand and puts her head down. I mention to Jade if there is anything (else in the piece) that she would like me to clarify. Jade shakes her head. I suggest that she should definitely ask if she is unsure of any other concepts, though I wonder if she feels like I would shame her if she did so. I go on to
explain the C double sharp and ask again if she is sure that I hadn’t ‘told’ her. She
timidly says ‘yes’. I say that last time (lesson) she was fine with the notes but the
rhythm was wrong, and this week both the notes and the rhythm are unsteady here. I
proceed to ‘point’ with the pencil, seeming a bit condescending when I ‘tell’ her what
she did wrong last week and how that hasn’t improved this week either, mentioning
that if I can remember and I have more than 40 students why couldn’t she. This may
be true but I can’t help but feel that the way I spoke to her hardly inspires confidence
to try or a feeling of competence to continue trying. I go on to say that I suggested
exercises to help to improve the crushed notes in the final bars and that if she was
‘going to forget, circle it and makes sure you …’ I mention that it might be best if she
wrote it down either in her diary or on the music itself – she writes something, but I’m
not sure what as I go on to say that that is how she will slow her progress. By
‘wasting’ five or six minutes of the lesson doing ‘the same as last time. It’s not that I
don’t mind going through it but come on … you’re old enough now … mmm?
Remember you came to the house and your lesson was three times longer than usual?
Come on – be fair … mmm?’ I play the last two bars while counting, and Jade copies
me. I then say, ‘so we’re gonna …’ and then start playing again from the double sharp
part. When Jade plays the last two bars only and then looks at Joanne with a panicked
look, I go on to criticise her for not reading my mind and starting in the correct spot. I
go on to say that when I start playing from a certain spot, that although I might not
say it, I ‘expect’ her to do it (read my mind in other words, which is hardly fair). ‘Did
you think that I was playing it for myself… come on, you’ve got to read between the
lines a bit’. I continue to scold her for not ‘understanding’ the process of working on
the two parts and then joining them together, but this seems to be wasting valuable
lesson time and not really helping in a direct way. It just seems that I’m enjoying
acting superior. I play and narrate what she ‘should’ have guessed. ‘Even if I didn’t
say it, what might be going through your head? … I think that Mark wants me to join
it up and run it … so come on you know me by now. Jade tries to play it but is having
trouble with fluency. I say not too bad and then put the metronome and we continue to
repeat the passage, pausing to ask Jade to write in F#. Jade looks at me and I say
(while chuckling) – ‘It’s fine, it’s good – considering you haven’t practised it’. I say
to her, ‘What am I really saying?’ She replies, ‘That it needs improvement’. I say,
‘Yes, so put a bracket around it and sit there for five minutes and do it – it can be
good’. Jade starts playing the section again but with mistakes in fluency. I stop her
and ask her which particular bars she is having trouble getting fluent. She answers ‘correctly’, so then I say to do those a few times (Jade starts the nervous nose wipe here). I mention that it’s weird taking it out (partial practising) and my tone shows greater empathy here – Jade nods. Jade continues to partial practise one bar to the beginning of the next bar and I suggest, ‘Stay with that for a bit longer’. I sit down and supervise this process and then help her to move to the next bar (bar 67). I remind her to use her arm movement (I demonstrate the gestural component while she watches). She tries several times but not knowing the notes really well means that she can’t do it. Nonetheless, she keeps repeating and then after another demo from me, she starts to implement notes and gesture simultaneously. I then go on to suggest that the gesture will make the phrase sound ‘like elves and fairies’. She tries but gets the interval between the last two notes incorrect, so I ask her to practise that interval – ‘get to know that interval’. We work backwards adding a note. She takes the initiative and pairs the notes together. I ask her to swivel with the wrist so as to maintain correct alignment for the interval – ‘Notice your hand is pointing to the corner of the room?’ As you play these notes, that’s where you hand needs to point … If you don’t do that you’ll always have a wrong note’. We go back two bars, but she seems to be pushing on the wrists and getting worse. I say, ‘push yourself, come on’. She keeps trying and starts to have more success. I ask Jade if she is good at spelling. She gestures and answers cautiously, ‘all right’. I ask her to spell cat, and as she answers c-a-t confidently, I link her response with the learning goal of ‘spelling’ of these bars (chords) confidently. I suggest that she is improving with the piece, but she needs to know her ‘spelling’ a bit better, but it seems the more I push her, the more cautious she becomes (probably needed to back off here). The phone rings and Joanne exits the room and I walk away and she gets better. When I walk back to stand beside her, it deteriorates again. I suggest that we have very little time and that she needs to ‘do that at home – we haven’t got time to sit and practise – I will show you what to do and you do it (yep)’. Instead of moving on, I go back and play it slowly (again) and then faster. I suggest that the speed will come when you’re confident with ‘c-a-t – oh, that’s easy – when you’re confident with the spelling you’ll be able to play it faster, but until you know the notes well, it will never sound good … Get to know your notes so that you will sound good, so that you will have enough energy left over in your brain to sort of do all this (expressive gestural movement). If all your energy is going into the notes, you will never get past an amateur level, where you are just pressing buttons’ (Jade
looks at Joanne). I then go on to say that the rest of the piece has improved, but then immediately focus on the negatives. ‘Considering how much effort I put into your lesson last time and the (preparation) time that you’ve had …’ The concepts here are great, but need to be presented in a less superior manner. Apparently, Jade had been away camping for five days. Joanne says that she had a marvellous (practice) session two days ago. I suggest that maybe when she was away camping she may have forgotten a few things, but ‘that’s all right … are we on the same page (now)?’ Jade answers yes and smiles shyly. I say that she has done well with all of the… (I play the rotary movement part), but this part (sections where melody is in the left hand), ‘You are using the wrong fingering in the left hand and that’s why it’s all awkward’. Jade looks surprised, so I jokingly say that she had too much of a good time camping (Jade smiles at Joanne). Jade takes the initiative and takes the sheet out of the plastic sleeve to write on it. I praise her for ‘getting into it’. I say that there are a couple of areas to fix up – bars 67 to 68 (near the end again). I ask her not to pause at the bar line – right notes with the right timing is the goal here. I suggest that she move the left hand first and then the right hand second. She is slow to start but starts to have better accuracy after about five or six attempts. I suggest, ‘Pencil? What could you put there? What would tell you to join those two bars up? As long as you know what’s happening … because once you leave here, it’s all up to you… well not all up to you. I will help you, but most of what you do is done outside of class … I’m supposed to just guide you through.’ Jade seems to agree and nods. I go on to ask her if she is playing Elfin Dance next Sunday. She looks at Joanne tentatively – ‘Would you like to play this piece next Sunday? Remember that it’s a performance workshop, not a performance, so you could just get up and give it a go’. I go on to suggest that it’s good to give yourself a goal – ‘In a week’s time… I’m going to be able to play the whole piece fluently, so that I might have some cognitive resources (I ask her what that means) … I might have some extra brain power for my ‘fairies and elves’ but if I use up all my brain power on getting the notes learnt, how am I going to find any brain power for imagination or expression? The goal is to have the notes by the workshop date so that you have time left over to devote to the expression (of the piece)’. Jade agrees with me when I say that we have put in a lot of expression (through gesture) already, but you want to get the piece to the stage where it’s a bit more automatic. I sit down and play the last few bars and ask Jade why do we that kind of practice for those last few bars – to be a good girl, or to get it automated and confident so that we have enough
left over (cognitive) resources. I say that it’s all for her benefit and not to trip you up – ‘Ha, ha caught you … you did it wrong again!’ I say that I’m not trying to do that, but rather enhance her understanding of why that kind of practice might benefit her, though Jade continues to nervously wipe her nose. I start asking her a question about ‘sometimes to you play it and if it’s not right the first five times, do you just go …’ but Joanne says ‘Jade’ to direct her attention. Jade seems to be genuinely surprised that she should have been paying attention, as I think by this point she has disengaged in an effort not to have to endure further criticism. After I have her attention, I ask her how she feels when she is trying to correct a certain part (the last few bars again) – she tells me she feels mostly annoyed. I suggest that she has to be prepared to feel a little bit annoyed to get better though. I say notice that I gave her the space to try (?) so you have to give yourself that space too. Jade starts wiping her nose nervously again. I say that often people try it a few times and give up if it’s not correct. I suggest that to give yourself space to learn, it might be that you spend 10 minutes doing e.g. the join between the last few bars (I demonstrate complete with mistakes and saying ‘annoying’). I go on to say that you’ve got to be realistic.

- Spanish Donkey Driver: When I suggest that we move on to this piece, Jade’s face lights up. I ask her to stand up and then ‘sit down on the donkey’ (the piano) … You ride the piano like a donkey … Take the reins’ (preparatory movement with in breath) – I move Jade’s left arm and ask her to breath in and out. She then plays the piece (beautifully) while I stand at the second piano, occasionally conducting expressively. I take the music from her stand and sit down at the second piano while she continues to the end – ‘that’s nice … good girl … you play it beautifully’. Jade smiles with pride – I say that she can play it from memory – ‘You don’t need the book … it will give you a bit more space’. I put down the music stand so that she can better hear herself. I suggest that the whole thing is a bit slow, not boring, but could you go faster, so that it’s a one in the bar feel. We play the piece in ensemble with me improvising a harmonic part. I ask her that when she has C Major to C minor chords, what should happen with the pedal. Using expressive vocalisation, gesture and demonstration, I coach Jade to ‘show the listener’ the change of harmony. She tries, but pedal gets in the way at first (probably should have spent more time on this before moving on). I correct the notation around the transition to E Major chord. I hand her a pencil and she smiles as she takes it – I ask her if she had a pencil at the musicianship
course (in January). I playfully encourage her to be a musician and write fingering, timing or other in the score so as to trigger her memory later. I suggest that she heighten her awareness of this part of the lesson and ‘take charge of her own learning’. I say, ‘very good’ when I see that Jade has written in exclamation marks, but she continues to wipe her nose nervously, though smiling widely. I say to write in ‘quavers’. I give Jade encouragement, saying that she is good at it, because ‘it’s fluent, there’s minimal notational errors and she portrays the character really nicely’. I help her to correct a couple of left-hand errors with chords, writing in chord names where necessary. Interestingly, Jade is not touching her nose nervously here; her demeanour is more positive and she is making eye contact with me. I suggest that she can give herself space to make corrections, and pleasingly, she goes straight in for the chords we were just practising – ‘Make sure that at home you give yourself the space (time) to sit for 10 minutes and repeat until it’s right’. She does well, but she plays quavers as semiquavers again. She takes out the sheet, takes a pencil and writes. While she writes, I ask her what her favourite part of the piece is, and she timidly answers. I agree and say that I like that part too, and that she has a lovely sound for the piece. I ask her what she might improve with the piece this week ‘what are you going to give yourself space for fix up?’

- Festival Rondo: Jade plays quite accurately (a few stumbles in the second section) without once looking up at the score. On the return, I sit down and play in ensemble with her. This is the first time I have heard the whole piece all the way through. When she’s finished (looking exhausted) I say, ‘Yay!’ and give her plenty of encouragement. Joanne says that ‘she and I’ had a big session (presumably on this piece) when it was just the two of them in the house, and ‘she went all afternoon’. I say that it really shows. ‘That’s terrific … Well done … Yay!’ Joanne says that she enjoyed herself doing it, and that was the best thing. I agree and say that that is the best thing. I reiterate that she gave herself the space to learn – ‘That’s good!’ Sorry to dive into the mistakes … and I coach Jade with the left-hand timing of the A-Major cadence. Probably too quickly, I move to the gestural components (three movements including double rotary movement) before she has acquired confidence with the notation here. I playfully pop the pencil on her music stand and she takes it and writes something on her score – I’m not sure what. I say that I’m really happy that she knows the notation pretty well, because that gives her resources and time to ‘play
music’ (Jade nods). I coach her with the down and up movements of the right-hand phrasing here, encouraging her to stand up, play with the very tips of the fingers and roll through the wrist without pressing downward quite so much. She plays a really good one – I suggest that it sounds quite different – She then plays a ‘flat’ one and I say that it sounds like she is being trapped, and judging by her facial expression, she seems to understand and concur. I probably should have left it at that before introducing ‘a swing across’ to the top note, as progress stalls. I say, ‘Send the last note off into the air (she tries) … gracefully, don’t just chuck it … it’s not a tennis ball so use a movement that will suit the sound’. She does very well here and I say, ‘lovely’. She plays again and I suggest that ‘as you do it, can you smile inside?’ and she grins. By the time she gets to the third phrase, I suggest that there’s a problem there (the rhythm is wonky), so I ask her to stand, she plays and we ‘keep moving through the notes’. I suggest that often people get into trouble when they play the note, stay still and then start to twist – ‘Play the note and start moving’. She really is improving here. ‘Jade… if you use movement, you won’t have a rhythmic problem (there) and it will feel really nice to play’. I coach her right-hand section one, including in and out breathing, preparatory movement and up/down gestures, all the while coaching her using expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation. I say that the challenge will be doing that when adding the left hand in. She plays hands together, quite well actually and I suggest that I can hear it coming alive (I can see Joanne nodding in the reflection). ‘The piece has shaping because you’re giving it shape – if you’re not giving it shape, who will?’ I suggest that she play the piece standing up, but Jade says, ‘Nana doesn’t like it when I play standing up’. I sit down and demonstrate, saying that what she has done is excellent, and that it makes me excited. ‘The way that you approach the notes and the way that you move on them is what makes you a pianist, otherwise you’re just a button pusher’. Joanne says, ‘Is that so? (Yeah) … I’d never thought of that before’. I suggest that even getting as far as the correct notes, fingering and rhythm is quite an achievement and most kids don’t even get that far. I sit down and demonstrate that ‘most kids’ will (plays) … and even if they put some dynamics in, it will sound sort of fake (plays) … but then you’ll get someone come up and they’ll go (plays) … you’ve got to ask yourself, well what’s the difference … It’s an intention and a use of the body, that’s the only difference … and usually, if you’re not confident with the notes, you won’t have reserves left over to do that … If you learn the notes and the movement (choreography) at the same, you’ll
find that the piece will open up quite quickly … When you’re confident with the notes
the piece will open, but when you’re not confident with the notes, the piece will never
truly open, like one of those tulip bulbs that never sprouts (all the while Jade is
standing and play the right hand’. I suggest that that is what needs to happen with
Elfin Dance now. Joanne suggests for Jade to write. Jade suggests ‘bouncy, bouncy’,
but I suggest, ‘Hard work, open up, don’t get annoyed, get on with it … Give yourself
a whole week to get better at it’. Interesting, she has great difficulty starting the piece.
Once she gets going, the sound is still quite flat unfortunately. ‘When you’re
confident with the notes, it’s much easier to be expressive … you’ll blossom … did
you know that?’ Jade shrugs and then does a roly-poly. Before we finish, I help her to
set some learning goals for the Festival Rondo, particularly around where the left-
hand octaves are. ‘I’m getting excited because I can really see the finish’.

Lesson 9: 3 May 2014

Reviewed 21 October 2015

- Julia is away and Joanne may come later as she is trying to find a park. While I set
the computer cord up, Jade plays some random notes from Elfin Dance. We shift the
chairs around. I exit the room to take a drink and Jade starts ghost playing Elfin
Dance. I ask Jade what she will play in the performance workshop the following day.
I ask her what she will play first – Elfin Dance. I show her where in the program she
will play. I explain to her that a performance workshop is an opportunity to try out her
pieces and then continue to improve them thereafter. I encourage her, saying that she
has got three pieces up to performance standard so far this year. I mention that two
other students are also playing Elfin Dance at the workshop. I exit the room to drop a
book off at the library. Jade plays Elfin Dance but it is quite uncoordinated on the
whole, and seems to have physically gone backwards in terms of progress during the
week, despite the ending being much improved. I come back in and say ‘yay’, saying
that she had fixed up the ending. I say, ‘What’s really good about your playing, is that
there is a fine sense of the triple lilt throughout … it makes it sound like the elf is
dancing … it’s more interesting to listen to’. I ask her to play it again ‘sounds good,
very good girl’. The second time is marginally better in terms of overall fluency and
coordination, but it’s still rather untidy and lacks harmonic tension. I start to play with
her at the second piano during the final sections. I say that the last two lines have
really improved – ‘I can tell you’ve been working on that’. I say that the piece is in
good shape for tomorrow, but if you did have an opportunity to practise overnight… Jade suggests the bars that have tri-tones, but I say, ‘That’s not too bad, it’s mainly the coordination of this bit’ (plays part in B minor where the left hand has the melody). At this point Joanne comes into the room and Jade asks her if she ‘got a park all right’. We work on the right-hand broken chords there and I ask Jade not to flatten her knuckles as this makes rotation somewhat ineffective. We continue to work on this hand shape and I ask her what the chords are as we go. I ask her to play the B minor chord while adding C#. I suggest that if the thumb is too ‘flat’, it tends to make the hand go (demonstrates) and that will result in a flat and stiff sound. I then ask Jade to loosen her elbow and shoulder. I ask her to bring the elbow right out and right in and right out and right in and then back to the middle. I ask Joanne if she is ok – ‘Are you stressed?’ (I’ll be right) She starts to have more success and I suggest that if she ‘starts’ in that shape, it will be easier to control the pace of the rotation. I continue to ask her to imitate me, trying to get her to avoid pressing on the wrist while executing the B minor add C# chord. I then ask her to play the three chords before pronating the right forearm and shifting the elbow out to execute the broken chords. I reiterate that it’s still good, and after Sunday, continue to improve. I mention to Joanne that she’s done well to bring three pieces up to scratch. I mention that one of my students doesn’t even have one piece prepared. I mention that music is about learning and enjoying learning, but if you’re going to come here and have lessons, you want to have something to show for it. We then launch into chaining exercises with hands together (broken left-hand chords/left-hand melody) in an effort to improve the coordination between the hands. As I sit at the second piano and Jade sits at the first piano, I ask her to imitate the gravity drop (turn your elbows out and then drop). Once she has this feel, I ask her to drop faster in the left hand for more sound, before adding a preparatory up movement in order to ‘give it the momentum to be loud … Don’t squeeze, fall way’. I then help Jade to add the next two notes while gesturing in the direction of travel. I then ask her to come right out on to the edge of the F# before aiming to ‘rock to the D’, then adding a note and rocking back towards Nana. Jade continues to imitate me and I ask her ‘try not to press (into the keys)’. I suggest that she is too far in (on the F#) and that is why she appears to be having overlapping between fingers 4 and 3. We continue to refine the gestural choreography here: ‘Play the F#, then rock to the left for D, then rock to the right E and F#’. Jade has success – ‘Good … that will give the music shape … if you shape your arm, (Jade plays again)
you’ll give it good (sound) shape. I then coach Jade to roll onto the E while lifting up the D (finger). I then demonstrate the passage with hands together and Jade imitates – ‘that’s better, now go …’ We continue with directional drills but with hands together. I ask her to have the right hand sitting slightly higher than the left hand. We continue drilling (and cycling through the drills) the hands together, adding another beat while gesturing in the direction of travel (either right, left or crossing over in the middle). I ask Jade if she feels it getting better – she nods. I say that this process will help her find how the hands coordinate, rather than asking her to simply practise the passage until the hands are coordinated. I say that, ‘this method really does work, but that you just have to spend the time doing it’. I further say (and demonstrate) that it may not be perfect by tomorrow, but ‘that’s all right, It’s come a long way (thumbs up/Jade looks at Joanne) … You do one thing at a time … she’s fixed the last bit up, now the next challenge … It’s like, a shopping list (gestures) … you just gradually work through it’ (Jade nods). We continue with recycling the drills always feeling the direction that each hand travels. I mention to Jade that you wouldn’t think that each hand could be going in opposite directions. ‘It’s because people are unaware of those small movements, that’s why it’s uncoordinated. It’s not because you’re uncoordinated, it’s because you don’t have a really good knowledge of those movements, but doing this sort of practice is how it will happen’. We continue to explore the gravity drop of the arms with a solid foundation of the feet before cycling through the drills again, culminating into dividing the two bars into halves, stopping in between and then continuing with a gravity drop and then as written. I then coach Jade to avoid over-extending the fingers, particularly the second finger of the right hand. ‘As soon as you have over-extension in the fingers, it means that you won’t be able to … these muscles through here (points to forearm) will be all tight and it makes the rotary movement harder to achieve’. I mention that keeping everything flexible is the key to effective rotary movement, critical here and especially when playing more advanced music. We laugh about ‘rotary’ club. I explain that there are different degrees of rotary movement happening in each hand here, plus the left hand has to be louder, therein lay the difficulty. However, over the years I have built an internal kinaesthetic image of what it feels like to play these gestures, and that’s why I am able to play it with greater reliability, but by following these techniques during home practice, I suggested to Jade, that she will start to build her own ‘kinaesthetic map’ too. ‘I know which movements to use, like if I was playing a game of tennis … If someone does
(plays) a shot, you have to think what shot am I going to return with … because I’ve been doing it (playing) for so long, I know which shots go with which notes, but you have to be prepared to work hard and learn the shots.’ I go on to explain (with Joanne watching as I can see her reflection) that when people get a bit nervous, their muscles tighten, and it makes rotary movement harder to achieve. ‘Basically what we’re doing is we’re practising so that the movements become automatic so you don’t go (plays clumsy and tight) … and that takes time… to train your motor system to move this way or that way’. I praise Jade for putting in the time to develop these skills and she points to something that we (I) wrote on her music in a previous lesson that makes her and Joanne laugh – ‘Hard work, open up, don’t get annoyed, get on with it! If you play ‘closed’ (demonstrates), your playing will sound closed, but if you (demonstrates) send it out into the world… if you move your hand like this (demonstrates) … or this (demonstrates) … that’s the sound you’ll get’. We talk about Tristan briefly, and how he is going. Then Joanne and I talk about rotary movement around the wrist (in relation to Tristan having difficulty there), and I suggest that it’s probably the most important movement in piano playing, and more important than fingers (Joanne seems surprised). During this time Jade is playing the rolling part of *I Love Coffee* that Tristan has been learning.

*Festival Rondo*: Jade plays the piece hands together without once looking at the score. She plays quite well. When she misses the last couple of notes, I suggest that she combine finger movement with gesture for greater clarity. I coach her with add-a-note technique, both the ornament itself and the phrase leading up to the ornament. I also related the direction of travel as either clockwise or anti-clockwise – ‘Do a big loop – start at 11 o’clock, down to six, over to three and then back to 10’. Jade tries, but then I take her hand and guide the movement in the air and then with the notes. I suggest that if she doesn’t have that movement, it’s more likely that she will become stiff and not able to play quickly. ‘The movement will help you to shape the sound, and it will help you to execute the sound’. I say that the piece is fine – ‘It’s good, but even if you did one more thing, it would be ‘one more thing’ better again’. I take the pencil and put a ring around it, and then further draw the clockwise movement while talking about the ‘o’clocks’, but on subsequent trials, she is still unable to improve the clarity, so I take her through various drills and finally has some success. I suggest that she will do well in the performance, and that it will put another notch on her belt, but
there will no doubt be further ‘bits to circle and clocks to wind up; a few more things to polish’. I mention that Jade seems really confident and ready for the performance.

Lesson 10: 10 May 2014

Reviewed 29 October 2015

- Technical work: I mention that I would like Jade to do her AMEB exam in August, half way through next term. I give a brief summary of where we are at, and where we need to be. I compliment Jade on her performance last Sunday and Joanne comments on Noah and Andrew’s progress. Joanne asks me how long Andrew has been in Australia and how long he had been learning. I mention that while he is talented, he does work and ‘gets more than his fair share of extra encouragement, time and coaching’. Meanwhile, Jade is happily playing first inversion chords with the right hand. Joanne further comments about Max, Adrian and Ilianna and how cute they are, and how they started in the keyboard group, just like Jade. We go on to talk about Colin and then the Piers Lane and Myra Hess concert, and Joanne said that she was watching his wrist and the top of his arm (‘I’m learning too!’) She said that her and her husband were given tickets by Julia and her son. I ask Jade to play A Major, and then four octaves for Grade 4. I ask her if she has to do four octaves for violin too. I coach her with coming across with her elbow and upper body as she reaches the highest register and ask her to push her feet into the floor. ‘Take the load into the bottom half of your body, so that the top half is nice and light’. I sit at the second piano and coach her one octave at a time ascending, checking fingering, elbow position and bracing the lower half of the body. I say that I want her to start revising her scales (it’s been a few weeks). She plays E Major left-hand ascending but is having trouble remembering the finger patterns (‘push into the floor’ at the extreme register). We go through ascending and descending. I mention that she has a lot of loom bands and she says that she made them all because she had ‘an hour to kill’ today. I ask her why she didn’t practise for an hour, because then she’d be an hour better at her scales. I mention that small amounts of practice truly add up. I ask her to get back into scales this week and ‘don’t get all lazy on me’. I also say, ‘We’re going to look at contrary motions as well’. We then move on to arpeggios A Major (‘the root, the third, the fifth’) and I coach her with inward pronation and elbow alignment with the right hand – ‘Make sure that you are lifting your arm, but don’t get tense in the shoulder’. We then move to the left hand and I help her physically with the
fingering and technique here (Joanne leaves to get the car). We move on to E Major, doing root position chords all over the piano, then the left-hand arpeggio configuration (lots of work to do here). We move to B-flat Major chords in root position with right hand and then left hand. I coach her with the left-hand fingering for B-flat Major arpeggio and the ‘rotary club’. I ask her if it feels more awkward coming down with the left hand – ‘The thumb can only get so far, but if you pronate …’ I then set A, E Major contrary motion, demonstrating while Jade verbalises one hand up and one hand down. I mention to Jade that ‘the plan’ is to keep practising the three pieces she already knows, to push on with the other two, and to complete the technical work in preparation for the Grade 4 AMEB exam. She says that she really loves the Einaudi piece. She plays the right hand and I play the left hand (on the same piano). We don’t get very far before stopping. I say that she certainly has the right idea with using crescendo for repeated notes, and we then move to right-hand chords for the next section, analysing them and writing in. We also start to implement right-hand fingering for the subsequent section. I ask Jade, ‘Which way are we rotating – clockwise or anti-clockwise?’ She answers correctly and gestures with me, before we drill small groups in the direction of travel – ‘breathe in; drop – that’s how you practice that, and then you join two of them together’. I ask her to bring out the melody by using a quicker speed when rolling to the right. I ask Jade what she does on Thursdays, hoping to get her to come to the house – ‘You are doing well, just keep it up, OK? This (piece) is going to suit you so well’. I ask Jade to stand up and I play the section that we were just working through with hands together and pedal. I ask Jade if she has watched it on YouTube. I say that I love the left-hand ‘specks of colour’ and encourage her to get the notes down so that we can get to ‘making music’ sooner rather than later. I mention that the piece is by Einaudi, it’s in the minimalist style – ‘It’s so dreamy’. Before she leaves, I ask her to ‘get over the notes quickly’ with arpeggios.

Lesson 11: 15 May 2014

Reviewed 30 November 2015

- The lesson starts with general conversation regarding another family (little boy who used to do the group but was very shy?) and Holly’s insurance payout. I ask Jade, ‘What are we doing?’ She suggests something, but I’m not sure what, as I can’t hear clearly and the camera view is obstructed. I ask her if she has been practising her
scales. She replies yes, but mentions that she is having trouble with the left-hand fingering. I ask her if she has her scale book and she gets it out as Julia and I ‘talk’ to Holly. I talk about Holly’s sleeping habits and Jade also talks about her dog and where she sleeps. Jade has her book open and I ask her to do E-flat Major. I mention that we need to get on to soft or loud too. Jade plays E-flat Major with the right hand but she seems to have no idea of what she is doing. I help her to ‘see’ the pattern of 123/1234 and coach her with inward pronation of the thumb when ascending. I then ask Jade if she has the picture scales handy, which she does and I help her to organise her materials. I ask her how many flats E-flat Major has and she answers correctly. I mention that usually we start the flat scales with the second finger, despite the picture scales indicating three. I leave the room for a drink while she continues, and is having a little more success now. I point to the paper with the silver pointer and she follows as I vocalise the numbers. I suggest that for the time being, until she becomes more confident, two octaves might be best. I say (in a playful way) that doesn’t mean that she becomes slack. Jade smiles broadly. ‘No, you’re not off the hook, you’re still on the hook, this is just a bit of a stepping stone, OK?’ I ask her to move on to B-flat Major – ‘All the orange ones are Major, aren’t they Holly’. Jade plays the right hand of B-flat Major well. I ask her if she finds the picture scales helpful. She smiles and nods yes. I say that a lot of students find them helpful. Jade then moves on to the left hand of B-flat Major. She is referring to the handout. I ask her which other Major scales she needs to accomplish. I suggest that she memorise which Major scales and their key signatures so that if someone on street asked her …. I suggest that this may help her to feel more confident whilst taking ownership for her learning. She moves on to E Major, finding it in the handout and then playing the right hand and then left hand successfully. I ask her how about hands together. She seems surprised, but I suggest that this could be the goal for this week. She asks if she can try and has reasonable success overall – ‘Good girl … nice job’. I ask her how much time per day she sets aside for technical work – before she answers – ‘30 minutes Mark!’ She smiles. I say, ‘How about 30–45 minutes on pieces; around one and a-quarter hours per day.’ She nods and smiles and I ask her if she has filled up her test tube. She seems confused, so I ask her she has been given that sheet. I ask her if she wants to do that, she shrugs, but when I show her she agrees. Julia says that she isn’t to spend an hour colouring it in though (laughs – ‘she’s a bit of an artist, you see’). Jade and Julia smile and laugh – ‘Thank you Mark’. I ask her to bring it back to me when it’s
finished to receive a present. We joke about random presents, including an orange peel, broken glass and used teabags. Jade moves on A Major, playing right hand and left hand separately. She tries hands together, having some problems with the sharps. I then say that we will start her off on the harmonic minors. I suggest G harmonic minor, briefly referring to relative minors, and properties of harmonic minors and natural minors. I demonstrate G harmonic minor and G natural minor. I ask Jade if she has ‘heard’ of melodic minors. She says yes, and so I ask her if she has heard the melodic minor ‘story’. Before giving her the story, I briefly refer to natural (folk) minor, Harry Harmonic minor and Melody melodic minor. Jade, Julia and I all laugh. Jade seems genuinely engaged. She then goes on to play G harmonic, and I refer to the three black notes, one of which may be a nose or lip ring. Jade relays a story about a magnetic lip ring. I then ask her to play the left hand for G harmonic minor (she refers to the handout). I say that since we’re on a roll, we will C harmonic minor, referring to the relative Major/minor sequence. I ask her if she is learning anything, i.e. scales and practical theory; which keys are related to each other. I mention that sometimes (in this case), we get one less black note for the harmonic form (B flat becomes B natural). I ask her to stand up so that I can ‘have a try’. I sit down and play in similar motion, in octaves and then launch into Beethoven’s 32 Variations in C Minor. Jade is smiling. I say that I wasn’t born playing like that; I had to learn too. I ask her to move forward each week. She says ‘OK’. I say that we have time to hear her Einaudi piece. We (I) look up the meaning on Google. *Divenire* – means ‘to become’ or ‘becoming’. I ask Jade what she is ‘becoming’. I suggest a better piano player, a more sensitive person, or a musician … Jade doesn’t seem too interested in that ‘game’ and starts randomly play the keys. We (I) try pronouncing the word with the help of Google … ‘I’m becoming bored!’ Julia asks her if she is going to play it (?) and Jade says, ‘Yes, you have mother!’ Julia says, ‘I thought you were interested in language’. Jade says, ‘I’m interested in French’. Julia says that Italian is very similar to French and she should reflect on what she is becoming. I say, ‘A pain in the neck … I’m becoming infatuated with the piece … the piece is becoming more intense’. Jade says that she likes ‘that bit’ and I ask her to show me. She plays that section reasonably fluently with hands together and the sustain pedal, but ‘gives up’ when things start to go astray. I say that she must not do ‘that Jade thing’ and give up – ‘You’ve only just started the piece’. She says that ‘that bit’ doesn’t sound right. I look it over and say, ‘Oh, you poor thing, you need some help with the fingering’. I sit
down beside her, and help her with left-hand fingering, giving reasons for decisions made. She tries, with success, and then I say to apply that idea with this part as well. I say that this fingering will help her to get a nice ‘wave’ sound – ‘I’ll show you what I mean’. I show her how the fingering induces rotary movement. I demonstrate but then make some further adjustments, saying that those fingering choices allow for her a better gesture – ‘From the outside the middle of the hand straight away … you’ll get a nice balance’. Adelaide comes in and I say hello. Julia leaves for the bathroom. Jade tries it, but then we conclude the lesson – ‘See you Saturday … don’t get all slack on me … you can do a good two days’ worth of practice between now and then’.

Lesson 12: 17 May 2014

Reviewed 3 November 2015

- Scales: we start the lesson with A Major scale. Jade asks if she can swap piano chairs. I ask Jade how the new Einaudi piece is going. I remind her that the title translates as ‘to become’. She plays A Major with hands together using pictorial notation. It’s very slow but accurate. We move to E Major. I ask her how many sharps are in the key signature, with further discussion regarding ‘Father Charlie Goes Down and Ends Battle’/‘Battle Ends and Down Goes Charles’ Father’. I write it down using the circle fifths handout as a reference (sharps also go in fifths). I demonstrate the circle of fifths (and order of sharps) at the second piano, referring to descending for flats. Meanwhile, Jade is fiddling with the E Major scale, right hand. I also coach her with relative majors/minors (cousin keys), playing minor left hand and Major right hand. From her previous lesson, I reference ‘Harry Harmonic’ and ‘Melody Melodic’, which Jade and Joanne enjoy. After some time, she plays E Major with hands together using pictorial notation. We then move to the relative minor, C# minor. She plays right hand and then left hand using the pictorial notation. I ask her to put the hands together for homework. We then move to A Major’s relative minor, briefly referencing descending three semitones to find the answer. I say she has been learning lots of new things (of late). I play some perfect cadences in F# minor and a harmonised scale, probably in an effort to lift her enthusiasm, as the pace is very slow today. She plays the left hand of F# minor and I remind her to hold her feet flat and firm, ‘even while learning them’. I mention that ‘we are getting through them’, and to concentrate on the harmonics before the melodics.
Contrary motion: I mention that we are going to start revising these. She tries a few notes for A Major, but doesn’t have much success here. I use the picture scales to try to help her, which does seem make things a little easier. Next, I ask her to E-flat Major in contrary motion, which is ok. I ask her what the two flat keys are for this grade level. I mention that they are ‘your’ scales. I ask her how many scales there are and make the observation that she only needs to complete four of 24 and therefore, ‘it could be worse’. She then plays B-flat Major and E-flat Major, both in contrary motion, slowly, but accurately for the most part. Before moving to chromatic scales, I ask her to complete for homework, all Major contrary motion for this grade. I ask her to try A. chromatic. I give her a 36-hour test tube sheet, with ‘no retrospective colouring’ (laughs). I show her how to execute the right-hand fingering for chromatic commencing on A – ‘Sounds like you’ve got a bit of revision to do there, hey?’ She then moves to the left hand, which is quite neat overall, though slow. I ask her what tempo and she knows. Joanne’s phone rings, Jade seems to ‘phase out’ and I’m having trouble with my metronome. I show her how fast with hands together they need to eventually be, so I remind her to work hard to get these ready by September, before moving on to do some more ‘exam examples’, this time with dynamics and including scales, contrary, chromatics and arpeggios. ‘I would extra firmly suggest…’ and I set my expectations – ‘Get to know them, so that I can show you what to do with them’. I then remind her (verbally) this week’s goals, and suggest that I have not set anything unreasonable – ‘Just keep moving forward’. We have some discussion regarding which piece she might present for the AMEB exam, and I suggest the Czerny study. I ask her how much she will complete and I say under my breath, ‘right hand all through’. I ask her to write in pencil ‘right hand all through’, but perhaps she is just doing what she is told and not really setting goals for herself? I sit down and play the first page of two Diverine for Jade – ‘It’s a nice piece, and so is this …’ – I then play part of the Czerny for Jade. We finish the lesson, saying, ‘We’d better get going’.

Lesson 13: 24 May 2014

Reviewed 4 November 2015

- Jade looks very tired. I adjust the piano stool and talk to Joanne regarding Holly’s trip to the vet. Jade sits down and has a big stretch. I ask Jade how scales are going. She says that she gets mixed up with harmonic minor. I say, ‘Keep trying’ but she
says that scales are boring. I say that I loved scales when I was a student – ‘I found them really interesting’. I suggest that we start with arpeggios instead. I mention that an arpeggio is really just a broken chord. I ask her to play several chords in root position, analysing the tone/semitone patterns of major and minor. Jade wipes her nose almost continuously, and I ask her why she wipes it so much. She smiles and seems a little embarrassed but not fazed. I say that a lot of germs are spread through doing this. Joanne mentions that she is doing this because she is nervous, as she ‘doesn’t have allergies’. I mention that I have noticed this before. Joanne asks Jade to hold the top of her nose, presumably to help her. We start with E Major. I say it’s probably my favourite. She touches her nose with the left hand while playing with the right hand. I ask her to put the left hand behind her back. I put pink spots on the keys that she will need to use, but surprisingly, she still makes mistakes, perhaps due to the tempo being too fast. I ask her to slow down and we move to the left hand. I ask her to play E minor, and I move the sticker down a semitone to G before she continues. (NB fourth finger on G for the left hand). She smiles after she finishes and nods when I say, ‘Cool?’ I mention that she has lovely alignment and she is ‘aiming for the corner of the room’. I ask her to move down an octave. I ask her to take an interest in the scales and arpeggios, mentioning that I ‘let’ her have options in terms of the pieces, but the technical work is not negotiable. ‘I don’t care if you have to force yourself… you have to take an interest’. Joanne mentions that she likes hearing them. I say, ‘Yeah, they’re nice. I used to like doing them because it gave the (my) practice structure … they don’t change’. Jade says, ‘Always there, always the same’ while gesturing a double karate chop. I suggest we move on to A Major and A minor, and ask Jade to move the pink stickers. I ask if she wants some pink stickers to take home. She says that she has tried using sticky notes (at home). I say don’t let Tristan get hold of them. I help her move the stickers as she begins to work out the notes. Joanne says that on the way out, she has two things to talk to me about. Jade plays A Major two octaves with her right hand (good girl) and then left hand. I play along with her on the second piano. I then move the sticker (‘down one semitone for minor’) and remind her of the fingering. As she plays, I harmonise. ‘It doesn’t take long, just run through them… maybe we can add some more next time (Yep). Can you please remove those stickers?’ Jade removes the stickers and then puts some on her scale sheets and one on her forehead. I ask her to play A Major scale with hands together – ‘Was that a mistake I saw? (Jade shrugs)… please do it again’. I then ask her to play E Major
scale hands together. I ask her if she likes using the picture scales. She says, ‘yes’ into the camera (thumbs up). She says Tristan was surprised that she had to use them. She and I agree that they are very helpful. She then plays E Major hands together mostly accurately. I say that it sounds like she has been working steadily. I ask her if there are any other major challenges. She says not in those ones, so I ask her to keep working on the harmonic minors and the melodic minors. I ask her to play g harmonic minor hands together – she seems a little worried, but has a go. It’s slow and I remind her of the F#. I start pointing to the picture scales with a pencil and ask her to slow right down. She says she’ll be right. I say just take it slowly, or you’ll be behind another week – ‘Try and move forwards, not backwards’. I say, ‘You’ll get there’ and demonstrate G harmonic minor staccato and quickly legato. I say not to leave it too long before I can help you with … (I demonstrate again). I say, ‘You’ll be able to concentrate on the actual technique if you know the notes well … (Jade says ‘mmm’ and seems to be listening here) … Getting the notes learnt is not the main goal… the main goal is learning how to play them well… it’s a bit like your pieces, but if you leave it until October before you know them … (drops sheet) … You’ll just run out of time (yep) … and then if your scales aren’t good, there is no way that you’ll get an A. You have to take an interest in them. I know they’re not as exciting as other things, but you just have to plough through it’ (yep). I remind Jade that there is a concert in two weeks and it’s time to start reviewing her pieces (‘don’t do the nose thing’). She says that she has still been playing them. I say that I would like to hear them, even if they might be a bit rough (you can smooth it out a bit). I say that in general, she did a good job in the recent concert with *Spanish Donkey Driver*, but she could ‘create a few more special moments’. I ask her if she knows what rubato is, but she seems to have no idea (she looks at Joanne a lot here and says ‘expressively’). I say that this kind of piece has to be a bit ‘loose around the edges’, and I suggest that we play it together (in ensemble), which we proceed to do. I coach her with the breath, counting, dynamics and time stretching. I try to harmonise in thirds but it doesn’t go well. I coach her with lifting her hands off the piano and creating a special moment with the repeated G’s (delay it and do it a different volume). I demonstrate at the second piano and suggest (dramatically) that it’s like when the donkey goes … (sighs), before he keeps going. I say that while I could show her exactly what to do (with other areas of the piece) I want her to take a bit of ownership. She picks it up half way through page two. I say, ‘That was lovely, but don’t be nervous, just sink your arm (I take her arm).
To get louder you have to drop faster, go again’. She plays again and this time I stand at the second piano and coach her using expressive gesture. I say that the whole thing is a little on the slow side, but Jade says that she likes it. I say ok, that’s fine, just make sure it has a triple lilt (I start playing again). I say that it can be slow, but if everything is the same volume, it will sound slow. I remind Jade of the triple lilt, and demonstrate two different ways, suggesting that the second version is still slow, but it pushes forward. ‘Make sure your music goes somewhere … don’t just have it sitting in the bar’ (funny gesture and body movement). Both Jade and Joanne laugh. ‘Keep it moving… slow but moving’. We then move to Festival Rondo – ‘Play louder! Come on!’ I take Jade’s arms, count in, and throw hers into the keyboard (‘like a conductor’), but she is having trouble with the notes. We work with the right hand reviewing gesture and double rotary movement. I say, ‘When playing semiquavers don’t squish your wrist because you lose all your power.’ I suggest that she needs to brace the knuckles and use height in a piece like this. I suggest that in the recent concert, she played too softly. I say, ‘It’s a Festival Rondo – like Queen Jade! You’re about to take your whole country to war! Otherwise they’ll decapitate you and get someone else’. Jade is smiling a lot at both Joanne and I, and seems to be enjoying herself. I sit down at the second piano and encourage her to ‘throw’ her arm into the keys (random) – ‘You’re almost there, you’re doing fine’. We work through the phrases, throwing the arm up for staccato. I encourage her to let go of the wrist on impact for a less wooden sound. She still finds it hard not to pull her wrist down and back for semiquavers, but she gets there (‘don’t overbalance’). She is still having trouble getting the ornaments clear and I say, ‘Sometimes your second finger goes to sleep … it’s like a bolt of lightning … If you don’t make it happen, it won’t happen … don’t just sit there’. I continue to coach her on finger clarity using rhythmic drills, analysis and note subtraction/addition. I suggest that she might slow it down a bit and keep practising. I say not to get lazy and to start moving forward again. I say that the goal for this week is to review the pieces now and not three days beforehand – ‘It’s too late’ (then).

Lesson 14: 28 May 2014

Reviewed 2 December 2015

- As the lesson begins, I ask Jade how her practice has been going since Saturday. I ask her if she’s been sick. She says no and I say that I have been sick since Sunday. I
ask her if she’d like to keep going with *Elfin Dance* or *Festival Rondo* (‘Queen Jade’) and she laughs. I ask her not to do the nose thing – do you want a tissue? I mention that Holly had had a bit of a vomit earlier. I talk briefly with Joanne who is sitting in the lounge room. I say, ‘Please welcome Jade, Jade West playing *Elfin Dance* by Edvard Grieg … Take it away Jade’ and she literally shrinks with embarrassment. The playing sounds flat, uncoordinated, and her arms appear to have no energy whatsoever; it’s almost as if she would rather be doing anything but this. She only gets through the first half page before things go ‘wrong’ and she ‘withdraws’ her hands and wants to stop. I ask her to stand up, saying that she has some wrong notes ‘here’. I start playing and show here where, and then commence partial practising myself. I ask her to do the right hand here, which she does. I start coaching her with the gestural components. I say that she’ll need to move further in than that – ‘let go of the wrist; come closer to the black notes.’ I suggest that rather than playing the notes, ‘try to feel the beat’. I demonstrate (while standing beside her) and it appears, that I’m asking her do three down movements ‘on the beat’. ‘So you sort of breathe and then come down’. I coach her with the wrist and forearm movements, emphasising the rotary aspects, saying, ‘You’re so tight in there’. We cycle between demonstration and coaching. ‘You have to put movement into it otherwise you won’t be able to … the pieces are too hard not to put movement in… if you don’t put movement in you won’t be able to play them’. Jade nods and straightens her hair and clothing. ‘You’re sort of going … (I demonstrate) … and trying to play it just with fingers, and it just comes apart’. I mention (and demonstrate) taking a breath before coming down, ‘up and down’. Jade seems to have a bit more success and I praise her. I ask her to play from the beginning. She plays a few bars and I say that her elf sounds a bit tired. I play, saying, ‘Catch the notes’. Jade plays and it sounds really good – ‘That’s it! Don’t you hear it?’ I ask Jade what sort of movement she did and she says ‘shorter’. She plays the opening couple of bars very well, but when she gets to the next couple of bars that we just went through, I suggest that she is getting tight (the coordination is very messy here). She does better and I say that using that movement will make a humungous difference. She plays and I say, ‘Make it sparkle – yes that’s it! It’s like twilight (turns main light off)… make it sparkle, like a twinkling star… good show me the first bit… Well done’. I suggest that even though she is not as good at one part, don’t play the other part that she *is* good at without energy – ‘it might not be perfect, but most of it’s good’. I mention that I don’t like it when Jade is ‘glum’ or
when she ‘gives up the fight’. I ask Jade to stand, and I demonstrate the quavers from
the opening bars, referring to and illustrating, ‘Out, in, out, in, etc. … rather than …. If
you try to do it all on one level without moving and adjusting, you’ll never get it …. You
need to revise the in and out movements’. I take her through the add-a-note technique, but
this time emphasising the in and out movements, the tip of the thumb, placement on the
key surface, and opening and rolling to the right. I continue to coach her with changing
direction, pairs of notes, standing on the fingertips, a quick shift to the right, alignment of
notes with forearm and avoiding a stretched ‘open’ hand (‘come around’). Other concepts:
not coming ‘down’ on the fifth finger, but coming up onto the fingertip, otherwise you
lose all power and the fingers can’t ‘speak’. I then ask her to combine the ascending and
descending sections of the right-hand phrase together here – ‘Don’t wait until after you’ve
played the B to change direction … Play the B on the way back up’. Jade plays it again while
I verbally and physically coach her using gesture the spatial directions involved. She has
good success and I praise her quite excitedly. ‘Play the F# to the left and the B to the right …
If you don’t do that you’ll find that the fingers will get stuck’. She plays the passage again a
couple of times and it has much improved in terms of tonal shape and physical
fluidity. Using critical comparison, I ask her to breathe in and drop into the first four
notes of the phrase so they aren’t static. I say, ‘OK, you know that it’s getting better –
you can feel it – yes? Can you tell or am I just imagining things?’ Jade nods. I ask her
to add the left hand back in. As she prepares, I say, ‘remember those directions,
because they will help facilitate not only a good sound (light is turned back on), but
they’ll make the rhythm and the coordination much easier’. Jade plays from the
beginning of the piece, very slowly. I say, ‘Good … now play it faster and with life’. She
does well and I say, ‘That’s it! Do you notice – it’s better?’ She smiles and nods.
‘So don’t get glum … I don’t like it when you’re glum … I find it irritating, (Jade
smiles). Oh my God, I’m just hopeless … If you think like that then all the good
things will start to be hopeless as well. There are things that you can improve, but
most of it’s good (so) don’t talk yourself out of it. In a way it’s our piece – it’s your
piece, but in a way it’s our piece, because I’ve tried my best with it too, and if you
give up, on our piece … (Jade is smiling) then you’re giving up on me … and I don’t
like that, it’s irritating, OK, you understand? Practise your best and then just go for
it?’ (Jade nods and smiles knowingly). I say that if she does recreate those practice
drills, she will improve further and her confidence will come back. Your confidence
has just been a little bit shaken (rattled). It’s normal for a piece to get good and then go back a bit, but that’s a chance for you to learn something deeper. Perhaps leading up to the first performance, you didn’t learn the ‘directions’ quite this well? It’s not a bad thing’. I ask her to ‘breathe it, drop and don’t start cold’ – now get busy with the left hand while you add the right hand back in. I then demonstrate the add-a-note with hands together, which she tries. ‘Ready choir – breathe in – sing’. We circle through the add-a-note technique with hands together. I then give her instruction to move the right as she plays the thumb. ‘Don’t change anything, just add one more thing. Keep adding … feel the beat … don’t get all tight … don’t you give up on us … now faster … now start playing the piece from the beginning … left hand has to feel the beat … don’t you give up on us’ (I’m getting quite animated with expressive vocalisation, clapping and gesturing by now). Jade seems to be enjoying herself – I say, ‘Can you see it’s improving? (Yep) You feel it don’t you?’ Jade continues to smile and make eye contact, ‘Good girl’. I then start coaching her with the left-hand melody. I demonstrate and she copies. We play a few notes and then drop freely into random keys for the minim F# - ‘Let the muscles go there … Less finger and more arm’. I use critical comparison then I ask her to think about it and just play it. ‘Well, think about it a bit (we both laugh) … Don’t start cold – drop’. We start doing add-a-note with hands together. ‘Stay up on your tips’ (she is getting tight on her third finger). I start to coach her with keeping a loose thumb here – ‘Check your thumb’s not getting tight … You’ve got a technical problem there, caused by anxiety, which is causing you to grip … As soon as you do that it won’t work … You have to practise not being anxious’ (Jade starts readjusting her hair and clothes). She plays that part and then I ask her to start playing the piece from the beginning. It’s almost as if I can hear her putting the ‘mental brakes’ on. I suggest that she ‘play’ but listen for the overall now. ‘OK, well it’s improved in the last 30 minutes … Thanks Mark … Don’t you give up on us’. Jade smiles bashfully and says thank you. I say that the relationship between teacher and student is ongoing and we don’t give up on each other. ‘I could have walked away many times, and you could have done the same, but we haven’t – see it through’. I continue to coach her with partial practice, but I can see she is becoming tired – maybe it was time to stop? I ask her which notes she has in the left hand. She answers D E, and I ask her to play D E with the corresponding right-hand notes. ‘Sit properly and do it again … faster … faster … faster! Throw your arms to the right … breathe in drop … good – now add the next notes’. Jade is trying, but she starts
coming in early in the right hand. She keeps trying and has success with that small part. ‘Don’t start cold – drop’. I ask her to work backwards and then finally from the beginning of the piece, but she starts playing without energy – ‘Come on!’ She goes again and is really trying, and I reshow her which ‘bit’ to partial practise, but I have a feeling that she is losing confidence the more that I ‘drill’ it with her. I circle the two ‘bits’ on the score that I want her to practise in order to ‘strengthen the chain’. ‘Faster … with movement … throw your arms’. I exit to get a drink. ‘Make sure those last two notes are together … flick them with the accent into the direction of travel… rounded fingers … good girl Jade, all right. Don’t you give up on me … on us. I tried my best to help you – what are you going to do? (My best). Even if it’s not perfect, don’t give up, you mustn’t … Don’t let one thing affect your confidence and your other pieces’. Maybe that wasn’t such a good thing to mention. ‘You’ve still got two weeks until the concert … You must see that you’ve made magnificent progress in that lesson (she smiles) … it’s not because I waived a magic wand, it’s because you worked for it’. I reiterate that ‘sitting’ there playing without moving is like trying to sing without taking any breath. I seem surprised to see that Jade had been recording the lesson on her iPad as we finish.

Lesson 15: 31 May 2014

Reviewed 3 December 2015

- Joanne, Jade and I spend the first few minutes talking about dog obedience. Joanne also talks about her sister who orders things online. I ask Jade what direction she would like to take with her lesson today. ‘Would you like me to hear Eflin Dance again?’ Jade mentions she has been trying to get the piece more confident (‘Oh that’s good’). I also say that I have a reward for her for working so hard – a medal, which I give to her. She is smiling very broadly at first but then seems a bit unsure of what to say. Joanne says a couple of times, ‘What do you say?’ Jade elects to wear it around her neck for the duration of the lesson. I mention that Tristan hasn’t done quite enough work yet to receive his. I also suggest to Jade that every time she feels like she’s not good enough, she can put the medal on and start practising again – ‘The good achievement medal’. I ask Jade to stand up and I adjust the chair. I mention that Julia will be so thrilled. Joanne says she can put it in her glass case. Jade mentions that she has a lot of ballet trophies and talent quest trophies, but this is her first medal. I say, ‘Let’s have a listen to how it sounds, hey?’ Jade plays accurately, albeit with a
few mistakes in the middle section and a slow tempo. Interesting, she plays the final section worse than the first section perhaps because the middle section didn’t go so well and she was feeling like she wanted to give up. At least she didn’t stop this time. I say that it has definitely improved – ‘Good girl, go again for me’. Jade seems to shy away at this suggestion and starts touching her nose nervously (three times before starting again here). I say, ‘Let’s get the left hand a bit more precise – feel it in threes’. The more she plays it, the worse it gets in terms of coordination and she touches her nose a bit more. I mention that she could try to fit the right hand into the left hand rather than the other way around. She tries again and it works. Then again, it doesn’t, then it does, then it doesn’t … We continue doing dotted rhythm drills and I point out which right-hand notes, ‘fit’ into the left hand beat notes (B-B-E). She does it slowly and has some success. It’s interesting, as I watch, she ‘adds a bit more’, but can’t keep the previous part coordinated, and I don’t really pick up on the fact that her forearms, wrists and elbows are low and quite inactive. I mention leading with the left hand again, which really does make a difference – ‘You can see that’s much better’ (Jade nods). We move to the next part, but when she can’t ‘pull it apart’ straight away, she seems to wince a little in frustration or embarrassment, though I’m not sure. We partial practise it forwards and backwards – ‘You can see it’s that second beat that trips you up a little there … Try and get really confident with that second beat during the next week. Throw your arms in the direction of travel … now towards each other’. She has some difficulty ‘copying’ the partial drills. They really do seem to challenge her, but not sure if it’s in a good way – could it be the mental stress is working against her? Anyway, we persevere and she certainly has some success. I mention that if she can get that second beat really firm. We go in for another round – ‘Get the left hand to lead if you can (left hand louder)’. I then take her back for a ‘lead up’, but it is still challenging for her, until I say have a downward movement for the F# – ‘It will more likely come together if you have a forward movement (from the hips which I gesture). ‘Throw your arms to the left.’ We then do a couple of ‘random notes’ practice, before I take her back again – ‘Try not to start on the surface of the note’, i.e. use a preparatory movement for the left hand F# as this gives it more momentum, volume, and enhanced ability to coordinate with the other hand. She finds it hard just to let go and coordinate in a natural way, but she is trying – ‘Good girl, it gives it more loudness’. By this point I can see Jade is becoming bored and lethargic. We go through some double rotation with the left hand, then combining it back with add-a-
note in the direction of travel. It really seems to work, but Jade remains rather uninvolved and starts touching her nose again. I erroneously ask – ‘Can you play it from the beginning again?’ I can tell watching that she seems detached. I try to engage her by singing ‘Let it Go … be confident!’ which seems to work. ‘Don’t practise anymore now … play.’ I play along with her at the second piano and mention again, ‘just playing’. I suggest that she put on her medal of confidence and just go with it. She looks at Joanne and we all laugh, but I probably should have stopped here, as Jade ‘stops’ at the end of each section. I mention that the piece is quite athletic and it’s like she’s in a race. We move to the BBF#BB crotchets and I ask her to stomp her feet into the floor. I play with her at the second piano and she seems to be energised, but is getting faster and faster and the middle section becomes quite messy. I coach her with the ‘throw it out of your hand’ aspect of the final chord, but she retracts her hands nervously and doesn’t seem to want to try, lest she not know what chord to play. I remind her that it’s an E minor chord in first inversion in the right hand, and root position in the left hand. She is still very cautious though. I mention that to get the ‘fairy sound’ (‘Have you seen Maleficent … no? It’s really full on’), you have to move like that, not plod along – ‘You become a character in a story … you’re telling the story of the movie through the piano, but if you move like that …’ I ask her to hop up and take a jog to the door and back, but she withdraws, while still smiling. She does it under duress, I ask her to jump, jog, then run back to the piano and start playing. The difference is noticeable, but she stops at the end of the first section, to which I say, ‘Why did you stop? Go, go, go!’ I ask her to run to the door to get her heart rate up so she can play a bit faster. She says she doesn’t want to run to the door. Joanne says, ‘Move a bit faster’. I start filming with the iPad from the back corner and say, ‘Ready … set … go!’ It’s all a bit of a mess as she can’t maintain an even tempo, but at least it sounds energetic. She still has trouble with the final chords and when she sees that I have been recording, she has a ‘happy’ meltdown; perhaps she is embarrassed? I mention that it’s a fast piece – ‘Can you move your fingers fast?’ We do so drills at both pianos in C Major five-finger position. She mentions that the left hand is hard. I come back (?) to the middle part of Elfin Dance and do right-hand rhythmic drills, add-a-note and remind her of feet position and leading with the left hand. During this process, I don’t seem to draw her attention to her low elbow position though. We continue the ‘copy-cat’ process, aiming for the first beat of the bar. I then move her back to the BBF#BB part, trying
to get a triple lilt, as she is playing all notes the same volume. We do the random splat
technique to get the speed of the arms right before adding the notes back in – ‘Throw
your arms into the keys faster on the first beat’. We then add the upbeat to the next
bars to those B minor crotchets, before moving forward a little more, essentially
chaining the two parts together in a coordinated manner. I mention that this is the type
of practice that I would like to see Jade do at home. We go back to the random splat
technique and not all same volume to help her stay in time. I mention that if a problem
with coordination exists, the kind of practice that you do would be that which would
enhance the coordination. ‘Prayer or a medal might help, but this will be better’ (Jade
smiles at Joanne). We take out the top notes and I ask Jade (regarding her feet
position) if she’s an athlete. There is further work trying to enhance the triple lilt of
the diminished seventh part (‘C’mon athlete … lead with the left hand’). Even when
she is doing the random splats there is a tendency to press instead of dropping in free
fall. I then guide her arms with my arms, but looking at the video, I can see that she is
rotating with the right hand at different tempi here, and I probably should have
pointed that out to her. I say, ‘It’s in there, you just have to keep practising to draw it
out … It’s different to your other pieces … It’s a virtuoso piece that will have the
tendency to come apart if you are not constantly on to it … You can’t play it like
you’re in a dream … You’re supposed to evoke a dream in the listener … it’s fast, it’s
lively, it’s Maleficent … all right, you did a good job’. Jade says a timid thank you.

Lesson 16: 7 June 2014

Reviewed 4 December 2015

- Initial conversation involves talking about weather and teddy beat jacket. I mention
it’s exciting that the concert is tomorrow. Joanne asks Jade to say that she is going to
Government House tomorrow. I ask Jade what order she will play her pieces in,
giving her the option to do a switch. She asks to play Elfin Dance, then Festival
Rondo and then Spanish Donkey Driver. I remind her to speak clearly tomorrow (no
mumbling) and then ask her to stand up and do an introduction, and she emphatically
shakes her head no. Nonetheless, she gets up cautiously and I take her out to the
corridor, she mumbles, I ask her to try again. She goes out and comes in (Joanne say s
‘hurry up’). Jade comes in and announces in a big voice, but I can’t help but notice
she sounds much younger than she is. Both Joanne and I comment that we like her
smile and that seems to make her even more self-conscious (she almost puts her head
in her lap!) I ask her to adjust the seat, and say that I went to a concert last night where the pianist mumbled – ‘If you’re going to talk, don’t mumble, otherwise don’t talk’. Joanne said that she had done very well yesterday (talking I assume) and then she says, ‘Take the jacket off … Hurry up Jade you’re wasting time’. I ask her Jade to hop up and announce her entry again. Joanne says no ‘shuffling’ and I agree. Jade has another go and does quite well, though she does seem a little immature and waves her arms back and forth. She then spends time fixing up her hair – we say come on otherwise … Jade finally gets the music out and starts playing Elfin Dance. Jade plays it well overall, despite the middle section being untidy. She then plays Festival Rondo, but the tempo is very fast and the playing has an unrefined quality, almost ‘bangy’ and completely absent of tonal nuance. Joanne says, ‘Smile Jade, smile’. Jade smiles and then starts playing Spanish Donkey Driver. This is clearly her best piece. The tone is beautiful and the languid nature of the writing suits her style. The connection that she has with the piece when compared with the others is unmistakable. She moves her trunk in and out with the phrases, her arms ‘dance’ and her head is involved in expressing piece as much as her body. Did I choose the right pieces for her initially? One can only wonder whether I should have involved her much more. I remember that I chose the pieces for her, without any consultation. There is a real sense of width, shape and confidence here. I ask her to take a bow and then ask her how she ‘went’, and a quick ‘pretty good’ follows. I think that she can sense my critique that is about to come. I say that she may remember that I asked her to change the pedal when the harmony changes. ‘Where it goes from Major to minor?’ She shakes her head with a look of total surprise, almost denial, which I find surprising. My voice goes quiet as I give the ending chords as an example. I ask her what key the piece is in there – ‘What’s the chord of the left hand there’. She becomes physically uncomfortable and starts to play with her sleeves and touches her nose and face. When she finally answers ‘C’ (chord) she is quite uncomfortable (lifting up her right leg with her right hand) even though I know that she knows the answer. I ask her to get a pencil and write it in, and then I ask her what the final chord of the piece is. She eventually says C minor (while touching her face), which I then say that she shouldn’t ‘mix’ the two chords together with the pedal. I say that she can probably see the pedal markings (on the score). She plays it again and then I say, ‘Hear that? You’ve got too much blurring there’. She fixes it up and then I ask her if there is a similar spot in the piece, which she answers correctly. I reiterate the need for clear
pedalling. I ask her to go from the beginning again – ‘When you get there, listen carefully to the overall sound’. Jade plays again (beautifully) and manages the pedal well. She gets only half way and then I stop her and ask her not to ‘bump’ the pedal – ‘It ricochets through the whole instrument and all the audience will hear is (sound effect) … You probably won’t hear it, but the audience will go “what is that noise, is someone kicking my chair?”’ I say to Jade that that piece is ‘quite good’, though I think that I could have been a bit more forthcoming with the praise here. I suggest that she could make it even more languid and I then ask Jade if she listens to herself playing, which is, when looking back retrospectively, quite a loaded question with an almost negative undertone. Jade continues to touch her face and I ask her if she is experimenting with the time stretching. Jade says, ‘sort of’, moving her hand in a so-so way. I pause the recording and she almost has a look of panic in her eyes. I say, ‘It’s your piece not mine’. To me that seemed like quite an unfair thing to say, considering it’s her best piece. I sense an almost deliberate attempt to undermine her efforts here. Joanne says, ‘You were wonderful’ and I contradict her by saying, ‘You need a bit more rubato in a piece like that … try to think more imaginatively’. Jade starts again, but I pull her up for being too slow. She looks worried and starts touching her nose again. I start to ‘explain’ rubato in words, but really I should have used the fluorescent elastic hair band like I did with Adelaide a couple of days ago. Jade plays as I coach her with the counting – ‘That’s it – you’re connecting to the piece much more already … You must use your body to explain the piece to the audience … You can’t just sit there and push buttons … the audience won’t get it’. She was doing fine before and I feel like I am punishing her with this piece because she didn’t do as well on the other two – who exactly is the one with the ‘all or nothing’ mindset now? I say that the audience will say ‘oh that’s a nice pretty piece’ but they won’t understand what the piece is about, but that is what I should have been saying about the other pieces earlier, not here. Talking about Festival Rondo, I say that the last section is too slow – ‘Either slow down the first part or play the last part faster’. Jade shows me the last section at a faster tempo – ‘Don’t stop at the bar line’. She tries again, but then I pull her up, saying that the rhythm is not right and the finger work is not good – ‘You need to be more active with your fingers … it’s like when you’re singing’ (mumble sings and then clear sings). She looks dejected, but keeps playing as I click and vocalise in the background. I say, ‘Show us the shape of the piece … no, your fingers are no good there (with the trill).’ I say that she can’t play a piece like this the way she
would play the Spanish Donkey Driver – ‘You’re playing them all a bit the same … a bit relaxed and languid … this is not a relaxed piece, it’s very royal’. Jade starts again and I ask her to slow down lest the last section will be too slow. I pull her up again and ask her why she is doing ‘that one’ so (short). She plays without staccato but instead of acknowledging that, I start criticising her for not having enough phrase shape. I ask her to use her arm to create sound which she does well, but then I say the rhythm is no good there – ‘Use your fingers to play’. Jade touches her nose several times. I say that if she was going to play with the other ‘violins in the orchestra’, she needs to be exact with the rhythm and the fingers. I click and expressively vocalise, but it really doesn’t seem to help. I ask her to play a long phrase end instead of a short one, which she does but I interrupt her and she continues to play half-volume, which I then criticise her for not playing with clear fingers – ‘When are you going to get clear fingers in this piece?’ It’s almost like I’m draining her of all her confidence as I watch. She continues to look at Joanne and I, but there is an inconspicuous silence. I say to Jade, ‘You can probably sense my frustration, but it’s because the pieces are not improving … they haven’t improved in the last four weeks … you’ve got to push yourself’, but the flip side is that she has improved a lot and the general level and rate of accomplishment has increased a lot. Jade looks at Joanne disheartened. I basically go on to say that it’s not good enough to get a ‘B’, and that the concert will go well, but she won’t ‘stand out’. ‘Come on … play it from the beginning and don’t just press buttons, play music … and if you can’t do that, just follow my directions … I’ve tried to make it as easy as possible for you’. Jade starts again, but clips the phrase again, for which I pull her up and she ‘fixes’. I go on to say, ‘I don’t understand why I have to be cranky to get you to play properly … I know it’s in there, you’ve just got to push yourself a bit … you’re just being a little bit slack’. I then suggest pedal to cover the gap, but when it doesn’t go so well, Jade starts to give up – ‘No, don’t do that, you’ve got a concert … are people going to pay to hear you come and play?’ Jade looks at Joanne again before starting the piece over, doing quite well, albeit with me in the background shouting ‘louder’, ‘and’, ‘don’t play slower’, ‘take us on a journey’, ‘cover’, ‘fingers’. When she is finished, I ask Jade if she can feel my energy – she nods – ‘When you come in and I give you energy and you give me nothing back, my blood starts to boil’. Jade gives a wry smile. ‘It’s quite unfair … I’m putting in everything, and you’re not giving me a thing back’. I say that ‘it’ (my frustration) hasn’t got much to do with musical ability, but it’s more about energy – ‘C’mon! Play
the pieces!’ I ask her what she is going to do at the concert tomorrow. She answers, ‘Play with energy’. I say, ‘You aren’t going to prance around, playing with your hair.’ Joanne says that her hair is going to be tied up. I say, ‘It doesn’t matter if you’re tired … I’m tired … I could easily sit there and say yeah that’s really good Jade’ (said in a tired voice). Poor Jade she is smiling and nodding. She is being remarkable resilient in the face of such humiliation. I go on to say that it’s got nothing to do with her as a person and I list off all of her good qualities. ‘When it comes to playing the piano, you must give energy and use your body to do so’. I say that playing *Spanish Donkey Driver* relaxed and beautiful suits her style, but she can’t do that for everything. I mention that the piece is full of war and peace, kings and queens – ‘You’re on a battlefield! Fight! Go!’ She plays again, and it does sound better, but at what cost? I think that asking her to lift her arms up and down with greater vigour may have had the same effect without any of the associated negativity. I sit down at the second piano and play with her, but not sure if this is helpful or not, though it does seem to solidify the rhythm. Joanne says, ‘See what happens Jade? Up it comes’. I say that it’s like being in an orchestra and start playing air violin – ‘Move the bow in time with the rest of the musicians, otherwise it’s really messy’. I do a critical comparison here of moving/giving and not moving/not giving. I say that it’s like a funeral – ‘Why? No, don’t die!’ as opposed to ‘Nah, I hated you anyway’. Jade smiles, looks at Joanne, and says ‘yep’ like a typical 11 year old. I play *Elfin Dance* and say she has so much ‘arm’ in that piece but not enough fingers. I ask her to imagine that she has just had a big drink of coffee – ‘Play quickly’. She plays, and despite a messy middle section, it does sound more energised and confident overall. We spend a little while staring at each other. I say that she mustn’t sabotage herself. Joanne says that she is very good at that. Poor Jade is getting it from all sides. I say that I can’t stand apathy, and that even if she is feeling scared, she needs to put on a brave face and get on with it. Perhaps there is a better way to manage a student’s MPA? I suggest that even though she is a placid person, she can’t just play placid pieces forever, but who says she can’t? I point out that she could go over the right hand of the middle section between now and tomorrow – ‘You’ve got so much rotation, it’s awesome, but you’ve got no fingers … I don’t know why you didn’t use the fingering that I suggested … it would make it so much easier for you’. It’s probably a little late now and would be much better not to use such undermining statements. She starts playing it, albeit timidly, and then I scold her for not playing it with a full sound. Suddenly, the recording of her
playing starts on the iPad. I give her some compliments and then say, ‘Most kids have the opposite problem to her – too much finger and not enough rotation’. I give her comments on how to improve, but it’s falling on deaf ears I think. I mention that the elf sounds like he’s a sleep and needs some coffee instead. We do a few drills to speed up her reaction time for the end of the right hand. As I listen to the Festival Rondo on the iPad, it does actually sound OK, but as the lesson finishes, I say that it sounds very flat. ‘Please don’t sabotage yourself … I don’t want to have to get cranky with you to turn you into a good musician’. The question is – who is sabotaging whom, and according to who’s definition of what a good musician is? ‘I’ve given you everything I’ve got … I can’t give you any more than that … the rest of it has to come from you.’ A valid point that is probably lost amid such suffocating negativity.

Lesson 17: 19 July 2014

Reviewed 7 December 2015

- The recording of the lesson begins with Jade playing La Vision with hands together. The tone is lovely and she has made a really good start in getting the notes under her fingers, despite it being very slow with an absence of rhythmic continuity. I watch over her shoulder and occasionally prompt her with the bass notes, correcting fingering and geography of the double thirds (treble clef), and missing left hand ties. Nonetheless, she has learnt the whole piece and has added pedal too. After she has finished she looks to me and gives a cautious smile when I say, ‘I’m thrilled that you have got that far … Yay!’ She looks at Julia momentarily and then looks back at me. ‘Now you’re moving in the right direction’. Despite Jade being slumped, she is smiling broadly and seems pleased with herself. I can see that she likes the piece, and I say that it suits her. Interesting, she starts touching her nose as soon as I ask her if she would like to make any notes on the accidentals/clefs, etc. that I had just pointed out. While she says ‘yes’, I end up writing them in, first circling in pencil and then getting out a green pen from my pencil case to work with. After writing on the score, I say, ‘So now that you’ve learnt it, you can start practising it … what to do … it’s just like a shopping list of 50 things to do’. Considering Jade’s history and temperament, I do think that I could have made much more of a big deal of this, rather than jumping straight into the ‘now we have to fix’ mindset. Julia said that she wondered if Jade had any questions, but Jade didn’t respond. I suggested that after she attended to the changing clefs, she could turn her attention to the rhythm in bars six, seven and eight,
which I then demonstrate while counting. I ask Jade to play the right hand, starting on
the fourth finger. She starts, but then I get the metronome out and put it on quavers
saying, ‘As soon as you (the notes) have tails, you know that it’s syncopated’. Jade
tries but doesn’t have much success. I then put the metronome on crotchets, playing
first for Jade on her piano, and then she tries. She has some difficulty, but does better
after a few tries and especially so if I clap and gesture too. Lia comes in momentarily
asking after her missing wallet. After she leaves, Jade plays the same passage 100%.
As soon as I introduce the aspects of expressive gesture and tone quality, the rhythm
falters. I suggest that to get a nice ringing sound, ‘lift you hand up and go … (Drop
and roll) … breathe in with your wrist … put a little bit of your soul behind the note,
and make it come to life … that’s it’. I then go on to suggest that this process is a little
bit like the story of Pinocchio, referring to the fact the piano is ‘just wood’ (knock,
knock). I then do a critical comparison of the two sounds. Jade tries, I smile and say,
‘That’s it … smile inside’ (I use an upward gesture with the right hand here). I then
ask Jade to add the preceding few notes to that, which she does. I ask Jade if there are
any other bars like that, and she answers bar 12. I go on to review the fingering here,
saying that third finger is a better option. ‘Any idea why?’ Jade answers, ‘centred’ and
I exclaim, ‘Excellent! You’ll be able to roll upwards with the three … if you play with
your thumb, you’re more likely to go down to have to play it.’ I then follow this with
a physical demonstration of the thumb here, albeit a little exaggerated. I say that she
could use the thumb, but it’s a little more difficult – ‘When you have to turn under
and float with the thumb, it’s very awkward’. I say that when choosing fingering,
these things are important things to think about. I ask Jade to pull apart these bars and
practise them hands separately. I then ask her to repeat what we have just done. She
does a great job with the fingering, rhythm and gestural movement. I suggest that she
can build in the expressive elements of the piece, whilst learning it, rather than
waiting until she ‘knows’ the piece. I play a little further with the right hand, before
stopping to ask Jade what fingering we might use for ‘those ones’. Jade plays on,
experimenting with the fingering, but her body is slouched and has her legs crossed. I
write in fingering, asking her to implement it – ‘Why is that one (second finger) good
do you think?’ I do an upward swirl gesture and smile, before sitting down to
demonstrate. Jade says, ‘roll into it’ as I play, saying, ‘centred, and roll up’ to the
rhythm of the passage. I ask her to move to bar 14 and ask her what fingers will she
do there. I say, ‘Very good, but start on five’. She tries, but I stop her and say, ‘Jade,
give the note life … breathe life into the note.’ While she does try, the way that she is sitting and ‘leaning’ on the keys is far from optimal. She just doesn’t seem to be able to resist doing so. I ask her to write the fingering that we just worked on into the score, giving her the pencil. She does so, referring to the keyboard during the process, which is good to see. I say that what happens next is really up to her. She can stay where she is, or she can move ahead quite quickly, depending on her choices. I say that if she keeps it hands together, it will improve, but maybe not improve rapidly. I give her a compliment that she has already learnt the notes (thumbs up), as most people take forever to even do that. ‘Stage two is where you practise the piece, implementing fingering, gesture and sound, and expression, and often a bit of both (everything).’ As an example, I suggest that she could take bar 14 and play it quite ‘mechanically’ until the rhythm is correct, just like an exercise. The metronome is clicking, and we ‘fiddle around with one bar before starting to breathe life into it’. Jade plays bar 14 with 100% accuracy, effective gesture and expressive tone, and I say, ‘Lovely … then you would practise that for two minutes’. I suggest that this process is like trying to mould the piece – ‘You’ve already got the outline and what happens next is up to you … You can really forge ahead with it if you make the right choices … it’s got nothing to do with talent … It’s just choices and skills.’ I ask Jade if she is sure that she doesn’t want to ask me anything else. She replies, ‘Yes, bar 22.’ I say, ‘That’s going to be the same rhythm as … none of them!’ We all laugh. I start to explain (with the metronome, clapping and counting) how to go about it. We clap it together, Jade is quite timid but it’s correct. I then say, ‘Well Done, now put your notes in’. After she has done that correctly, I say that perhaps she could do that for a couple of minutes during home practice. Then I draw her attention to the (implied) expression of crescendo. I do a critical comparison, first a deadpan ‘intellectual’ crescendo through squeezing the notes, before doing a ‘roll … doubly rotate’ version, which she then tries. I do another demonstration of double rotation, and she tries again, but the rhythm falters, so it’s clearly a case of ‘too much, too soon’. I explain that she will have to wait for the click and then come in on the half beat. She tries again and I add my own gesture and expressive vocalisation. She does well so I say, ‘Good, now stay with that … Pretend I’m here with you (conducting)’. I mention that I was at the Ray Chen concert and that I realised that part of my role in the lesson is to ‘conduct’ Jade and then when she is playing herself, she can take the role of being her own conductor – ‘Don’t just sit there and do it cerebrally … Try and use your body’. I
mention that it was so inspiring to see Simone Young and Julia agrees (I am doing a lot of body movement and gesture here). Jade mentioned that Alice watched it too. I say that it seemed like the orchestra was feeding off her energy – ‘That’s part of the reason I do the same in lessons … What I like, is for people to sort of go with that’. We repeat the passage while I ‘conduct’. Jade plays very well – ‘Good girl’. I say that the most important thing that she could learn today is to pull it apart and ‘rehearse’ it hands separately. I mention that most people think that hands separately is for dummies, but it’s essential to learn all of the ‘material’. I start playing the opening part of the left hand – ‘The way that you touch the keys is going to affect the sound’. The video seemed to stop and then restart. It resumes with me talking about taking one bar at a time and ‘practising’ rather than ‘playing’. I say that when I was playing just earlier, I knew the notes, so I was thinking of what movements I might use ‘between the notes’ to facilitate an expressive sound. ‘If it was something hard for me, I would follow the same process as you (Jade) … one bar at a time with metronome on’. I demonstrate with the Fantaisie-Impromptu, saying that I learn the notes and then visualise what movements ‘link’ the notes, lest it will sound ‘buttony’. Julia agrees. ‘What movement do I need to do to flow between each note to make it sound like that?’ I do a critical comparison with the right-hand section of La Vision that we were practising earlier: first with gesture and expressive touch and then deadpan without any facilitating movement. Jade is nodding but also kicking her legs. I say that first she needs to get the right fingering, because if there is any twisting or if the hand is not centred, then it won’t feel comfortable, and if it’s not comfortable, then you can’t really ‘relax’. I mention that she can come again this Thursday. I say that as she has her exam next term, ‘it’s full throttle this term’. We look at the scales and Julia says that she hasn’t been covering the melodic minors and needs to get back into it. Angel then comes to the door to give me a present from Japan. I say, ‘Keep pushing ahead … don’t wait for four weeks to do more, because you’ll run out of time’. Julia says that she did well because she was away for a week. Jade shows me her jumper with logo. I say that she did a great job over the holidays – ‘I really respect people when they put the effort in’. I say (and play) for her AMEB exam, she’ll play Festival Rondo, La Vision, Spanish Donkey Driver, extras – Elfin Dance and Study in C. We talk about what is manageable in the time frame. I suggest that she focus on technical work, La Vision and the Study in C really solidly for the next six weeks and
then we can reassess the situation. ‘The final six weeks is revision of general knowledge, aural and sight-reading.’

Lesson 18: 24 July 2014

Reviewed 7 December 2015

- Initial conversation regarding studio chair with Joanne, before she goes to wait in the lounge room. I notice that Jade is wearing her senior jacket and has macaroni ribbon in her hair. Joanne says that Julia is working tonight and on Saturday, so Joanne will be at the lesson then too. Joanne and I talk further about antique chairs, antique tables and antiques in general. Joanne talks to Holly while Jade and I work a little more on La Vision. I mention that last lesson we were working mainly with the right hand phrasing and perhaps today we could work with the left hand, pedal and texture. I ask Jade is she knows what I mean by ‘texture’ – ‘sort of’. I go on to say that it’s the way that something feels – ‘Obviously we can’t physically feel the notes … the way it sounds and therefore the way it might feel’, e.g. a ‘velvety’ sound. I ask Jade to stand up and I demonstrate at the piano the left hand and pedal, referring to a nice ringing sound in the bottom register. I also refer to (and play) soft rather than strident chords. Jade swaps places with me, and plays the left hand with the pedal. She has a little bit of trouble towards the end of the first section. I stop her and refer to G7 chord and ‘what inversion of C chord is that one?’ Jade answers correctly (second inversion). As she continues to play, I sit down next to her, blocking the view. Jade gets to the left-hand thirds part but she has forgotten the fingering and legato touch, so I ask her to write in the fingering. We start working on the legato touch by using two-note slurs with an upward gesture. I talk her about moving upwards quicker so that the thirds don’t ‘split’. She has several tries, but misses the legato. I ask her to take off the pedal, and she has more success. We do each pair of thirds in turn. I say that most people have trouble playing thirds, giving the two most common scenarios (non-legato/synchronised or legato/split). I reiterate how I would like Jade to practise these. We go through the exercises again, taking it in turns on the one piano, and I give Jade directions regarding ‘down movement’ and ‘up movement’ – ‘As you go up, thrust forward’. Jade copies with good success, but the fourth finger is not synchronised with others. She keeps trying and when accurate, we move to the next pair. I ask her not to tighten her hand as she thrusts forward, but it looks fine to me when watching it now. We move on, doing each pair in succession. I demonstrate first. I say, ‘Now that
is going to require a lot of practice please’ which Jade seems to agree to. She continues to experiment, doing mostly well, but I say, ‘When it splits, it means that you need to review the movement’. We then put the final repeated third on to the end of the phrase, which I sing the instruction to while playing. I say, ‘Try to mould yourself into the notes’. She starts to falter, so I suggest that we go back a step, which we do. She is having some success, so I say, ‘Now, I’ve showed you how to practise this part, so please do, OK?’ I suggest that we move the ‘sticky’ over to that spot so that she remembers. I remind Jade that it’s one thing to practise, but if she can practise the way that I instruct her to, she will improve quickly. Jade nods. I suggest that she may need to practise that part of the piece for some time and review it occasionally. I sit down and show Jade loudest, medium, and softest in each register (texture). I start playing in this way for a half a page or so before I show her ‘what most kids do’. I suggest that the music can sound beautiful, like Cinderella and the Prince dancing, rather than clumsy, like the ugly sisters trying to get the glass slipper on. I ask Jade to play the left hand alone – ‘velvet chords … lovely’. I mention not to cut the rest short on the fourth beat of the bar, before coaching her physically while verbalising expressively the idea of using the rest as a way to elegantly float the hand down to the lower register, as opposed to getting the note ready prematurely. I liken it to walking naturally, rather than getting the foot ready before taking the step – ‘Don’t line it up first’. Jade plays again, but misses the minim, so I say that she needs to slow down the movement so that she covers the distance within two beats instead of one. I coach her with gesture and saying, ‘minim thank you’, as well as ‘nice big rainbow’ and some other nonsense words. I say that that is how I would like her to practise the whole of the left hand – ‘like that please’. Jade seems to enjoy the movement and I suggest that as a pianist, she can create a visual and aural effect. I go on to suggest that as the piece is called La Vision, she can create a ‘vision in sound’. ‘Listen to my sound picture’, rather than ‘listen to my Grade 4 exam piece’. As you learn the notes, start to find ways to illustrate the sound’. Jade nods. I ask her to play the right hand (no pedal) – ‘I just want to hear the legato connection and shape’. Jade plays the right hand, but seems to falter before the end of the second line. I suggest that we may have to go back and write some fingering in if she is unsure. She starts again, before I stop to coach the ‘double C’ – ‘Up for the soft first one and down for the louder second one’. I ask her how to make the A loud – ‘What movement would you do?’ She does it physically and I get excited and say, ‘double rotation!’ Jade seems surprised, but
says ‘yes’. I show Jade what exactly I saw her do in order for her to give it a label, explaining that the thrust that she generated made the note louder. She comes to the next couple of bars, but seems to be unsure, so I experiment with the fingering, asking her ‘What would it be like … using those smaller fingers will give you a softer sound as you roll up, and then you can come down again’ (to make the louder sound). We pause momentarily as Jade writes in the fingering as I direct her. I find another pair of repeated notes, and I coach her with these a similar way as before. I go on to say that the fingering is really important, as it will give her a chance to shape the sound – ‘lovely Jade’. I suggest that if she is to use thumb on the final note of the phrase, she will need to start inside the black notes – ‘Too far out will cause a loud thumb’. Jade tries and has some success. We look further towards the phrase end and I coach her to lift her hand up and then drop quickly on the first note of the next phrase. I wonder off momentarily, and come back to find her writing in her own fingering! I say, ‘all right’ and give her an encouraging smile, but interestingly, she smiles and then turns her head away and immediately returns to a deadpan look. I ask her how her technical work is going, mentioning that I can continue helping her with the fingering in *La Vision* next time. I mention that the lesson is like the orchestral rehearsal – ‘you go home and do sectionals practice until next week’. Jade says (mumbles) that she has been practising. I ask her to play E Major, hands together. Jade asks me where (what octave) she should start. I direct her and she plays the scale hands together, though neither fluently nor accurately in terms of fingering. I mention that the fingering is still hesitant and that she could practise a bit more, to which she agrees. I then ask her to play the right hand for E Major. I comment that she has a nice sound. I ask her to shift over to the right so that her elbow and forearm are aligned before going to answer the door. I ask her if she has been practising the harmonic minors – she says no. I say that I expect her to play all majors, harmonic minors and chromatics – ‘I’m happy to go through the melodics with you, but you need to practise what we’ve already covered first’. I mention that Sam just did his fourth grade exam today. I say, ‘make sure you don’t leave your scales to the last minute’. I suggest that she pick up the pace a bit, making sure that she ‘rehearses’ what we do thoroughly between lessons, and then we can go further. I mention as we finish that she has a lovely sound for *La Vision* – ‘Are you still practising the other pieces? Be responsible and cover something every day’.
Lesson 19: 26 July 2014

Reviewed 8 December 2015

- Initial conversation with Joanne regarding Jade’s involvement in the school concert (choir and violin). Meanwhile, Jade is randomly playing at the far piano (the view is a probably a bit obstructed in this lesson). Talking about Sam coming to the house and going through every scale and every arpeggio for Grade 4. I say arpeggios are really just broken chords. I remind Jade of the fingering and we play pairs of notes before going one to two, and then three octaves. I complement Jade on aligning herself with notes in the top register, right hand. I ask her if she would like to run through all of the right hand first, Jade shrugs. I remind her that for this exam hands separately is all that’s required. We move to the left hand. I ask her if she has any questions so far? No? We move to the minor and I ask Jade which note changes from A Major to A minor, and she correctly answers the third. I play a couple of famous pieces in A minor (Grieg Concerto and Für Elise), before she plays the right-hand arpeggio for A minor. I ask Jade to move the chair further back so that she sits on the front half, reminding her of the optimal seating position where she could stand up at any given time. She moves her feet back and does the ‘stand up/sit down’ sequence and smiles in doing so. I explain that sitting in this way makes the posture activate rather than passive. I ask Jade if she knows what passive means, but she gives an answer that’s inaudible. I say that it’s like lying on the couch. I give a quick demonstration of activated posture and aligning the body with the notes, extending the spine and neck while coaching her to do the same, though she is obscured in the recording. I explain that scales and arpeggios are useful for chord and harmonic knowledge and also for learning how to operate the ‘apparatus’ – ‘How do we hold the apparatus?’ We move the left hand, and I remind her that the minor will be five/four. Jade starts too high, so I walk over and adjust her, asking her to push her feet into the floor while bracing the stomach muscles. ‘Stand up/sit down … lean/tilt forwards and play … soften the shoulder, but keep the upper arm switched on (I manipulate her physically here) – ‘Good girl’. I ask Jade to play E Major, right hand and left hand. She starts with the right hand. I ask her to pronate her right forearm in so that the thumb passes under without too much effort. She is lifting her shoulder up too much, so I ‘soften’ her shoulder for her. I ask Jade to start lower, before manipulating her – ‘Swivel the arm around from the elbow when you pass the thumb’. As she gets to the high register I
remind her to ‘start’ adjusting. I comment that it’s like being an athlete before sitting
down and then asking her to play the left hand E Major. I ask her to ‘start lower, lean
over, head over, shoulder soft, upper arm on’. I make a comment about pivoting
inwards with the forearm as she is descending. I ask Jade to play the E minor right
hand and left hand. She plays right-hand E minor, and I ask her, ‘Move across, tilt
your elbow up, come across with your upper body … oh, that’s lovely – beautiful
pivoting’. When I give her a compliment, she seems embarrassed and scowls
(playfully) at Joanne. We then move on to the left hand of E minor – ‘nice job’. I then
ask her to play B-flat Major – ‘soft shoulder, switch on your upper arm … as you
come to the F, don’t drop everything … your need to almost face down and in … not
that much’. I adjust her arm as she ascends (broken string). I comment that arpeggios
are a lot easier to do when they’re faster and harder to do when slower, and I ask her
to do more practice to learn the notes well. I ask Jade to move to the left hand for B-
flat Major, which she does, though with some physical incoordination of elbow and
thumb pronation. I disappear off screen and then return to play the left-hand
descending (blocks view). Jade and I play together (leg, tight tummy, tall neck,
rounded fingertip). I play a loud B-flat chord and it gives them a fright and we laugh.
Jade then plays B-flat minor scale while I find the page. She stops and starts touching
her nose and I pull her up about contracting someone else’s germs from the piano. I
suggest that she use her sleeve, or perhaps develop a new habit like stamping her feet
instead. Joanne laughs. I tilt her forwards and she plays the right hand for B-flat
minor. I adjust her physically (tight wrist) and then ask her if she can see her elbow
coming out as she ‘rolls inwards’. I continue to help her physically as she changes
direction (drop shoulder). I say, ‘You make sure you practise these … you’re not
going to waste a half hour lesson are you?’ Jade says no. We then move to the left
hand for B-flat minor. I ask Jade if she can turn the thumb under (descending) without
lifting her elbow – ‘see how you’ve got to squeeze? It’s that squeezing that will stop
you from doing well … You can’t really rotate without slightly lifting your upper arm
and elbow’. She experiments with her own arm. I ask Jade to feel my upper arm –
‘Even when I don’t lift when I turn the thumb, can you still feel the muscle try and
engage? See that? Let it do what it’s supposed to do’. Jade continues to experiment
with her own arm. We then move to E-flat Major, and I comment that E-flat minor is
harder because it’s all black keys. Jade is trying to do E Major. She plays the right-
hand ascending and descending and I ask her to circle the new ones in her technical
workbook. While I fiddle with some papers, Jade carries on with the left hand for E-flat Major. I go back and check, coaching the fingering, and writing it in. We have done all the arpeggios! I then suggest we go through the contrary motion scales. Jade asks me where to start, and I suggest that it depends where she is sitting. I take a video with the iPad of her playing contrary motion and we sit down to watch it together. I comment that she knows it ‘nicely’. We watch twice. I ask her to keep her upper arms switched on so we don’t come up and down with the elbows (demonstrates). I explain that there is a slight tilt forward, which helps keep the arms align, otherwise you’ll have straight arms. Jade tries, I remind her to tilt forwards. I comment – ‘Jade that’s awesome’ and Joanne says, ‘good girl’. I explain that that technique can be applied to all contrary motion scales, as the goal is to keep the tone uniform across all notes (demonstrates quickly – ‘it’s like a wave’). I gesture again, and then play F# minor contrary. I say that she needs to practise the minors – ‘yes Mark’. By switching your arms on, you will hopefully avoid a bump – ‘eagle arms, rather than chicken wings’. I comment, ‘In the old days, keeping the elbows close to the body was the norm, but that tends to make everything more stiff’. I also remind her that the more she gets to know the notes, the more she can demonstrate a good technique – ‘The notes are just a vehicle to show that you can keep the volume of the notes uniform … the pieces are just vehicles for your expression’. Jade smiles. ‘The better you know the pieces, the more confident you feel and the more expressive you can be’. Jade seems to understand. I strongly suggest that she start looking at the minors. I ask her if she would like more time before we ‘workshop’ the melodics? She answers, ‘yes’. I say, ‘Not too much more time … just one week’. I mentioned that when Sam was preparing for this grade, it was a bit hard at first because there was a large volume of technical work to do, but he did well in the end. I mention that I heard him doing his exam ‘through the wall’ the other day. We all smile and laugh. Joanne asks if Jade is ‘going to do it’. I explain that I think Jade understands and that she will do it, as she doesn’t want to waste her lesson time. Joanne says that she (Jade) doesn’t want to waste her time, or my time. I mention that even though I still get paid, I would rather teach a lesson for free and enjoy it, then get paid and not enjoy it. I say that if she keeps pushing herself, I will be a happy teacher. ‘There is a difference between having trouble and not trying hard enough’. Jade is nodding and saying yes. We then move to aural tests – intervals first. I coach her with the qualities of Major and Perfect. I ask her to give me some examples, suggesting that her and Julia could take
turns. We then move to singing higher/lower notes and singing chord notes ascending and descending. I ask her what syllables she sang in her choir camp. I suggest ‘doo’ rather than ‘la’ due to breath control. I summarise what was covered and suggest that she practise five times that amount to get the best out of her lesson.

Lesson 20: 9 August 2014

Reviewed 11 December 2015

- The lesson starts with a question from Joanne regarding the exam being at Ashgrove. Jade starts touching her nose as soon as I ask her how she is going with scales. She mumbles something, and I say, ‘What did you want to ask me?’ She looks at her work and after a couple of minutes of looking, says nothing. I ask her what she is looking for and after a while, it turns out that she has either lost her copy of Study in C, or hasn’t brought it to the lesson. She continues to mumble and fiddle with her nose nervously. I turn to the scales within the technical workbook, and I ask her A Major, hands together, loudly. I mention that the examiners will say ‘forte’ rather than loudly. Jade plays the hands together slowly, but accurately. I ask her what metronome speed she will need to play. I mention that she can go faster, but she seems very worried. I ask her to have a go – ‘ready go’, but she has trouble getting started and shies away. I smile and say, ‘jump in’ and she does three octaves well but then gives up and takes her hands away quickly at the first sign of having to make an effort to be accurate. I mention that she might have to start pushing herself a bit with the tempo. We both play the right hand, four octaves ascending and descending – ‘Thank you … please do E Major with the left hand … all of these have to be played by memory’. I ask Jade to ‘join in’ as I play at tempo, but she seems confused as to what I mean, so I coach her. However, that methodology seems to make her even less confident. She stops well before she has finished, and I say, ‘That doesn’t sound too good’. I ask her if she has been practising and she says, ‘Yes I have’. ‘OK, all right … Have you been putting the metronome on and getting them a bit faster? (No) …Well, when are you going to do it?’ Jade nervously itches her forearm. I don’t think I have asked her to do so, so it’s perhaps a little unfair, but it would be good if she could develop greater autonomy. ‘Come on then, B-flat Major right hand’. I ask her to ‘join in’ again, but it’s making matters worse. She turns the page to look at the scale, but I ask her to close the book and do it from memory. She makes a worried sigh, and doesn’t actually close the book. It seems that I am trying to prove a point in order to
shock her a little, but I am actually hindering any real learning here. She touches her nose nervously and glances at Joanne as I say, ‘join in’. She has a good try here, and apart from the last octave, which I remind her to do, she plays quite well. She seems flustered, but I say, ‘OK let’s hear E-flat Major left hand’, to which she replies with the same concerned sigh. I start playing half speed – ‘join in’. She seems really confused now. After a brief silence where I scratch my chin, after which she looks at me, I say, ‘How come you don’t know them? We’ve been doing them all year … You’ve got so many to do and you don’t even know the ones that we started with. These are easy … You’re supposed to be memorising them … Your exam is going to be in about eight weeks, and you can’t even play one hand separately of the majors … (Jade nods her head) You’ve got to get serious (clap, clap) … You can’t go in and play like that, they’ll fail you … They’ve got to be known’. I ‘demonstrate’ E-flat Major at speed – ‘You’ve got to know them all’. Jade looks very sad and defeated, but I ask her to play F# harmonic minor. Jade says that she hasn’t been doing them (harmonic minor) and it’s starting to look like she is about to cry. She says that she has been practising arpeggios, but instead of focusing on the positive, I say, ‘Oh Jade, you’ve got a piano exam, you can’t just do arpeggios … That is like feeding one of your five dogs but ignoring the other four … come on, you’ve got to get it together’. I am quite annoyed by now, and say, ‘You can’t turn up to a lesson without having practised all your stuff’. Jade stares glumly, at the keys. I am flipping papers, and then after a condescending sigh, I say, ‘What’s the point … Why are you here? Let’s hear your arpeggios then … You’re supposed to be knowing all the (notes of) scales and arpeggios so that I can teach you something … I’ve already been through all this with you … it’s just a waste of time. She starts, but I quickly interrupt and say, ‘We’ve got to get on with the technique of playing it, and the sound (Jade nods) … The notes are the easy part. Jade plays the right hand for E Major, but only does two octaves. I remind her to do four octaves at this level. I ask her what metronome speed and what tempo, but she doesn’t seem to even know where to look to find the information. After she plays the right hand E Major four octaves, I ask her whether it’s hands separately or hands together. She answers hands separately. I flip the pages and say, ‘good’ before we move (push) on – ‘Let’s hear B-flat Major with the left hand’. I start playing and then she plays, though it is neither accurate nor quick, and she doesn’t do four octaves. I remind her that it’s four octaves and ask her to ‘get her position (posture and feet) right’ and ‘have a think about where she will start and end … off
you go’. She plays the four octaves with the left hand quite well apart from one mistake, ‘thank you’. I ask her to play E minor with the left hand. She has trouble starting and there are many mistakes. After she finishes, I say, ‘all right, look, I’ve done this a million times with kids and you’re not going to make it Jade, I can just feel it. If you don’t pull your act together, you won’t be ready. (Jade nods) I’m not just getting annoyed with you for my own health, you, you … how old are you? 12? (Jade nods) Come on! You’re not six anymore … (Jade nods) You should be on that piano playing at least 40 minutes of scales a day … I just don’t understand why you don’t take more responsibility for your own learning’. I continue to flip through the pages, and I further say, ‘It’s just too exhausting for me teaching someone who won’t take an interest in … You know I don’t mind, ‘come on, let’s …’, but I’ve been through this over and over with you, it’s just too draining’. Jade has her head down looking at the floor now and I continue to flip through pages. ‘Well, you’ll just have to do more work … there’s no other way, we’re just wasting time here, OK? (Jade nods) Let’s do something else … let’s hear La Vision’. She barely has time to get her book out before I say, ‘This lesson is half over already and we’ve done nothing, except I’ve heard a couple of arpeggios that you’ve sort of got a bit better, but they’re too slow anyway.’ Jade is fiddling with her jumper and looking very stressed. She asks me for a pencil – I say, ‘You don’t turn up to a lesson without a pencil’. Joanne asks Jade if she has a pencil in her bag (no). Jade writes something down, but I’m not sure what. She pushes her chair backwards a little and then starts to play La Vision, but she doesn’t seem to have improved, as there are still the same wrong notes, hesitations and incorrect rhythm as the previous lesson. I pull the chair and sit down beside her with a frown, particularly evident when I can see that the ‘thirds’ in the middle are still not fingered well or played with legato. She ends up stopping on the second page, to which I ‘tsst’ and say, ‘Look, you’ve got some… most of the same mistakes that I heard last time … the rhythm’s not right, you’ve got the same wrong notes … why don’t you fix things up? Can you not hear that that (points to the score) sounds wrong? (Yeah) Well why don’t you fix it up? It’s been circled, you’re supposed to fix it up’. I get a pencil while Jade looks paralysed – ‘Write in the correct notes … if you’re going to write in the notes, make sure that they’re the right notes … it’s F natural and G#’ (plays on piano). Jade takes a pencil and writes something on the score, but I’m not sure what as I walk over to the second piano. After Jade finishes writing, she starts playing that section with a few bars leading up, but I notice that she
is so defeated that her fingers are barely touching the keys, as she ‘hangs on’ with her flat fingertips, particularly noticeable when she plays the third finger right hand. It’s not long before I interrupt her, ‘That’s the wrong rhythm there … we’ve been through this (section) before (Jade swipes her nose multiple times). When you have a quaver rest and a quaver, how do you count that out? Do you practise with the metronome?’ Jade shakes her head no and swipes her nose. I ask her, ‘How do you expect to improve a rhythmic error if you don’t practise with the metronome, or take note of what it is?’ Jade adjusts the bottom of her jumper around her waist, and also scratches her nose nervously. I play hands together while counting the quaver and crotchet subdivisions. ‘It comes in between the first and second beats’. Jade tries, before I ‘demonstrate’ again, and then she has multiple attempts without much success. I say, ‘so put a circle around that and fix it up, when you’re at home’. Jade says, ‘yep’, nods and then circles her work. I then go on to say, ‘See what happens with me, when people don’t take an interest in their own learning and don’t do what I ask them to do, I just lose interest in them. I just go … if you don’t care, why should I care … I’ve got more important things to do’. Jade is making eye contact here, a rare thing for this lesson. I play the hands together with an expressive approach. Jade puts the pencil away and swipes her nose multiple times. ‘You’ve got to get your rhythm and your notes right before you can do anything, and I just don’t think that you have learnt that. After six years of teaching you, you still have a problem with getting your rhythms and your notes learnt quickly. Fair enough you have been sick, but you’ve had this piece for ages, it’s been six weeks or something (Jade looks down even further into her lap) … and you’ve had those scales since the beginning of the year. If you’ve got to get there (gestures a high point), you can’t just leave everything until the last minute … it just won’t happen for you (Jade is making eye contact again). That’s why I don’t do exams with many people … they don’t work hard enough. How much practice are you doing? You should be doing at least one hour a day, at least. You can’t do an exam on 10 minutes here or 20 minutes there, or a couple of run throughs of E-flat Major at the slowest speed you can … you’ve just got to (gestures) push yourself a bit’. I shake my head and sigh with frustration. After a long pause, ‘ all right, you better go home and do some practise, that’s what you had better do. Do you practise the hands separately with the metronome? (Jade shakes her head and says, ‘no’). All right … well you need to. Are you writing this down or can you remember it all?’ Jade reaches for a pencil. ‘Just write it on the top of the page … practise hands
separately with the metronome, and start fixing your errors. They won’t be fixed by magic … you can’t just go to bed and hope for the best … you have to work at it’ (Jade nods and says, ‘yes’). As she continues to write, I say, ‘Being a musician … being an instrumentalist is not about talent, it’s about hard work, and it irritates me when people turn up and think that they can get away without doing the hard work like everyone else. It’s like, well what makes you so special? You’re obviously a talented musician, but if you don’t put the effort in, you’re not going to get any results. I randomly play the left hand for the opening two bars. I say, ‘OK, let’s hear the left hand’ as Jade wipes her nose. After she has played the first four bars I say, ‘OK, good … so you practise that separately, then put the metronome on and do the right hand’. I set the metronome, ‘You just do one line at a time … there’s got to be a system otherwise nothing’s going to get done’. Jade and I play the right hand at the same time. She does well with the first four bars, with only one error. I say, ‘Good, now put the hands together’. I count her in and we both play hands together with the metronome successfully. I ask her what fingering she is using at the end of bar four. She answers ‘correctly’ from the score, and I say, ‘Well make sure that you do that then’. We start again and both play with hands together. After I say that that’s your four bars, I say that the piece is only 38 bars and you do four bars at a time until their perfect (gestures). ‘It will take you … I don’t know, a couple of weeks … Done’. Jade nods and says, ‘Mm-hmm’. I ask her to do the left hand for the next line (four bars), saying that she might do that for five minutes. I look at my watch and say, ‘Look we’ve run out of time … I just don’t have time to practise for you … you have to do it yourself’. I can see that Jade is starting to become more engaged now, and it’s a pity that we have no more time. We play the same four bars again while I click along with the metronome. I ask her to then play the right hand (for those four bars). She has some rhythmic problems, and I ask her how she is going to do bar eight. ‘Have we written in the counting there? (Yes) So why is it not better?’ I count while Jade plays from bar five. I ask her what fingering she is doing for ‘that bar’. We go back to bar five again as Jade swipes her nose. I say to Jade that she should sit there for five or 10 minutes and practise that right hand until it’s known, and ‘then you put the left hand with it … then that’s eight bars out of 38 … you’ve only got 30 to go … but you’ve got to get moving (clicks fingers) … it’s not going to happen otherwise. You can’t just expect me to fix everything for you … I will tell you what’s wrong, and I’ll show you how do it (go about fixing the errors), but it’s up to you to do it … then we can
get on with the music’. Joanne clears her throat and Jade glances over. Jade nods and agrees. ‘These are the rudiments … you have to have the rudiments sorted to be an expressive player … you can’t just be talented’. I ask Jade how Study in C is going – ‘How much of that have you done?’ I look mortified when Jade says that she only just started looking at it today. She plays nervously with her jumper and I say, ‘OK, so learn half of that, both hands’ (Jade nods and says ‘yes’). I tell her that she needs to spend at least an hour a day on those scales and arpeggios, as they are ‘no good’. I say, ‘You’re not going to make it unless you pull your socks up … let’s see a big effort this week. Even if you’re sick, get on that piano and do something … run through your other pieces at least once, learn half of the Czerny … you’ve learnt the notes for La Vision, but you haven’t started ‘practising’ it yet though. You need to sit there and take four bars at a time, right hand, left hand, and then force them together … you can’t just sit there for 10 minutes and have a bit of a fiddle, it just won’t happen, all right’.

Lesson 21: 16 August 2014

Reviewed 14 December 2015

- Julia talks about being nice to be at the lesson and ‘reminds’ Jade regarding a positive start to the lesson. We have some further conversation regarding the ‘new’ Indooroopilly shopping centre. Scales: I ask Jade to play E-flat Major hands together, but she turns to her Julia and looks terrified, but I don’t notice as it’s out of my line of vision. Julia starts to become annoyed with her. She says, ‘Stop!’ I appear to be confused, and Julia asks if Jade could perhaps start with one that she ‘knows’. The look on Jade’s face and her voice as she explains what she has indeed been practising is so sad. She genuinely looks very scared and worried. I suggest that she plays A Major instead, but Jade still looks to Julia for comfort and reassurance. She plays the scale very well – ‘Sounds good’. I turn the metronome on and mention that the speed is good. We play A Major again as a duo. I ask to hear E Major. She stumbles a bit – ‘good effort’. I demonstrate and then ask her to play E Major slower (two notes per beat). She is quite tentative and plays five octaves, which we both smile about. I ask for B-flat Major with the left hand, and Jade gets out the picture scales. I say that it’s good that she is using these, but for the exam, the scales will need to be memorised. She says, ‘Yeah’. Jade tries playing with two notes per beat but has problems, especially with descending. I suggest (and demonstrate) that when she is having
trouble getting the notes accurate, ‘just split it into octaves’. I ask Jade to ‘get her body right, so that you tilt over behind the note’ (lean on your hip and support with the foot). We play the scale in unison, in octaves, with the metronome. I ask her to repeat the last octave ascending a few times, asking her to review the fingering. Jade swipes her nose as I ask her to review the right hand. She plays it octave by octave ascending as I remind her to ‘tilt over’ (to align herself with the notes). As she descends I comment on her lovely position, but she stumbles with the fingering. I say that she has a good technique, but the notes are not known well enough, and the tempo is too slow. I ask her what she is ‘going to do’ (to improve). Before she answers, I suggest and demonstrate the same process (octave by octave) but faster. Jade puts her hair back with her hands. We play in unison ascending, reviewing the fingering – ‘start on four’. She has lots of errors with the fingering when descending, but does get there in the end. She swipes her nose constantly as I am asking her not to spend too much time on each one – ‘Once you’ve got it to about that standard, move on’ (so that she can get through them all every day). I mention (with my eyes ‘up’) that it will take her about an hour. Jade and Julia say ‘yeah’ and Jade nods knowingly. Julia mentions that she is ‘catching up’ on what has been happening and tells me that Jade has been putting in the time, but perhaps not doing all of them as often. I suggest that Jade just keep ‘cycling’ through them – ‘In order to get them faster, it’s a combination of knowing them better, but also doing them faster … you have to push yourself’. Jade adjusts her headband and swipes her nose (left hand). I remind her to do one octave at a time, faster. ‘They are moving in the right direction this way … if you keep them slow, they will never get faster’. I direct her to move on to E flat. She gets out the picture scale, bites her nails, and then plays with the left hand, about two notes per beat, but there are many errors. She swipes her nose as I interrupt her and say, ‘Before you start, check out where you are going to finish’. I show her and she swipes again. I ask her to point her right-hand finger on the top note as she plays the left hand again. She has pretty good success this time. I remind her to tilt over to align herself with the notes in the extremes of register. She fiddles with her headband again as I direct to then do octave by octave faster. I mention that we haven’t got time (in the lesson) so ‘I’m just instructing you’. Jade swipes her nose as Julia says that she is making notes too. Jade smiles at Julia. I ask Jade to move to F# harmonic minor. She swipes her notes and then tries the left hand, but she doesn’t know it. I ask her to start with one note per beat, but even that is still challenging. I interrupt at the top and say,
‘If you’re not getting anywhere, there’s no point … just do one octave’ (until it improves). Jade swipes her nose as I ask her to refer to the picture scales (she had put them aside). We play the left hand in unison as she refers to the picture scales. I remind her to ‘lean over and play with rounded fingertips’. Without any facial expression, I ask her to move to the right hand, saying, ‘Practise your technique as you go … Don’t let the distal joints fall backwards… move your upper body across during the upper register … the top of your finger should be sitting vertically… but don’t put the wrist up though … four … then you would stay on that one for five minutes’. I look sternly and Jade swipes her nose again and nods. I say that we now move to F# melodic minor (Jade swipes a couple of times with both hands in turn) and I say that that one is not in the book. I say instead of D natural, you do D# and E#. ‘Do you want to make a note?’ Julia mentions that Jade has a pencil. I refer to the technical workbook, saying each note (she looks confused) and I say that she has probably done this in violin. Julia mentions that she is just broaching something similar today. Jade swipes as I say sharpen six and seven on the way up, and lower six and seven on the way down. Jade writes something in her book, I turn the metronome off and I say, ‘Let’s have a try’. I mention to Jade not to touch her face due to all the germs being on the piano. I suggest that she find another ‘habit’ such as grinding her teeth, or tapping her feet. Jade seems embarrassed, but says, ‘OK’. Jade has a go, and then we ‘try again’ as I play in unison with her. I suggest that she ‘take it in octaves’. It’s slow but steady and accurate, at least when ascending. I display no emotion as I ask her, ‘Do you want to make any notes about what you are supposed to be doing?’ Jade picks up the pencil and writes something on her picture scales, but I’m not sure what. I then ask her to play chromatic commencing on A. I give a quick demonstration with the metronome (four notes per beat) but she seems to have great trouble getting started. I glance over to Julia and then say, ‘all right, so you give it a go, and if it’s no good, come back to two per beat’. I look pretty unimpressed and bored here. Jade does ok, but forgets the last octave. I say, ‘So you haven’t been doing these either?’ Jade shakes her head, pulls her jumper down, and ‘shrinks’. Julia says, ‘Speak Jade, please’. Jade says, ‘I don’t know them’. I say, ‘Jade you’re just wasting your money darling … you’re just wasting your Mum’s money if you’re not doing these at home … you have to do all of your scales darling … we’ve been through all of these before … have you got $100 just to put in the shredder, because that’s what you’re doing every week, you’re just wasting money’. I wipe my brow and whisper,
‘so frustrating’. I then starting playing A chromatic with the right hand ‘from the bottom octave … down here’. I ask her where she will finish – ‘Good, go!’ She is looking very tight in the shoulder, but manages to play quite fluently and even adjusts her trunk without being reminded. I say, ‘Let’s spend five minutes on this one, go!’ We play in unison with the right hand, reviewing the thumb ‘on top’. I pull her up on the ‘wrong fingering … start again … and again … come on, join in!’ Jade flicks her nose with her left hand. We count the ‘boxes of things’ (13) and I suggest that to cover everything once over seven days, she needs to do two boxes a day. ‘That’s just once … you need to be going through it two or three or four times (per week) … you’re just never going to get there otherwise … when you’re doing an exam on any instrument, you need to practise religiously, not just when you feel like it … that’s why you are so far behind, because you won’t practise, and then there’s this big rush at the end, as usual’. I flick through the pages – ‘We’ve run out of time … there’s no time to learn anything … you’re not learning anything’. I ask Jade what she does when she is practising at home and she mumbles something. ‘Why don’t you do what we cover in the lessons … why do you do what you want to do instead of what’s required? Julia asks Jade what she does during her practice and Jade says that she doesn’t know. Julia says that she has been doing an hour, but obviously hasn’t been doing it ‘properly’. I say with a forlorn look, that she just doesn’t ‘know’ them. ‘They’ve got to be faster with hands together; it’s just too slow’. Jade nods. I think that she has been trying and I should have given her greater credit, as she has improved a little. There is a long pause and Jade looks paralysed. I ask Jade if she keeps a diary of what she has practised. Jade shakes her head no. I go on to verbalise what this might entail. I chastise her for not taking more responsibility, as she is ‘old enough’. I go on to say that all the chromatics are the same – ‘It’s no big deal, but you’re still having trouble doing one hand, slowly … If you don’t actually get in there and do it, it’s not going to get anywhere’. Jade is looking down into her lap. Julia says that the biggest thing is ‘I can do it … You’ve got to walk into the lesson to get the best out of the lesson … I can learn … I can do it’. I suggest that if it takes her two hours to improve then that’s what’s required. I say that she has left it far too late, and I chastise her for being ‘quite frankly, lazy with these scales this year. Next time you do an exam, I suggest that you start working harder much earlier. I’ve been making a record of these lessons, and I know that we have been working on these in the lessons, trying to build your confidence up, but you are just sabotaging yourself’. Julia says
mmm’. I say, ‘It then becomes stressful for everyone … The best thing that you can do for yourself is work hard, but if you can’t do that, find something else to do … do one instrument … or do choir. If you’re not going to put the work in, there is no point having lessons. As I’ve said to you, you’ve got excellent potential as a musician, but your work ethic needs to be reviewed’. I mention that we only have 30 minutes, so it’s essential that she do most of the work at home. ‘I’m just here to put the icing on the cake and to direct you. I’m not a coach, well I am … but I’d prefer to be coaching you positively.’ I wonder if that’s what I should be doing more of. ‘You won’t get the best out of me if you don’t put your best in … I just end up getting irritated, and that’s not good teaching … that’s not teaching. I just end up being a nag … that’s not teaching’. I ask her to play La Vision, reminding her of what I expected at the end of last lesson. Julia says that she has given that ‘a good go’. I look at Julia, venting my frustration on my face. I fold my arms and listen. She goes ok until line three, when I start helping her with the right hand. I mention the offbeat for the quavers. I stop her and say that we’ve run out of time. ‘You’ve done all right, but get on with the next three lines’. I question her fingering for page one and ask her to play the right hand alone. I pull her up twice, asking her the second time if she remembers, ‘doing this last week’. She has a vague recollection before I say abruptly, ‘OK, time to go, you’re in someone else’s time now’. I suggest that perhaps a different colour pen for the fingering, before reminding her that the fingering is the key to gesture and the key to sound, so ‘you’ve got to get your fingering and your timing sorted out before we can do any music’. Jade says ‘Yep’. I say, ‘See what you can do for me this week’.

Lesson 22: 23 August 2015

Reviewed 15 December 2015

- The lesson starts with Jade having a stretch and a big yawn. I’m talking about posture, etc. I ask her, ‘What’s your question?’ She says melodic minors, and a couple of others that are inaudible. I ask her to play C harmonic minor. She says, ‘Hands together?’ and I say, ‘Yes, if that’s what you’ve been doing’. She plays it hands together, and I look concerned and say, ‘That’s OK, it’s not too good’ and then suggest that we do the hands separately. Jade swipes her nose repeatedly (six or seven times) and adjusts the seat. I suggest that we do something that I did with another student. I ask her what the metronome speed is and she tells me from memory. Step One – slowly, with good sound, good fingering (Julia laughs), attention to body
We start at one note per beat and then two notes per beat. I adjust her body and remind her to ‘have a straight line between your arm and your hand’. I say, ‘good girl’ and then ask her to move to the left hand. She plays left hand with two notes per beat. She finishes, swipes her nose and then I ask her to ‘go again’. She has then same errors as before. It takes her awhile to self-correct. I ask her (and demonstrate) to lean in so she’s not dropping on the thumb – ‘So you have a nice upper arm, otherwise you’ll get a bump on the thumb’. Julia says, ‘That’s pretty good now’. Jade makes eye contact but shows no emotion. I take out a piece of paper and ask her to write down the steps. Julia says, ‘that’s good’, as she has forgotten her recording device today. The camera is moving weirdly. I forgot my Sony camera, so Julia is recording the lesson with my iPad. Jade asks me how to write step 1, so I say, ‘put one.’ I ask her to write, ‘four octaves, slowly, with attention to sound, accuracy and body position. (Jade gets that one after I say, ‘what else’). I say that she does this for each one and keep rotating until they improve (mainly hands separately). Step 2 – I ask Jade to write MM (she asks me what that is and I tell her) equals 72, hands separately, one octave/two octaves/three octaves/four octaves (Jade smiles and swipes her nose). I summarise by saying (and demonstrating) ‘at tempo in small amounts’. The metronome is on and she plays after we start in unison but then she drops out. I remind her to land on thumb and not fifth finger. She plays well while I conduct and say, ‘and’. I say that she should practise for five minutes until it’s improved. Jade says ‘mmm’. Jade swipes her nose. I say that she should go again because it doesn’t sound confident yet. She starts overlapping so I ask her not to (between fingers three and four) a couple of times, ‘Good girl’. I say, ‘Keep it legato … where’s your body position?’ She then starts descending as I sit down. She finishes and then I ask her what is next on the list. She doesn’t seem to know what I mean (?) and suggests left hand, but I say, ‘stay with the right hand because you’re improving there, two octave by two octave’. I stand and demonstrate. Jade has a go and I remind her to ‘land on thumb; it’s only five on top’. She keeps trying two octaves but takes many attempts. When she starts to get it she smiles and looks at Julia. I say, ‘By about the tenth time you will start to have success (Julies says, ‘mmm’) … you just sit there until you can do it’. She looks at me and nods. I then say, ‘Next up is the top two octaves’. As she plays I remind her to move her arm over. I say that when she has success, ‘Continue down … good. Some will be easier than others … keep going (Jade nods). She starts
on five instead of one. She has success and I ask her what’s next on the list. She tells me three octaves. I demonstrate and then she tries. I remind her not to land on five, it’s one and she smiles at Julia. She repeats those three octaves. I remind her about her body position and that is why she is having trouble ‘getting it’ (the top notes). Julia makes a comment, ‘It makes a huge difference’. Jade smiles proudly. I say the keyboard is a metre and a half long. I then ask her to play three octaves down – ‘Stick to the plan’. Julia is smiling because I can see her reflection in the piano. She is stumbling a little – ‘You’re starting to lose concentration, so either go for a walk, or turn it up (gestures)’. Jade nods, I ask her to ‘move over’ and then she tries the top three octaves descending, but seems confused, though is smiling. Julia says, ‘You’re on three’ and I say (and point), ‘Well, what’s the plan?’ I then demonstrate over her shoulder what we are doing (three plus one). I remind her to start on the thumb. She does so, and I say, ‘Repeat that for five minutes’. I ask Jade what’s next on the plan (four octaves). She tries, I say, ‘big breath in, go for it!’ I remind her of body position, but not to lift the feet off the floor. I sit down. She continues to practise ascending while I watch. I ask her (as she swipes her nose), ‘Are you listening to the sound? There are quite a few notes that are overlapping, for example, there’. I attempt to explain that the overlapping is usually caused by not moving the hand across ‘enough’. Jade swipes her nose. I say, ‘Especially when it’s a white and a black note … if you don’t move off the notes with your arm and follow it through with your body, your hand will lock over those notes’. She tries again with a few stumbles. I say, ‘This is where you will need to get a bit more active … you’re sitting there very passively … you’ve got to sort of be like an athlete’. Jade looks at her Mum with a worried look. She does well and adjusts her body. I ask her to open the door and go for a run down the corridor. When she comes back, Julia says, ‘I was thinking, it’s like being a dancer; a finger dancer’ and I say, ‘Now sit down and be an athlete, go!’ Jade is smiling and laughing. Jade plays ascending four octaves well, and then I ask her to descend four octaves – it sounds good. I then say that she is going to do all of those steps with the left hand; Jade sighs. She starts octave by octave at tempo. I sit down and play it in unison with her after she gets started. I ask her to pronate her forearm and not ‘drop’ as she is descending. She goes up and down again. I nod yes, and say (with the metronome) on the last octave ‘five times … four times … etc.’. Once completed, I ask her to move to the next step (2). She does so with the left hand, but starts looking at her Mum when she is making mistakes. ‘Don’t take it personally
(if you make a mistake), just sit there and do it’. Jade does so and takes quite a few goes to get the first two octaves ascending correct, but it doesn’t seem to improve. I say, ‘If you find that you’re not getting anywhere, then just stop; have a walk around the room’. Jade smiles at Julia and shakes her hands as I say, ‘Have a think about where your problem is’. Jade identifies where the problem lies and I say, ‘Good, so do it again and think about it’. The poor kid is having trouble getting her fingers to do what she wants them to do. She knows what should be happening, but it’s just a slow process for her. I sit down again and watch her practise, but I look a bit bored (I’m facing the camera and Julia). After a while, I stop her – ‘Good girl’. I suggest that she spend more time doing each step at home, as we are actually ‘rushing through it’ here in the lesson. I notice that I am very gestural as I am explaining what to do. I say (in a positive way) that we don’t have the time to practise (too much more) in the lesson and that (from here) all I can do is direct her. I say that I want Jade to follow this process for every single scale. Julia says, ‘Yeah, fascinating … from this angle it’s fascinating to watch’. Jade is smiling at Julia but still swipes her nose. I say, ‘Scales are just computerised movements … if you don’t do your work, you won’t be able to do them’. Julia mentions that they are like dance steps. I say, ‘It’s not musical, it’s completely an athletic activity’. I seem to be talking over Julia a bit here, but we both seem to agree. She says, ‘musculature’ and I say, ‘motor-oriented’. I say, ‘It’s got nothing to do with being (singing expressively) musical, I got a HD in choir and a scholarship … it’s just hard work … most people won’t do it and say they hate scales (with a lisp) … that’s ‘cause you’re lazy’. Jade and Julia both laugh. I say that there’s nothing wrong with scales; they make you work. I laugh a bit too. I ask Jade to get the pen out – ‘Step 3: as in step 1, except with hands together. Step 4: as for step 2, except with hands together’. I ask her to put in brackets, instead of hands separately, so it’s absolutely clear. Julia says, ‘Wow, that’s fascinating’. I say that if you (Jade) do this with every scale, you will have success and it will actually save you a lot of time. ‘It takes a lot of time, but it saves a lot of time’. I say that in the last 20 minutes, you have improved C harmonic minor a lot, and Julia agrees. I say that Jade has at least 30 hours to go to get them all up to standard. I say that I decided to not chastise Jade for not practising, but to give her very specific goals and process, but the rest is up to her. I say that you ‘know’ C harmonic minor and that’s why we are now ‘practising’ it. ‘You’ve got to get the notes ‘done’ then you practise, then after that we do the loud and soft’. Using the sliding scale idea with the silver pointer, I give Jade and idea of
where she is and where she needs to ‘get to’. I ask Jade to check in the book (now) if we have to do crescendo and diminuendo (no). I say that I’m (trying) to encourage her. Julia says, ‘That’s good … she’d done lots of work this week, and you need to come to Mark with questions’. I ask Jade what her question with C melodic minor is and she says, ‘What notes to play?’ I ask her to write – ‘Ascending use A natural and B natural (good girl), descending use A flat and B flat’. I demonstrate while verbalising the above. Jade tries, but the keyboard is obscured. Jade tries it once, and I say, ‘Great, you’ve learnt the notes, now start doing that (points to steps)’. We all laugh. I ask her to move to the left hand – ‘Simple, easy as that’. I tell Jade, that realistically, she may have to do a bit of preparatory practice to get them in a condition where she can do MM equals 72. I suggest that as she is finishing ‘the process’ with C harmonic minor, she might be starting the process with C melodic minor, and ‘they all filter down and through (using gestures) … as one is getting better you start the next one … now the melodic minor for G … and you just keep doing that … like a treadmill … like a workstation’. Julia mentions that it opens so many doors to what you can play, and I agree. I ask her to get the pencil again. I say that Noah isn’t coming so I can give Jade extra time. Julia is thankful, but Jade is worried about not getting her chinrest. ‘Ascending use E natural and F#… descending use E flat and F natural’. I mention that with melodics, you raise six and seven on the way up and lower them a semitone on the way down – ‘You probably know that from violin’. Jade mumbles something, but seems to know what I’m talking about. I say that this is (not like violin) not a ‘tuning’ instrument; it’s a motor-oriented instrument. I say, ‘So come on’ and Jade seems surprised and starts playing G melodic minor ascending and descending one octave. I say, ‘good’ and suggest that we do step one, reminding Jade verbally of the ‘ingredients’. I help her with the notes, reminding her of those that change ascending and descending. I say, ‘G melodic minor has entered the building … C harmonic minor sort of half way through its polishing’. Jade is smiling and playing with her shirt. I ask Jade to play the left hand, reminding her of ‘body and firm feet’. She plays slowly but accurately, except for the last octave (doesn’t seem to notice). She swipes her nose as she finishes, and Julia says, ‘again’. I come back in the room after exiting briefly, and remind her to adjust. She adjusts quickly, but I say, ‘No, you’ve got to adjust gradually, not in a huge lump’. Julia and Jade laugh. I say, ‘That’s fine, it takes time to do everything … You could do each one for half an hour a day, or stay up for 24 hours and do each one. Do you keep a
practice journal, what you’ve been doing each day?’ Jade and Julia mention that she has been ticking them off. I say that I would highly recommend it, even if just on a piece of scrap paper. I say, ‘Monday, did steps four and five, did … etc.’. I say that that way, she knows if she has covered everything during the week. ‘That way in the lesson we won’t have the ‘what about arpeggios’ scenario’. Both Julia and I say, ‘Write it down and then you realise’. I suggest she can then do a cross check at the end of the week. I say that when I was Jade’s age, I was doing it. I say, ‘I had a hat that I put all my scales into … (I actually rip a couple up to show her) and went through each one in a random order’. Jade smiles and says she likes that idea, and Julia even seems to find it novel. I say that she probably isn’t quite ready to do that yet, but you could try. Julia says she likes that it’s random and will ‘play that one’. I give Jade the papers, so that she might remember the idea. I caution her not to spend too much time ‘making’ the papers. Jade has them in her lap and is enjoying ripping up the paper. Julia agrees with the comment about Jade not spending too much time cutting them up neatly and ‘making them pretty’, etc. Jade is smiling. I say that when I was a kid, I was really bored and doing stuff like this was entertaining. ‘I didn’t realise at the time that I was practising. My teacher would just give me ideas and I would really like that. No wonder she liked teaching me because I had massively improved. I didn’t realise … I just did what she said, I was paying her and she was the teacher’. Julia recollects that her time at the piano was ‘her time’. I say that I felt like my teacher was working on my hobby with me, and Julia agrees. During this time, Jade really seems to be enjoying looking and playing with the scrap paper, but does look up occasionally. I say, ‘I never felt a sense of (negative) duty … I just did it because it was enjoyable’. Jade sighs and puts her head on her hand briefly. I ask her if she has any other questions. Julia says there was one other. Jade swipes again, and eventually we arrive at G harmonic minor in contrary motion. ‘OK, you’ve just pulled that one out of the hat’. I suggest that she can save $30 and make these instead of buying them at the shop. I sit down and demonstrate and then say, ‘go’. Jade plays and I ‘push’ her forwards as I say, ‘As you get to the outside you move in’. I remind her of fours at the ‘checkpoint’. I say that it’s common for people to make errors on the final octave coming in (like Jade did). She smiles and seems to understand. I ask her what she would ‘do’. She starts to say something, but I interrupt and say, ‘Turn it over (the paper) and write some steps down … you don’t have to, but have a think. What would you do?’ Jade says, ‘one octave’. I suggest that she could also do two
octaves out and one octave in. ‘Don’t waste time doing something you can already do … not that it’s a ‘waste’ of time’. Julia mentions something about focusing on the tricky spots. I say, ‘Let’s not waste time’ and Jade starts two octaves out. I nod and then she comes back in, but there are errors. I ask her to start from the outside again. I watch as she practises each octave coming in. I say, ‘Has it improved yet?’ Jade sighs seemingly annoyed. ‘Well keep doing it … stop fidgeting and be more aware of what your body is doing’. I ask her to go for a wander around the house (walk up the corridor). She takes a while, and Julia says, ‘That was a slow walk’. I ask her what the metronome speed should be, and she answers 52. I ask her to ‘find it’. I ask (and conduct) her one note per beat, but I tell her she has the wrong fingering coming in one octave. I ask her to look ‘up there’. She forgets about one octave at a time, so I pull her up. With my direction, she plays the hands separately in one octave before putting the hands back together. I ask her to write on the paper – ‘Contrary Motion: Step 1 – put MM equals 52, one note per beat, octave by octave … (I ask her what that means – she seems to know, but I demonstrate anyway) … Step 2 – as in step 1 except with two notes per beat’ (I demonstrate as Jade writes). I mention that the speed is very fast – ‘You better get cracking girl … Step 3 – as in step 2 but with four notes per beat’. I suggest that she could do three notes per beat if she wanted to after Jade asks me ‘What about …’ I ask Jade how many contrary motion scales she has to do (seven). I then point to the steps, saying that she has to do ‘that’ for seven of them. Jade agrees. I say that there is probably about four hours practice ‘there’ to bring them up to exam standard – ‘You don’t have to do all of them this week’. Jade asks me how fast it actually is. I sit down and demonstrate, saying, ‘It’s not that hard’. I get very excited and full of praise after Jade plays G Major at the desired tempo. I say, ‘Goals for this week …’ Julia says, ‘This is good stuff Jade’. ‘Can already do A’… Jade adds, ‘E and F# harmonic minor’. I am surprised, saying that that one is pretty hard. Jade says, ‘Really?’ I say, ‘Do you think step one is required? (No) Do you think step two is required?’ (Possibly) I write that down in her list of goals for the week – ‘Possibly step two/step three’. I ask her what others, and she says all others – ‘Get all others up to step two/possibly three’. I say that that is the goal ‘sheet’ for contrary motion and then she could do another ‘sheet’ for arpeggios (It’s all the same thing). Julia says that then you are tracking where you ‘are at’. I say, ‘Playing the piano is not about giftedness … it’s about organisation and hard work, and a bit of giftedness’ (Julia laughs). ‘You are already gifted enough … you are not going to get there by
osmosis. You don’t come to a lesson (gesturing) and I sprinkle dust on you and you make it all better … It’s just hard work, with a little bit of giftedness. There’s this myth around being good at music’. I compare singers being born with a type of voice being like being born with a good motor system – ‘but … it’s still hard work that will get you there. Violin is more about fine motor and tuning … if you’ve got an overbite, then trumpet is probably not the best instrument for you’ (Jade smiles at Julia). Jade hands Julia her ‘papers’. I ask Jade how she went with … (plays La Vision). ‘First Line good? (Yes) Second Line good? (Yes) Third Line good? (Think so) Well, you better get it so. You get your weekly goal sheet – La Vision: how many lines is it? About 12? Practise line one until ticked… practise line two until ticked… line three until ticked … etc.’ I say that Jade doesn’t need another lesson from me on scales and contrary motion – ‘That’s up to you now’. Both Jade and Julia say ‘yes’. Julia says that is so much clearer. I say that I can help Jade with interpretation, wrong notes, tricky rhythms, but you have to meet me half way (facial expression). Jade says, ‘Yes’. I say that if she meets me half way, she will have much more productive lessons, but if I have to come down to her 20% and pull her up for too many weeks (in a row), I start to lose energy. ‘We meet each other at 50% - that’s fair. The best students are the ones that meet me at 80% – I have to put in 20%’. Julia says, ‘Yeah, be one of those’. I say, ‘Those are the students you want to give extra lessons to, because they are inspiring to teach … they give you energy’. I say that she will find that when she starts teaching – ‘Oh no, here comes Sue Blogs’. Julia says, ‘I could tell that the dynamic was different, and that’s what I said to Jade … Did you feel it?’

Lesson 23: 30 August 2014

Reviewed 15 December 2015

- There is initial conversation regarding ‘saving’ their new dog. Jade says that she is sweet, just like Holly. We also discuss pet insurance, vets, operations, long legs, and Tristan’s nose spray. Jade is fiddling randomly, trying out each piano. I give Jade another copy of Study in C. Julia says that Jade’s story from Writer’s Camp is being published, and that she had a presentation. We move to Grade 4 aural tests. The first one – 95%. The second one – one note wrong. Duple or triple are fine. We then do intervals, and I coach her to sing up through the Major scale: Major sixth (My Bonny), Major third, Perfect fifth, Major seventh (Somewhere Over the Rainbow/Bali Hai). I also coach Star Wars (fifth), Addams Family (fourth), Airport Bell (third), Happy
Birthday (second). Higher/Lower notes are fine. Middle note of Triad – I say that she is really good at that. In terms of scales, I ask Jade if the previous lesson was helpful. She says it was really helpful, and Julia mentions that Tristan was her teacher, helping her with the random hat idea (‘Lucky Dip Man’). ‘Attention class … ’ We all laugh. I say, please play A Major hands together, softly. Jade plays really well and I say, ‘That’s pretty good … Please play E Major with the right hand, forte … move, good … Remember that playing the piano is not just about your fingers … they’re just the very end of the playing mechanism … It’s like singing is not just about your throat’. You can see Jade processing the idea and then she nods. ‘Please play F# harmonic minor hands together, loudly’. Jade needs to look at the picture scales, but manages to play quite well overall. I say, ‘Good try … you’re mixing up the left-hand fingering there’. Jade says OK and then tries the left hand alone. I say, ‘That’s it, good girl’. I ask her if she wants to make a note of that in her book – ‘Just write, check left hand for F# harmonic minor … it was pretty good, well done’. Jade writes it in. ‘Please play C harmonic minor with the left hand, softly’. Jade plays C#, so I ask her to listen carefully. It takes a while for her to become oriented. She plays slowly and is mixing up the notes and fingerings. I put the metronome on and she is playing one note per beat. After she has finished, I ask her to play two notes per beat. Jade is sitting at the second piano this week. She plays and I ‘remind’ her to ‘move’ during the final octave – ‘Let’s go again … try to be aware of your whole body this time’. Jade smiles, and then wipes her nose. She plays the left hand again, but there are a couple of errors. ‘That’s better … now pronate your arm, like, roll it inwards so that you are using the tip of your thumb, otherwise you’ll get an extra bump … Well done Jade’. I ask her to write down: ‘Practise harmonics and melodics more … move with the scale … use tip of thumb so as to avoid tonal bumps’. I say that I write this in people’s (exam) reports all the time, but no one really listens. ‘They come back the next year with the same problems. Half the time I think that it’s just bad teaching, but then again, you can’t blame the teacher all the time’. I ask Jade – ‘The important thing is, if you’ve got tonal bumps, how do you fix it?’ Jade thinks and smiles when I say that there’s no point me just saying, ‘You’ve got tonal errors’ or ‘Play evenly’. I liken (and demonstrate) the idea of playing without tonal bumps to speaking without sudden ‘bumps’. Julia laughs and Jade smiles broadly. Julia says, ‘That’s a good demonstration, isn’t it? You don’t realise the effect do you?’ I say that that’s why we use the arms and body – ‘Technique is in itself not a means to an end, but so that you
can use that technique (and associated sound) in your playing… You can make it sound as natural as possible’. Jade seems to ‘get it’ and ‘demonstrates’ that she gets why not to have a bump on the thumb. Jade starts to reflect on something but I interrupt (!) ‘Basically you’re just playing a big music box … the music box doesn’t come to life unless you make it come to life … The best piano players are the ones who sound good … They seem connected to what they’re doing (Jade swipes), not just pushing the right buttons for a minim or a crotchet’ (Jade seems like she is taking it all in). ‘Please play B-flat chromatic with hands together, softly (E flat?) B flat’. I put the metronome on and Jade plays well, with only a small pause at the top. I say, ‘That’s a lovely hand shape … even though it’s soft, can you dig a little bit deeper? Hold your fingers down for longer and make it more legato … Good girl, that’s a better sound’. I mention that everyone stuffs up the last octave at the top while turning back, so I ask her to write down a reminder to practise avoiding that. I show her what I would like her to do as she writes – ‘That’s where your confidence needs to be really high. Why do we practise?’ Jade says, ‘To improve’, and I continue, ‘To improve our confidence … it’s really simple … if you’re not confident, you need more practice. Please play staccato hands together, A Major’. I put the metronome on, verbalise the speed, and Jade plays. I ask her to be a bit more vigorous – ‘Excellent … that’s better! One throw of the arm for each note … be even more vigorous, especially for the left hand … bold and brassy … everyone always plays their staccato too soft and without enough vigour, especially with the left hand’. Julia seems interested and surprised to hear this. ‘Please play Contrary Motion, B-flat Major’ (I adjust the metronome). There are errors, so I ask her to come back to two notes per beat – ‘Start with that’. I point out an error with the left-hand fingering. She starts again, and I show her the left-hand ascending, but she has errors in both hands. I say, ‘Write down B-flat Major contrary needs more work’ and she does. ‘Please play A Major in contrary … that’s nice … same story with your similar motion scales, you need to play on the tip of the thumb to get the sound uniform’. Jade tries and even remembers to tilt inwards from the hips. I help her physically to tilt inwards – ‘Keep her elbows high and rotate inwards’. She does seem to have stiff shoulders here. She swipes and Julia’s phone rings. I say, ‘Most people don’t know it well enough to move on, but you are getting really good with the notes, so now work on the technique … the notes are just there to demonstrate the required technique’. She is making brilliant eye contact and is nodding here. She’s also smiling. I mention that the pieces are similar, in that ‘the
notes are just there to lay your musicianship on’. I say, ‘You get it?’ (Yes). ‘Please show me A Major arpeggios with the right hand’. Jade checks the compass first and then plays – ‘That’s the idea’. I ask her to try not to collapse onto the thumb when ascending. She fixes it and I say, ‘Good, that’s better … very good. Please play A minor in the left hand – five/ four for the white notes … You need greater pronation and greater alignment so that your thumb can be on the tip. That’s too much, you don’t really need it on the way up … it’s more on the way down’. I help her physically with the last couple of octaves descending – ‘From the elbow down you roll’. I try to help her let go of her wrist – ‘Keep the top of your arm switched on’. I adjust her body again and then move to the left hand – ‘Let go of all of the muscles inside … bring your elbow up … try and hang on to the fourth finger, but don’t press your wrist down … you’re flexing these fingers’. It’s a bit hard to see what I’m trying to do her. Julia says that next weekend she is away with choir and Thursday she has her presentation and asks for another time.

Lesson 24: 13 September 2014

Recording not available.

Lesson 25: 20 September 2014

Reviewed 16 December 2015

- The lesson starts with us filling out the exam slip with pieces and composers: List A – Festival Rondo, List B – La Vision (‘a recluse, people never saw him’), List C – Spanish Donkey Driver, Extra Lists – Study in C, Op. 299 No. 2/Elfin Dance. We talk about the possibility of being able to choose the extra list piece herself. I ask to hear some scales. Jade also asks if I could help her with Study in C. I notice she is swiping quite a lot here when compared to other lessons down the track. I ask to hear the right hand for the ascending scales near the middle section. I point out the geography of G and E, and then identify C chord root, first inversion, and second inversion. I ask her to put her feet flat so that she can take the weight of her body when playing in the higher register. I ask, ‘Any questions with that?’ Jade shakes her head tentatively and then I ask her to play the right hand again while I play the left hand, but is it too soon for this? We do so slowly, but Jade comes in too early with the chords – ‘Do you know when to come in? (No) You should be following my left hand, start again. We start again, this time I count the beats for her and she seems to mostly understand –
'Good girl … would you like me to go through it again with you?' She says, ‘Maybe once more’. We do so, and it’s accurate this time. Jade picks at her nose a couple of times. I ask her to play the left hand for that section. She does so a couple of times and self-corrects the fingering. I remind her about the semiquaver rests. I say, ‘What are you doing, it finishes on F (Oh, whoops) … try again’. I start to get impatient – ‘Fix up the fingering … put your feet down … you’ve got to have you feet flat so that you can come up onto your hips bones, so that your arm doesn’t end up in an awkward position’ (as she ascends to the higher registers). I interrupt, ‘No ok, what fingering is that supposed to be there … here write it in’ (I give Jade a green pen and she writes it in). I ask her to try it again, this time I count the semiquaver subdivisions for her and click. It’s pretty good this time, only one error. I adjust her to the left as she goes towards the bottom. ‘Now you were supposed to practise these two bars, so let’s hear it’. Jade starts acting nervously, and pulls at her dress. She plays the left hand – ‘No, your right hand goes on the second beat’ (oh right). She adds the right hand in. I say that’s the wrong octaves and the wrong timing as well – ‘Aren’t they crotchets?’ She is getting the crotchets mixed up with quavers. I briefly ‘read out’ the rhythm according to what is there on the page, but perhaps there is a better way to facilitate her understanding? ‘Come on Jade … we went through this last week’. I am audibly sighing and rolling my eyes here as I walk to the second piano. ‘You’ve got to try and remember what we go through and go through it … it takes twice as long to go through everything twice … you are so slow’. I can hear my frustration as I count and conduct – ‘I asked you to put the metronome on and get the hands together … (Julia coughs and Jade looks paralysed) … and we went through all the fingering and you’ve just done the same thing as last week … We’re already 20 minutes through the lesson … and we’re doing the same thing as last week.’ Jade plays again as I flick through pages. I sigh and then click/conduct her. ‘You can see where the pink thing is, that’s where you were having trouble with the geography and you still haven’t got it (finger click) … compare that chord to this chord (Jade plays right hand) … you’re playing it an octave higher when it’s right next to it’ (Jade plays it correctly but I say nothing). She then plays it hands together in tempo. Again I say nothing and go back to flicking pages, though she looks at me for approval. She plays again and again (correctly), but as soon as I start clicking my fingers to the beat she starts balking in terms of getting the notes ‘out’ and has errors with the timing again. I say, ‘Remember you took notes last week about what you were going to practise? Where
are the notes that you took?’ Jade tries to find them, but then I take over – ‘Where’s your notebook?’ Julia says, ‘Did you leave it on the piano?’ I say, ‘Maybe it was on a separate piece of paper’ Jade is madly looking through her bag, and I sigh (my face is obscured but you can tell that I’m annoyed) ‘That’s fine, that’s fine … all right well let’s hear some scales then’. I sit down at the second piano and Jade tries to find her technical workbook. I start to ask for A Major as Jade opens the book. ‘You need to put the book away, you should have them memorised by now, the exam is four weeks after the holidays; you need to do everything from memory … Please play A Major hands together with crescendo/decrescendo’. Jade looks upset and tries to play, ‘I can’t do it … I can but I can’t …’ I say without concern or care, ‘OK, we’ll use the book then’. She plays ascending well, but errors with descending and the left hand drops out half way. I look over at her. She finishes and looks at me – ‘Please play B-flat Major with the right hand softly’. I turn the metronome on, Jade checks the compass, I demonstrate the tempo and Jade plays though she has errors in the top register. I ask her to play G harmonic minor hands together loudly. She tries at tempo, but it’s very messy. I ask her to play G melodic minor softly with the left hand, but she doesn’t know it. Eventually I help her – ‘it’s B flat’. She tries ascending again, but there are many errors. She tries to descend – ‘OK, well you need to practise that one, write it down, make a list of things you need to do’. Jade scurries to get her notebook and then writes in it. I ask her to play B-flat chromatic hands together with crescendo/diminuendo. She plays accurately except for the turn, but there isn’t any tonal variation. I say nothing, turn the metronome off and ask for A Major staccato with the right hand. ‘Please play F# melodic minor staccato hands together’. Jade looks through the book, swipes her nose and then mutters that her melodics still need work, all while touching her neck defensively. I ask her to repeat what she said, after which I say, ‘Well you’ve had all year to do these … if you’re not prepared to work then why did you elect to do the exam? This is just stressful for everyone … you should be doing at least an hour’s practice for these … you can’t do an exam and just sort of like, oh I’ll get around to it when I feel like it … you should be on to them every day, until they’re learnt’. I continue to flick through the book as Jade looks painfully guilty and self-conscious. ‘I’ve already been through them (with you) more than enough times, it’s up to you now … Please play A Major in contrary motion … it’s good. G harmonic minor in contrary motion’. She has many false starts and can’t get started; she gets through it though eventually.
contempt is palpable. ‘A Major arpeggio with the right hand … E minor with the left hand … what fingering are you supposed to be doing for minors?’ Jade looks in the book, self-corrects and plays again. ‘B-flat minor with the right hand’. She knows it but has trouble with the fluency and fingering. I interrupt her towards the end – ‘all right, it’s unsatisfactory … you won’t pass the exam playing technical work like that, trust me … especially with an examiner like Denise … she won’t like it … it needs to be a straight through performance. You’ve only got a small number of scales and arpeggios to study, and you’ve had all year. I’ve looked back on my notes and we’ve been doing them consistently all year. (Long pause) Four weeks out from an exam and you should be much better than this’. Jade is looking at me but I avert her gaze as I sit down. ‘You just need more practice … we’re coming up to finishing … there’s just not enough time … (Another long pause while I look through the technical workbook and Jade looks down) I don’t know what else to say Jade, you’ll just have to know them. Do you go through them every day? Do you set a schedule? Do you have a goal to memorise them? How do you do it? You have to take more of an interest in it. It’s fine you’re busy … everyone’s busy, but people can be so busy that they just put it off and put it off and put it off (gestures) and then it’s too late’ (Another long pause as I sigh and rub my eyes; Jade stares at the ground) ‘At this stage of the game when you’re preparing for an exam I should be hearing pieces as a whole (Jade looks up), I should be doing general knowledge, I should be offering you feedback with small things in scales… (Interesting that I am referring to myself here – who’s lesson/exam is this anyway?) Jade looks down again. ‘That’s why I’ve been on to you all year, all year, all year, all year … and you just won’t keep up (pause) I went through really carefully with your Czerny Study and you’ve still got the same errors. I know you’ve had a busy week, I’ve had a busy week too, but we all got stuff, but when you have a deadline you’ve got to meet it … (Chops hand in hand) otherwise, don’t set it – don’t set a deadline you can’t meet’. (Who’s deadline was it? Did it tangibly exist?) Another long pause … ‘Most of my other students, I go through the Study with them, that page would be finished. They’d be like thanks for your help I’ve got it hands together … I just feel like I’m wasting … your time … you don’t listen to me’ (pause) ‘It’s fine that you’ve got lots to do, but what about what we do, why do I always have to get put at the bottom of the list, of all your stuff. You’ve got this, and you’ve got that … but what about what I want (chops hand in hand) I asked you to do this, anyway we’ve run out of time, I haven’t got time … I’ll just have to
see you after the holidays and hopefully it comes together …’ (exasperated sigh) As they’re walking to go – ‘You’ve got to put that book away and play all your scales from memory (gestures) and you sit at the piano until you can play them all from memory. If that takes eight hours, 16 hours, 24 hours it’s up to you … You can’t go into an exam and play like that you’ll fail, trust me … If I heard someone’s scales like that I’d say, oh, this is going to be a C at best, and then I hear them play their pieces – if they’re pieces are hopeless, I would just fail them. Why should you get a pass when everyone else is working hard?’

Lesson 26: 8 October 2014

Reviewed 15 December 2015

- The lesson starts with talk regarding Holly ‘pooing everywhere’ earlier that day. I ask Jade what she has been doing. She says, ‘Mainly practising and memorising scales’, and we all laugh. Jade mentions that she is having trouble with a few of them and shows me in her technical workbook. I suggest that we start on arpeggios today and work backwards. I ask Jade to play A Major (hands separately) right hand then left hand. I put the old metronome on and Julia talks to Holly. I ask Jade to play A minor right hand – ‘That’s good … play it a bit louder now … nice technique … very good’. She plays the left hand and I suggest that she can get a bit more pronation with her arm (not your head) – ‘There’s a bit of a lock in the wrist there … that’s better, now start from here (an octave higher, descending left hand) … good try, but I can feel you squeezing to get (the thumb) under there instead of rolling … that’s better, good girl’. Julia encourages Jade too and comments that it sounds better. I mention that it’s a very subtle difference. I ask Jade to start from the top octave (descending left hand). I suggest that as Jade ‘goes under, face me’. I walk over to Jade’s right hand side. Jade tries – ‘Pretty good (I demonstrate and say) … you roll your elbow out to the right and the top of your (left) hand faces me’. Jade tries as I adjust her left shoulder and suggest that she come up onto her hips. I say, ‘Good, Well Done … now a little bit louder’. Jade plays descending – ‘Not too bad … good girl … and now faster’. I ask her to use her upper body as well. Jade plays E Major as I adjust her alignment within the top register. ‘Think of the pelvis as the middle point or the bottom of your spine’. I adjust her from side to side – ‘Very good’. She plays E Major very well. I ask her to play a little bit firmer – ‘Good, get into it Jade … a nice ring in the sound’ (gestures). E Major left hand – I ask her not to slow down, as she will lose
momentum, leading to stretching between the notes. I work with her pronation of the left-hand descending – ‘Roll this way (to the right) but move that way (to the left)’. I ask her if she can roll faster now, so that the pronation doesn’t make the whole tempo slower. She tries again, and I say, ‘Not as good because you’re starting to bang the thumbs’. She tries again and I ask her play on the very tip of the thumb. ‘Nice’. I say that the scale is of a high standard nonetheless. I say that I do have very high standards (Jade smiles and Julia chuckles). We move to E minor, and I suggest that she start lower with the left hand. I ask if she can hear the little gaps? Jade says yes – ‘That’s because you are stretching (between the notes) instead of rolling’. Jade tries again – ‘Good girl’. I ask her to play descending two octaves and initiate the movement from her elbow and upper arm. Jade tries – ‘Good!’ She loses momentum in the last octave and the notes aren’t clear. ‘Come over here (I pull her to the left from the elbow in order to align to the lower octave) … and push your feet into the floor so that you come up over the notes (gestures). Come over here, push your right foot into the floor so that your stomach muscles brace.’ I ask her to start descending again, whilst ‘falling’ into that position. Jade plays four octaves descending – ‘Good try … Lead with the elbow and come over with the body … a combination of those two things. No you’re still stretching’. I ask her to shake her wrist loose. Jade plays – ‘Good, you unlocked your wrist that time’. We start an octave higher again – ‘Notes no good, technique excellent … combine the two … Good try … from the top to the bottom now … play louder … use this part of your body to move (pulling to the left gesture) and everything else will fall into place. Lead with the elbow … good … as you come up, don’t sink down with your shoulders … don’t pull your feet up, push your feet into the floor, that’s where your balance comes from. Good … lovely sound’. Jade plays the right-hand E minor – ‘Notice your right hand coming down is very lovely? The right hand going up and the left hand coming down is where you have to ‘create the movement’. It’s the equivalent of backhand (stroke) in tennis. If you don’t create movement, you’ll always be behind’. I sit down and demonstrate – ‘This is how you create the movement … you’ve got to start … You have to be energised. If you start … (I demonstrate no energy). Coming down, it’s a lot easier to roll over the notes’. I show Jade that when coming up, most people do that (bump the thumb).

‘Play the scales and arpeggios like pieces’. As Jade plays I get very excited – ‘Good, go go go! Lovely … good!’ Jade swipes her nose, a rare thing in this lesson. ‘They’re
like little mini pieces ... if you can learn how to hold your body in scales and arpeggios and energise them, and then transfer that to the pieces, you will get the maximum benefit from doing the exercises’. Jade says, ‘OK’ albeit sheepishly. I say, ‘Let’s start with the left hand for E-flat Major’. Jade plays quite well but with incorrect fingering. I ask her to swing her arm from side to side (without any notes) – ‘Now put the notes into that movement ... energise’. She does well – ‘It’s only a very small amount (of energy) needed (to make a difference)’, but she looks a bit confused. I ask Jade to play the right hand. She checks the compass first and plays well – ‘good’. B-flat minor right hand – she hesitates, but gets it the second attempt. I ask her to scratch the end of her nose with fingers two and three – ‘Now play the piano with that shape and that much sensitivity in the fingertip’. She tries, but I interrupt, saying that there is not enough energy carrying that arpeggio – ‘It’s got to come from inside of you, coming through the hips and out through the arm ... Fingertips’. Jade plays again as I say, ‘energy, energy, energy ... good’. Lastly, E-flat Major – she tries, and then the second time I ask her to do a preparatory movement (gestural demonstration) like she would in her pieces – ‘Lovely and left hand to finish’. Jade plays left hand for E-flat Major but does better the second attempt. I say, ‘That’s all your arpeggios! Let’s move back and do contrary motion’. We go backwards, starting with C harmonic minor. She is having some difficulty with fluency and fingering. E-flat Major – ‘now lean in’. G harmonic minor – I start the metronome as she tries. There are quite a few errors, but second attempt is better. I ask her to speed up now, and she plays with the metronome while I click and conduct. Jade has some difficulty, but cleverly partial practises the last octave coming in and then the last two octaves coming in. I say, ‘That’s a good idea, do that again ... so you try and speed up half of it’. Jade keeps trying while I listen from outside the room. Jade goes back to the final octave and then the final two octaves again. She eventually has success – ‘Very good!’ She tries a few more times, but is making errors again, but then has success again. She swaps to the right hand alone and then the left hand alone. I can see that she clearly has been taking in the practice methodology and applying during her home practice. I say, ‘That’s it, so you do each one until you can do it (Yep) and if you can’t ...’ I ask her to stand up and I demonstrate (‘like you did’) octave by octave/two octaves but two notes per beat instead of two. I say, ‘There’s no point doing it for 20 minutes wrong (Yeah), if it’s really not working, it’s really not working, and you’ll have to go back a step’. I turn the metronome off and ask her to play B-flat Major
contrary motion. Jade sits down and plays quite well, despite a few errors, both first and second attempts. I ask her to check her left-hand fingering ascending. I ask her if she wants to write it in (fourth finger) and she does. I ask Jade to start the scale again, maybe with two notes per beat. I ask her to lean in at the extremes of register. I help her to check the right-hand fingering and then she writes it into her technical workbook. Interestingly, I walk out of the room and she does one note per beat accurately. ‘Good girl, now do the same thing that you just did another 15 times’. Jade has success again, and again, (she looks over) and again, and then again (I come back in and remind her to lean in and tilt forwards from the hips), and again. I take out the mop and get her to tilt forwards, so that the elbows are in line with the notes. She finds this difficult and keeps coming backwards and moving her head awkwardly. I say, ‘If you stay like that (leaning backwards), you’re not really learning the technique … the notes are just there to facilitate what you’re supposed to learn’, (Yeah) I say that we’ve come up to finishing. I ask Jade to run through E Major in contrary motion. When she has finished I ask her ‘to do the posture for me … good … F# harmonic minor contrary motion … this is the one that they always ask’. She has a go, but there are errors at this faster tempo – ‘They (the examiner) will definitely ask you that one’ (OK). A major contrary motion – ‘Leaning in and out is to help you get the tone uniform’. I sit down and demonstrate as I say, ‘You have to lean so that you can pronate properly … if you don’t lean in you can’t pronate. When the arms don’t pronate that’s when you usually have … (A bumpy touch) … it’s a wave … the notes are just there to facilitate what you are supposed to know. See you tomorrow?’ I mention to Jade that, ‘We got through all the arpeggios and contrary motion scales, so that’s quite a good lesson. You still need more practice, but you are on the right track, good girl’ (Thank you).

Lesson 27: 9 October 2014

Reviewed 16 December 2015

We start the lesson and I ask Jade, ‘Is that what you’d like to do?’ I ask Jade if she’d had a big day as Joanne talks to Holly. I ask Jade to play A Major staccato. I help her to align her body to the lower register and say, ‘Throw your arms vigorously into the keys’ (she smiles). She plays it hands together but the tone is very flat. After she finishes I remind her of and demonstrate the left-hand fingering, but she seems already aware – ‘Oh is that what happened’. She tries again and the fingering is
correct. I come in and demonstrate, saying, ‘Now see if you can get the movement a little bit more jerky’. Jade plays again – ‘That’s better, good … good job, that’s nice’. I then ask to listen to F# harmonic minor staccato, reminding her to start on the left-hand fourth finger. She has problems with fluency and accuracy of right-hand fingering. I demonstrate and ask her to try again in the top register. She does a couple of times. I then ask her to play left hand in the top register and then hands together – ‘Good girl … good girl’. She plays octave by octave descending, but she still has trouble, so I ask her to do right hand and then left hand and then hands together ‘for that octave’. She does that a couple of times and I continue to help her correct the fingering. I coach her to start with the ‘customary’ 2/3 with the right hand and she writes it in her book (OK). I then suggest we do F# melodic minor right hand first. As Jade looks up the fingering and notes, I talk to Joanne regarding Holly being sick on the holidays. I can hear Tristan playing the memory game. Jade continues to play the right-hand staccato F# melodic. I ‘check’ the compass with her and then ask her to do the left hand. She has challenges with fluency – ‘The actual technique is quite good, you just have to get the notes more confident’ (yeah). I ask her to play hands together – ‘Well done … good job Jade … it’s on the way’. She plays briefly with her hair. I remind her that she has to memorise all these (yeah). I say, ‘Let’s hear E-flat chromatic’ as I turn the pages back. She plays hands together well, but I can see she is sitting a bit too high. I put the (manual) metronome on 72, four notes per beat, and then start to demonstrate at the keyboard (she looks over) before Jade plays. She keeps up mostly well – ‘Good … now play B-flat chromatic with the right hand softly’. Jade checks the compass before playing the right hand – ’Mostly in time … lovely hand and finger shape … go a bit faster now’. I ask her (and demonstrate with her hand) to use a preparatory movement, presumably to get her to start with the required momentum and energy. I count her in and conduct as I play on the keyboard, helping her to align at the top register – ‘Much better that’s it … so you adjust you trunk (I adjust her) so that your elbow stays in behind the notes, and bring your head across as well … most kids do that (I adjust her)’. I say, ‘Let’s do E chromatic with the left hand softly’. She plays and I play the keyboard and in minor thirds when descending. She is 100% accurate. We ‘check’ the compass as Jade seems unsure, but she plays E flat instead of E’s so I remind her. I then ask to hear A chromatic hands together loudly. I play in minor thirds at the keyboard. She seems to make mistakes in the last octave over and over in this part of the lesson. I ask to hear E-flat Major left
hand softly. Jade turns to the page and plays at tempo, with just one mistake at the top. I ask her to speed up, but I’m not sure why. ‘That’s it, next up, see if you can do this one without looking (at the book) … B-flat Major hands together loudly’. Jade quickly checks the compass and plays well overall, with only a few hesitations. ‘Check the left-hand fingering hey (yeah)’. Jade plays and I ask her to move her body across during the last two octaves. I ask her to go again. She does – ‘Keep moving … good girl, that’s it’. I then ask her to play A Major hands together loudly (that’s good) and E Major hands together softly – ‘Play a little bit more deeper in the left hand’. The difference between loud and soft doesn’t sound too much different, but it is ever so slightly. Jade plays again, but the hands are not well coordinated. ‘OK… they’re quite good except for B-flat Major’ (yeah) Jade circles it in her book without me asking. I say, ‘Let’s go with harmonic minors … C harmonic minor with the right hand loudly’. I remind Jade that the examiner will say piano or forte. Jade plays well and I ask to hear the left-hand C harmonic minor. She plays but I suggest that she needs more pronation. I demonstrate and show why (bumpy thumb). She works on it – ‘That’s it … that’s a bit better’. I explain (and demonstrate) that the different width of the turns between two and four means ‘a wider pronation’. Jade tries – ‘Good… well done… (Jade wipes her face and then writes a reminder in her book). So you’ve got to adjust those intervals … the notes are just there to unify the tone… the (required) technique is to unify the tone, did you know that?’ Jade says no and shakes her head. ‘Yeah, that’s what they’re looking for, is whether you can unify the tone and in order to do that, you need to learn how to use your arms (demonstrate) in order to unify the tone (Jade moves her arms in the same way) – just like pieces … scales are like mini pieces. You’ve got to use your arms to play, not your fingers’. Jade says, ‘OK, I’ve got to remember to “chicken”’. I agree and we both experiment with moving our arms – ‘So you turn on the upper arms and that naturally pronates the arm, they actually roll in. Do you want me to show you?’ I sit down and demonstrate. I show Jade an exaggerated form (Jade smiles) and then show her faster with smaller movements – ‘The movements are still there, they just become smaller’. As I demonstrate, I explain, ‘When you pronate, it allows you play on the tip of your thumb without having to stretch (I show her carefully with the left hand – Yep). As soon as you stretch, the muscles will freeze and then … (I stand up) muscles want to be relaxed so they will go … (dramatises) and you’ll get a bump in the sound. They don’t like to be tight’. We stand opposite each other and I can tell that Jade is
enjoying this segment. I ask to hear G harmonic minor right hand. Jade plays and does well with only a couple of mistakes – ‘A little bit more accurate if you can’. She goes again and does really well – ‘That’s better’. After asking a couple of ‘wrong’ ones, I ask to hear C# harmonic minor hands together softly. Jade plays well except for the last two octaves. ‘Try and align yourself with the notes, you’re sort of sitting back a bit… lean forward over the notes … get involved’. Jade tries again but ‘pulls back’ at the first sign of inaccuracy. ‘So a basketball coach might say hustle, hustle (says with energy) … not hustle, play (unenergetic)’. Jade is smiling and looking. ‘You’ve got to really get in there and play, same with scales’. Jade plays again and does really well. ‘It will work much better when you give it your full commitment. Don’t sort of back off when you make a mistake. Often people go, well, I wasn’t really trying, that’s why I made a mistake so … it’s sort of like a bit of a copout’. I try to explain that if people really try and fail then they might think they’re hopeless, but if they don’t try and fail, they might make an excuse that I didn’t really try. Jade is making full eye contact. I say that that’s a very negative way of learning – ‘You’ve got to get in there and hustle’. Jade is smiling and says that Mrs C says that you have to make a loud mistake. ‘Yeah, I lot of people do that they give it a half effort and then they fail, they say that it’s because I wasn’t really trying and then it’s like an excuse – don’t make excuses, get in there’ (Jade nods and says OK). ‘Hustle!’ I say that we do have to do F# harmonic minor legato. Jade says yes, and plays it legato hands together. I’m outside saying that Holly has gas. Jade plays again and I say, ‘That’s good’. I ask Tristan to put his shoes outside. I ask her to play F# melodic minor softly with the left hand. Jade plays and I mention socks to Tristan. Jade adjusts her hair band. I say what else do we need to do, and Jade seems to know! So she plays G melodic minor hands together while I’m outside talking to Tristan. She plays it twice well and then waits. She plays it a third time very well – ‘They sound heaps better’. I ask to hear C melodic minor softly with the right hand. ‘Wow … congratulations, they’ve made a massive improvement over the last two weeks or so … keep going, all right?’ (Jade smiles proudly and says yeah). I show Jade where she was is on the sliding scale (silver pointer) and where she was, and where she spent most of the year – ‘You’ve pushed yourself up, it’s really good to see’. Jade is smiling and nodding. ‘Well Done’. I ask her if she has any sight-reading books. She says yeah – ‘Do want some more?’ She says, ‘Maybe not’. I ask her what she has. I walk around looking for materials and Jade fiddles with the keys while looking at the top of the piano and standing. I ask
Jade which ones she has (again) and she checks in her book. I say that she should aim for at least five minutes sight-reading a day. I say that copies cost money, so don’t waste it or lose it. I run it through the copier. I ask her how her Alkan piece is going. I ask her if she has general knowledge sheets for *La Vision*. She says that she thinks she has one sheet but not the other. I ask her what key it’s in (she answers C Major). I ask her what the title means, and she agrees it’s a storytelling piece. I ask her what keys it change to, and that’s why she needs the analysis. I say that while she is practising scales and arpeggios this week (Jade says, ‘and sight-reading’), I would recommend at least 20–25 minutes of scales, five minutes of sight-reading, and 30–60 minutes of pieces. I say to do 90 minutes a day and I will organise the analysis for you. She is nodding and saying OK. ‘I will find all the others, and then you can be sure of all the questions’. I then ask her to play *La Vision*. She sits down and plays as I start the copier. She stumbles a bit before the A minor key change, and has a few problems with rhythm and fluency thereafter. The second half seems more confident than the middle section, at least initially. The ‘cadenza’ and ending aren’t good. She looks at me, poker faced. I reassuringly say, ‘It’s OK’. She seems relieved, but then I say, ‘To be honest, it’s not that good, but it’s OK’. Jade says, ‘Yeah, I know’.

I say, ‘It sounds like you’re not really involved in the playing, like, you’re sitting back waiting for mistakes to happen, mmm?’ Jade looks confused. She smiles and says, ‘probably’. I sit down and play (up to around the A minor key change) saying, ‘You’ve got to try to create a vision or an illusion of something’. I say that it’s supposed to be slow, but yours’ just plods along really slowly (I infer a flexible delivery here). Jade says that it’s sort of like *Spanish Donkey Driver* (Yeah). I sit back down and show her not to play the beats the same volume (it’s sort of boring). I demonstrate playing a feeling of one to the bar. I say, ‘and then to there … and then to there’. Then I start singing the melody, ‘it’s like you go … to the start of the bar … and then it’s new … Show me … what happens to … this lovely piece … I stand up and she sits down. I ask her to put a bit herself into it, ‘Don’t just sit back and relax’. Jade plays good overall direction, but I stop her and help her to be more flexible with the end of the bar right hand. ‘For example, there, push it forwards and then pull it back’. I am singing, gesturing and clicking. Jade tries again but I say, ‘No that didn’t go anywhere’. I sing without any shape, and she smiles but looks self-conscious. ‘Imagine if your choir did that, Mrs C would be like, you guys sound gross, put a bit of energy into it’. Jade smiles knowingly, but looks down. ‘It might be soft but … (I
start singing with shape, conducting and clicking again). Show me … you’re not
listening to the piece, you’re not putting a CD on and saying oh this is so relaxing… a
player doesn’t do that, they’ve got to create something … it might be slow and soft …
but put a bit of intensity into the playing’. Jade plays again, really expressively this
time, and I say, ‘good’ while I dance and then coach her using gesture of the whole
body how to move through the whole bar with a duple lilt, avoiding playing each beat
the same volume. The doorbell rings and Holly barks. Jade tries again and I say, ‘No,
those chords are too loud … try to sweep them up with your arms’. Jade tries again
and it’s better – ‘That’s better’. I stop her and stand in front of her. I coach her using
critical comparison, vocalisation and expressive gesture – ‘Play through’. I further
sing, move, sway and dance ‘and through this bar’. She is stumbling with the notes a
little, but is making a really good attempt to shape the music expressively here. I say,
‘Now, your notes are getting in the way of the music (Jade nods) … Keep practising
so that you can make something happen … It takes a lot of energy to teach like this …
It’s very easy to just cut someone down and say that’s disgusting … I’m trying not to
do that because I want to help you, but you’ve got to meet me half way (Jade smiles
and nods) … Put some energy into it, all right?’ (Jade nods and says yeah). Perhaps a
better idea here would have been to say, ‘Wow, that is so uplifting when you and I
work together like that! Can you do that again?’ As we finish I say, ‘Thank you, see
you next time. Having said all that, it does sound better, but I know there is more in
there’. Joanne agrees. ‘Get to know your notes better so that you can get rid of the
notes, OK? You scales and arpeggios are on the right track, they’ll probably peak at
the right time (OK). These pieces, they need to sound like … it’s got to sound like it’s
godly and heavenly, not like a plodding rhinoceros on the way to get slaughtered’
(Yeah).

Lesson 28: 16 October 2014

Reviewed 16 December 2015

- Julia is with Jade today. Talked about meaning of Spanish Donkey Driver – ‘Maybe
it’s like the donkey taking his time? Allegretto molto e rubato – moderately fast with
lots of stretching in the time’. Jade writes it in. Julia talks about Jade wearing a skirt. I
ask Jade what other piece we’ve been doing has lots of stretching in the time (La
Vision). ‘Time signature? Triple or quadruple?’ Jade looks at Julia and whispers. I ask
Jade to write it in. ‘Quasi guitar? What key is the piece in? (C Major) What key does
“It’s trying to imitate the flamenco style … the donkey and the singer’. I mention about all the terms … ‘Un poco più lento?’ Jade writes in ‘a little bit slower’. I turn on the copier. I say they might ask the form – ‘actually no’, but I tell her anyway (B section from bar 26). I copy the analysis and Jade talks with Julia. I ask her what key the middle section is in (Jade writes in A Major). I say that they will ask structure and keys (actually not structure). I say to learn it anyway because it helps you with the piece. I explain that if you know the harmonic and formal structure, you can illustrate (define) that to the listener (I demonstrate using gesture and expressive vocalisation). ‘If you know the keys and the structure, you can play it more expressively’ (Julia says ‘mmm’). I say that’s the whole point of general knowledge – ‘So that you can make your piece sound like a story, not just so that you can answer questions’. Julia says, ‘So that you can have an understanding’. Jade fiddles with the pencil and picks out notes of the right hand while I am silent, looking up the syllabus. I read out the requirements and Jade listens (and yawns). We find out we don’t need to know the form until fifth grade, but do it anyway. I discuss nationalism – ‘From Spain (I demonstrate not sonatas and concertos) … Folk music … Austrian of Hungarian heritage’. Julia – ‘Visited and inspired’. I mention E phrygian mode and demonstrate and explain in Spanish (demonstrates). Coincidence? I say to ‘throw that in’. Julia – ‘If you know it, say it’. Jade yawns and wipes her nose. I say, ‘Perhaps it’s about someone playing guitar while someone sitting on the donkey is singing?’ and Julia says, ‘Yes, use your imagination Jade’. Jade puts the sheets back into her folder. Jade says that her teacher says her imagination is getting in the way of her math. Festival Rondo – who’s the composer? I talk about the tune made famous by Purcell, and being arranged by Britten. Rondo form: I dramatise, expressively verbalise and explain. ‘Peanut butter … chocolate … peanut butter … ice-cream, etc.’. Festival: I talk about Kings and Queens – ‘Queen Jade of the Gap’. Jade fiddles, I sing, and look for analysis. The Grease book falls from the shelf and we talk about it and sing. I find the analysis. I read out a bit of the biography, information about rondo form. I ask her key, time signature, modulations and she answers referring to the score. We also refer to the terms for the piece that have been written in – ‘It’s better to learn them as you go, rather than all at the last minute’. I say, ‘That’s for you’. Julia says, ‘It’s a really good analysis’ (Ross Hamilton). Jade asks if she needs to know about the extras (Mostly). We talk about knowing the key signatures without referring to the score.
ask her key and key signature for *Festival Rondo*, and we talk about true D minor scale and C# accidental. Jade and Julia talk as I copy and look for original copies of the pieces on the bookshelf. We talk about Harley Mead’s passing. I say that I’ve been there and depression is a horrible thing. I collect up the books for Jade and mark the pages. Jade starts fiddling with *Elfin Dance*. I give her the analysis for *Elfin Dance*. I ask her to write the keys and terms and signs into her music this week. Julia talks about letting the balloons go and singing Harley’s music. I talk about Marie being weird lately. I hear the doorbell and gate. Julia is talking about the Kransky Sisters. Julia says that she thinks Marie suffers from depression and husband hasn’t been well. Julia has talked to her before about it. Julia talked about her former teacher who died when she was 16 and she sang in a jazz band (a very good teacher and arranger) and I copy, continuing to talk. She says that like me, he had high standards. I remind Jade to write in all of the terms, even if she feels like she knows them. Julia asks me, ‘On the day, does she rub out?’ – ‘No, use these books instead’. I say look after the books – ‘Four books with five pieces’. I mention that she needs the Czerny book too.

*Lesson 29: 23 October 2014*

Reviewed 16 December 2015

- I ask Jade what tempo she is doing – ‘Not too slow, OK?’ I ask Jade what *esrez lentement* means, but she doesn’t know. I read out an analysis of the *La Vision* – ‘Fine example of the Romantic style … good introduction to Chopin Nocturnes … dream like character’. I can hear Joanne talking to Holly. I ask Jade if she has heard of the Chopin Nocturnes – Jade says no and I sit down and play her an arranged version of the E-flat Major Op. 9. I ask Jade if she’s heard it before. She smiles and says that she has heard of it. I then play a bit of the F minor Op. 55. Jade looks at the clock and swipes her nose a couple of times. I talk about it being a dreamy sort of song. Joanne asks me about the mini-djembes while Jade looks out, listens and fiddles with the right hand of *La Vision*. I say, ‘Off you go, let’s have a listen’. She plays beautifully with lovely shape, but still has problems with the notation towards the end of the first section and the playing turns flat during the middle thirds. In general it has a nice shape, but there isn’t much overall dynamic variation, though there is plenty of potential. I clap – ‘That’s really lovely Jade, Well Done, good girl … I wouldn’t tell you it was if I didn’t think it was, it’s good’. Jade seems reluctant to accept the good
feedback, appears to be unsure if I mean it or not and remains poker faced. ‘Beautiful sound … lovely’. Jade keeps looking back to the score and scratches her arm, saying ‘OK’. She (whispers) asks me if we can do the other pieces just to make sure… I ask her when her test is – ‘The 31st? She says, ‘Yeah, 12.18pm’ (she smiles). I ask Jade if she is (still) going to have another lesson on Saturday. She says yes. ‘So, that’s good isn’t it?’ (Yeah) I ask, ‘Can we go back to the Alkan piece for a minute?’ Jade turns back the pages. I ask her if she has her analysis here – ‘Did we work out what the term at the beginning meant?’ She says that she didn’t bring it because she had to transfer everything from her Birralee bag. I ask her why my books are out of the plastic packet that I gave her. I say that I gave her the plastic packet so that they wouldn’t be damaged, so they should stay in the plastic packet. I don’t want fingerprints on them, yes? (Yes) ‘There’s $80-$100 worth of books here and the plastic packet is for a reason’. I ask her again where the analysis is and if she has been studying it. I go to the bookshelf and get the analysis, looking for the term – ‘quite slowly’. I say, ‘I think yours is bordering on a little too slow, but not unbearably slow’. I laugh and Jade smiles, but seems embarrassed and starts swinging her arms. ‘I wouldn’t go any slower though … It’s quite lovely the way you play, honestly’ (Jade says OK and nods). I ask her to stand as I say, ‘At the end here …’ I play and then suggest that she ‘bring out’ the left hand (in the final bars). I ask her to try it again with the left hand. She checks where to start and then plays. I don’t seem to clearly ask for what I want, and just ‘show’ her what to do instead. It seems that I want her to shape the notes (‘see it’s going up there’) and ‘arrive’ on the A. I say, ‘Even though it’s very soft …’ I coach her with the phrase shape using gesture and body movement to indicate dynamic levels here (‘very nice’). I ask if she can do the hands back together now. She plays, but I say that I can’t hear the left hand. I demonstrate the voicing – ‘See if you can balance the sound’. I take her hand, saying, ‘If you come down faster on this one … hear that? That’s how you balance the sound … Good. So think fast and drop for the sound’. Jade plays and I point to the score, saying that she should definitely use five there (instead of three for the lowest left-hand note). Jade tries the left hand alone. I say and demonstrate with the left hand, ‘That will help you like, to roll … so use that gesture’. I ask Jade what sort of gesture that is. Jade copies with the left hand and says ‘rolling’. I say, ‘Double rotary movement, or rolling … If you do that, it will generate sound … You try’. I write something in the score here. Jade plays hands together and does well, but then has
difficulty a couple of beats later with the right hand. I say, ‘No, the reason you’re having trouble with the right hand is because you’re not starting on four and two’. I point to the score and ask her to play softly with the right hand, ‘Start on four and two’. I help her fix up some wrong notes and coach her with (and write in) some fingering. ‘Good, now, which note do you hold down there?’ Jade tries again without change. ‘No, which note changes and which note’s being held down … See there are two stems?’ Jade tries to answer, but I say (while pointing to the score), ‘No, the top note’s held, the bottom one changes … see it’s a dotted crotchet? So you go …’. I demonstrate while Jade watches. Jade tries, ‘Good, now, shouldn’t you hold the B?’ Jade plays again – ‘That’s better’. Jade swipes her nose and says, ‘OK’. I then demonstrate and say, ‘So that you get a lovely effect, drop, play that one loud and this one softer, and then softer again’. Jade tries and does well – ‘Lovely Jade, now that will need to be practised … it’s not the kind of thing that will just happen. I can tell you’ve done quite a bit of practice (Jade nods) … Is that right?’ Jade says, ‘Yes, especially this bit because … so I could remember it’ (not sure of exactly what she says). I say, ‘Yeah, it’s really improved’. I comment that even though the score says to gradually release the pedal, I really love how she used the pedal in the cadenza part and similar – ‘I think what you’re doing is really nice and I wouldn’t change it’. I suggest that she could make the last few bars more melodic – ‘It’s not just a blah, blah, blah (low, sloppy voice) … It’s a left-hand melody and how do we get the tone? How do we start?’ I take Jade’s hand and do a preparatory movement with a loud down, even though it says $pp$. I gesture and vocalise to help her with the expressive phrase shape. I say, ‘That will need to be practised hands separately … What fingering should you start the right hand on? That’s critical … If you don’t start on that, you won’t be able to do the last couple of bars properly (Jade plays). No you took the B off too early’. Jade plays the right hand – ‘Oh, that’s perfect (Jade half smiles). So, practise that 20 times until you can do it more automatically, then start adding it together, then put the pedal on … you might spend 10 minutes on those couple of bars.’ I ask Jade if she can start the piece off again from the beginning. She plays the first couple of lines and I say that we have to make sure that the left-hand chord doesn’t split. I say that she might use a delicate touch, but make sure the fingertips aren’t all soggy. ‘It’s good to have lovely arms, but it’s (also) good to have active fingers’. She plays and I whisper, ‘That’s awesome’. I ask her what note has to provide the bass. She points to the lowest note – ‘Yeah, so make that one a little bit
stronger’. I sing and gesture here, first the bass and then vocalise the melodic line. As Jade continues with the left hand, I start playing the right-hand melody. I say, ‘The sound is absolutely beautiful, good girl’ (pat pat) I say, ‘Thanks Mark (Thanks Mark) … You should feel proud when you get up on Saturday and play like that … Now don’t go all funny on me … No shrinking violets (Jade is smiling self-consciously) … You might have some memory lapses … Whatever, it happens to everyone, but it’s a good practice for you and it will be good to get someone else’s feedback’ (Yeah). I mention that she’s never done a masterclass before. Jade mentions that she has done something similar for violin. I say that it’s like a lesson – ‘You have a public lesson for 15 minutes’. Jade is playing with her hands nervously. Joanne mentions that Holly needs the scissors. I ask her if she still wants me to hear the other main pieces. She says, ‘There’s Donkey Driver and this one’. I say, ‘Let’s hear the Donkey Driver’. Jade plays really well. I say, ‘That’s very, very good … my only comment would be … where the repeated note is (I do a critical comparison and dramatise vocally) … I think that it would be better (the second note) if it were louder’. Jade plays again and I say that’s better and mention (and demonstrate vocally) that it sounds like a big sigh. Jade nods and says, ‘Yeah’. I say, ‘That’s good, this is going well. Those two are clearly of an A standard’. Jade checks if Elfin Dance is an extra. Jade gets out the music for Festival Rondo, but she is playing too fast and the right-hand finger work is not rhythmically clear. I say, ‘It’s quite good, but it sounds too fast to me’. I ask her if she has heard the original orchestral version. She says no. I ask her if she remembers that we listened to it in class, but she doesn’t recall. I say that it’s very grand and that she needs to be a bit bolder in the D minor section. She starts to play while I coach her, but I interrupt to say that the rhythm is off there. I ask her which note has the second beat – ‘Yeah, so you go towards that note … you’re just getting there too soon’. I explain that she is coming in to early with the E (after the D). She tries again, this time much slower and I say, ‘Don’t do it slowly, that’s not going to help … it has to be quick’. She plays the right hand again while I clap the beat – ‘Good … In general, you need to go slower and be more accurate with the rhythm … it’s all a little bit loose’. Jade says ‘yeah’. I sing like a trumpet and say, ‘It’s a fanfare and your trumpet player is out of time’ (Jade smiles and we both laugh). She plays again with hands together and it is better, but still a bit inaccurate with the rhythm. I say that we need to get going – ‘See if you can get the semiquavers to sit right on the beat’. I conduct, gesturise and sing. Jade asks, ‘So, a metronome?’ I say, ‘Yes I think a
metronome would be useful, but I think that you need to listen and … (Jade plays the right hand again) be very clear with the fingers. I say, ‘You’ve got a lovely sound, but there’s not enough finger activity’. She plays again really well and I ask her what she did, and if she could do it again. As she moves her fingers, she says, ‘sort of stiff?’ and I say, ‘Yeah, dig in a bit more … The overall sound is very good, can you slow down at the end?’ I demonstrate and say, ‘Get the trills more clear … just go slowly … it’s too fast and needs more depth of touch, and more rhythmic accuracy’. I say that it’s about a B+ (OK), but if she can do those things she can bring it up another level (OK). I say that her pieces are good and ask her to do some more practice on scales and arpeggios – ‘Don’t stop now … See you on Saturday’.

Lesson 30: 25 October 2014
Reviewed 17 December 2015

- The lesson begins as Jade is playing the Czerny Study. I interrupt towards the end because the chords are an octave too low. Jade has fixed up the rhythmic detail in the final bars and has the whole piece hands together. I say that it’s very fluent and Julia agrees – ‘Trippingly’. I ask for the music, sit at the second piano and then say that the rhythm is not as precise as it could be at the beginning. I demonstrate and hone in on the quick semiquaver interchange from right hand to left hand. Jade tries to find the notes that I finished on (beginning of bar two) but then I suggest she try (start) again and I give her the start cue. She starts again with good rhythm, but accidentally falls off the keys and I laugh (that’s funny), she smiles. I ask her to go again, giving her the first few notes as I cue. She plays again – ‘Lovely sound’. I stand up to help her correct the fingering of the left hand. I say, ‘Yeah, you don’t want to mess those up (Jade nods) … you could even practise them a bit’. I start to show her drills that she might use, stopping on each turn and repeating that finger a few times. Jade doesn’t take the hint and plays as normal. I ask and adjust her to move her upper body forwards at the hips (to the right). She plays again, but adds a couple of extra notes. I sit down, demonstrate and ask her to play with dotted rhythms left hand – Jade plays. I then reverse the dots, but she plays as before. I ask for SSLL (and demonstrate) Jade plays. Then LSSL, she starts to play, but I interrupt and ask her to tilt forward and then bring her elbow across to the left to meet the notes directly. She plays LLSS instead. I sit down asking for a bit stronger now and I demonstrate the first bar. Jade plays – ‘Good … To be strong and confident and expressive, what do you need to
do?’ I pause while we look at each other. ‘To play strong and confident, and expressively, what do you need to be?’ Jade plays with her skirt and sheepishly whispers, ‘Confident?’ I say in a loud voice while laughing, ‘Strong, confident and expressive!’ Jade smiles. ‘Make sure between now and whenever your exam is, take some of those scales out and do some rhythmic drills … It sort of, sort of makes you a bit more … confident (Jade nods and waves her arms confidently). Can you do that for the E one?’ I start to demonstrate the LSLS version and Jade copies. Then we move to SLSL and Jade copies. I mention that doing these drills makes the scale a bit more challenging so that returning to the ‘normal’ version – ‘Oh, this is fine, I can do this. Do you understand the principal behind it?’ Jade nods and says ‘yes’. I then move to SSLL and Jade copies (Well done). Then LSSL and Jade copies (Good girl). LLSS, Jade copies (very good). I play as normal and Jade copies. ‘Your scale playing has really improved this year, amazing (Jade plays with her skirt and seems to nod)… The exam has been good for you … I know it’s been a bit up and down to get to this point, but it’s pushed you along a bit’. Jade nods and I start playing the first two bars – ‘Oh, that’s not right – you go …’ Jade smiles. Jade plays hands together as I use body movement and gesture to conduct her. I expressively verbalise, ‘Big one … coming up to the cadence … C Major, D, E, F, G … show me the cadence (I seem to distract her and she starts making errors) … sorry – different’ (she starts making errors again). I interrupt before she gets to the end and say, ‘No show me … sorry to interrupt … that’s good! The whole idea is that you show the listener the harmonic structure of the piece (I use expressive gesture here and Jade nods) … and when you do that you’ll make them really excited. You can almost feel, like …’ I sit down and play chords, illustrating the tension of the harmonic structure – Jade nods. I say that it was really interesting when she took over, and I demonstrate the part where the scales are in tenths. In the following bar, I show Jade that the hands are a semiquaver apart, not together. Jade tries. ‘Good, so …’ I start to demonstrate again, this time chaining the bar together, adding a note at a time. Jade either doesn’t understand or doesn’t take the hint and plays the bar as written. I say, ‘That will need a bit of practice there, so how about we do our …’ I start to demonstrate the hands together but with the dotted rhythms and Jade copies. I ask her (left hand) to rotate her elbow up and her forearm in. Jade tries left hand. I say, ‘That’s good … You’re sitting back here when you should be sort of over … bring your nose over the keys (I demonstrate and Jade adjusts her body) … That’s better (Jade plays) … good girl. I play again and ask her
to blend the D in. She tries hands together (good try). Jade tries again but I say that her D is too loud. I do a quick critical comparison, saying, ‘You’ve got to use your movements to blend it … (Jade tries) … OK, well let’s just work on that for a sec’. I ask her (and explain, she smiles and adjusts) if she is up on her haunches – ‘Like up on your pelvic bones … If you sit back her (demonstrate) it’s really hard to even out the sound. So up here … lean up on to the right leg’. I demonstrate and play the left hand. Jade plays left hand and I ask her to come forward from the hips (good girl). We continue to go to and fro (that’s better). I add a little more and then ascending/ascending and descending (Jade copies each time) I ask (and demonstrate) to her not to flatten her fingers; she copies. Tilt your elbow up and play on the top of your thumb. I ask her not to lean back; she plays (good). I add the rest of the notes of the scale; Jade copies (good) then I put the hands together and Jade copies. Don’t collapse; don’t pull back (I demonstrate, pulling back on the last few notes left hand) Stay up over the notes (illustrates forward tilt); Jade tries (that’s better) I demonstrate hands together but with the scale direction reversed; Jade copies, but I don’t seem to notice her pulling down on the fingers during the last couple of notes because I’m not looking. ‘Can you tilt your hand like me? (I demonstrate first left hand turn slowly) … it doesn’t have to be a lot (Jade tries) … that’s better… no, don’t pull; you’re flattening out there – what’s going to happen when you play the next note? (I demonstrate flattening out – I shake my head and say no good) Jade plays left hand; I play left hand in pairs; Jade copies; ‘No, pulling back again (Jade tilts forwards) … Stay forward, over the keys’ We play conjoined pairs in unison, then Jade on her own (stay forward; very good girl; well done) I walk over to her and adjust her upward gesture to the right when scale starts again. She keeps going with left hand; ‘OK Jade, so you need to do some practice there (Jade nods and says yeah) … Now do you want a piece that starts beautifully and ends pathetically? (Jade shakes her head) Well, what are you going to do about it? (Jade says practice; I say good) We both smile. ‘Where would you say the most exciting part of the piece is? Jade suggests and plays (not very excitingly) around bar 8 (?) I say, ‘That is a very exciting bit … Would this part be exciting (I play from where we having been working on) Jade smiles and says, ‘sort of’. I seem surprised and say, ‘Oh, it’s not the most exciting, it’s probably the second most exciting, so you don’t want to get all auuuu … there – you need to do more practice there (Jade nods and says yeah) I stand up and say, ‘If you want to be confident, what are you going to have to do?’ Jade says, ‘Practice’. I say, ‘Yeah, until
it’s confident. If you want to be expressive and confident what do you have to do
(Jade whispers be expressive and confident) How do you get expressive and
confident? By going to bed and praying? (We both smile and Jade shakes her head
no) … It can help (laugh), but what will really get you expressive and confident is a
thorough knowledge of the notes (Jade nods) and you can only get that by doing this
sort of stuff (I sit down and start left hand ‘pairs’) and also by technical … (?) Now,
when I ask you to tilt, you sometimes do this (demonstrates) and you do a huge one
(Jade smiles and nods) So can you do one that’s not too large, not too big, but one
that’s in the middle? Jade starts and I walk over and tilt her body forward and to the
right; she keeps trying left hand (I say yeah good and ask her to do a couple of bars
just so we can see what’s happening; I demonstrate) Jade plays left hand (very good,
now can you play it 3 times louder than that?) Jade plays left hand but pulls down on
the last note. I ask her not to do that by showing her the position out of view; Jade
copies. ‘The upper arms are not switched on and that will overlap the fingers and
make it less exciting’ Jade plays left hand again. ‘Good girl, so upper arms must stay
on’ Jade nods. ‘Playing the piano beyond fourth grade involves more upper arm
action (Jade works her arms like a scarecrow) so this is a perfect piece for that. As
you get to the bottom, if you turn your upper arm off, the fingers will get all saggy
(Jade demonstrates perfectly!) What happens when your fingers get saggy? Jade says,
‘It doesn’t sound good’ I say, ‘You get a saggy sound’ Jade smiles. When you get a
saggy sound, what happens? You get a pathetic ending … and then what happens
when you get a pathetic ending? (Jade smiles and says it’s not good) I say, ‘It’s sort of
not very enjoyable to listen to, you know what I mean?’ Jade says yep. It’s really so
easy to fix up (Jade nods). You’ve come so far with that piece, don’t stop now, you’re
almost there (Jade nods and whispers OK) I show her where she is on the sliding scale
and ask her to get it ‘up here, and then there, and then there’ (off the piano – Jade
smiles) ‘Do you feel like you’re feeling a bit more confident than you did a few weeks
ago?’ Jade nods yes, smiles and whispers something. Julia laughs and says, ‘I feel she
is’. I say, ‘I feel, you’re playing sounds a lot better, so what’s … what have you been
doing differently? Because you’re still the same person with the same fears like
everyone else (Jade smiles), you know, everyone’s got fears … oh what if I make a
mistake … What have you done differently? Jade swings her arms, says ummmm,
pauses, smiles, and then says as she sits up confidently, ‘Probably a lot more practice
than I did before… yeah’. I say, ‘What kind of practice have you been doing?’ Jade –
‘Well … just running through those bits …’ Mark – ‘So have you been doing randomised practice where you take a bit, work on it for 10 minutes?’ Jade – sort of. Mark – Yeah? Jade – Yeah. Pause and then Jade nods. I say, ‘So what I do in the lesson, I give you … umm… I give you sort of … examples of how you might practice’ (Jade nods) I explain to Jade that usually I will tell her what’s right with the piece (Jade nods; I say, ‘it’s always nice to hear some good feedback), what’s wrong with the piece (why it doesn’t sound as good as it could) … and then I will usually give you exercises that will help you to improve your knowledge and confidence. Once you start to realise that that is what the lesson’s for, you will find that you will start to improve rapidly (Jade nods). I lot of times people think that they will come to the lesson and I just wave a magic wand and then it’s all fixed up (Jade nods and smiles), but really I’m just starting you off on the process to what your assignment is for the week. The kids who do really well with instruments, particularly the piano, are the ones who can sort of, you know, randomise their practice a bit, try the last bit this way and that way … but you build it up over time (Jade nods). If you leave it until the last minute, what happens? Jade says, ‘It won’t work’. I say, ‘Well you will run out of time to do stuff, and that’s when people get really freaked out and nervous (Jade nods) … and then their playing doesn’t sound as good as it could (Jade nods and says yes) … Are you listening? Jade smiles widely. Are you taking it in? Oh, that’s good. Are you thinking quietly? (Yes – she gives a sweet, cheeky smile) Make sure that you are polite to Jenni (Mmm) Julia asks what happens in that dynamic. I explain that it’s a public lesson for 15–20 minutes; you play the piece through, and then from a musician’s point of view she will tell you what you are doing well and what could be improved in terms of how you are playing the piece. The whole idea is to get feedback and new ideas from someone else. You are supposed to go in with the piece already polished with a view to receiving tips of touch, tone and pedalling. I you haven’t got notes, you … you can’t do anything. I explain to Jade that I could have nominated anyone, but I chose Jade because I felt that she is doing well (‘much better now’). Julia asks Jade to say thank you, which Jade does with a broad smile. Julia says make sure you don’t look switched off. I say, ‘It’s ok to feel nervous, that’s totally fine, but you look people in the eye and smile. You don’t have to say a lot, just appear to be interested, even if inside you are going oh my god all those people are freaking me out, that’s all you have to do. If you do that you will attract more flies with honey, you’ll get more places in life; I’m really freaked out by all these people,
but …’ Jade smiles and puts her thumb up (Oh well). Just smile anyway, and then you then you can go home and have a big sleep; it’s exhausting trying to be friendly all of the time’. Jade says, ‘My friend Hannah, her motto is smile and act like you care’. Julia says that she is very positive. I say that I’m not the most confident person, but you have to make an effort to be friendly around new people in order to get places in life. I ask Jade to play some scales – A Major hands together forte – Jade plays well. G harmonic minor right hand softly – I say that it sounds a little on the slower side. I put the metronome on and she plays again – ‘move’ (Jade smiles). ‘You are 50% of the instrument, the piano is not going to move for you, it’s just a piece of wood; you have to move for the piano’. Jade plays again (good). C melodic minor hands together forte – she has trouble starting and plays harmonic minor instead. I interrupt and say that’s harmonic – Jade says oh that’s the changing minor isn’t it. Jade balks, I say come on, Julia says you can’t do that on the day, you can’t just freak out like that, I say you’ll have to do something. Jade sits for a while, smiling, then plays C Major (I tell her) but then she eventually she does it well (good, thank you) Jade smiles and says, ‘I just can’t remember’. I say well you’ll have to and Julia says you’ll have to practise. (Keep practising). I ask her how many melodics she has – three – well, come on let’s … Julia – let’s get real. We all laugh. I say that they are only asking a choice from three melodics and four harmonics, ok so come one (Jade smiles and laughs). She says, ‘I’m sorry’ and I say, ‘There’s nothing to be sorry for, perhaps you could just put in a little bit more effort on these in these last few days, OK?’ Julia and Jade say yes. I ask for A Major staccato hands together (52). Jade plays well; I say that you can go a bit faster if you want to (Jade – just not slower). I say that it sounds like you need to speed up and be a bit more vigorous. Jade tries but I interrupt and say, bounce … bounce on the keys (good!) I say that (in general) the left hand can get quite sluggish with these and then you end up with this kind of sound (sluggish sound) I make a critical comparison with vocal demonstration about singing staccato which makes Jade smile, look at Julia and say, yep. ‘OK? It’s still good’ F# harmonic minor left hand (come one) I come over and help her with the fingering, (I demonstrate saying throw your arm into the keys … if you have flat fingers it will make everything much more heavier) I starting jumping as she is finishing the last couple of octaves and then do a critical comparison using body movement – you can’t do staccato without putting effort in, OK? (Yep) ‘That’s the biggest thing with your playing – when you put effort in, it comes alive’. C harmonic minor contrary motion, she has a
few false starts and it’s not fluent. I say that’s no good. You only get one chance to
demonstrate your skills, so you have to practise that one. E Major contrary – she plays
twice well. I say that it sounds like all the contraries need to be reworked (Jade nods
and says mmm). I ask her if she usually plays them well and she says yes. I say why
don’t you make up some exercises to go over them. I sit down and do dotted rhythms
and Jade copies (move in). I say that if you are sitting out here, it’s so much harder. I
then demonstrate reverse SLSL. Jade tries, but plays LSLS. I interrupt saying (and
demonstrating while standing) that she is not staying in and that why you are missing
the notes. Jade tries again. I say that sometimes we do things that we’re not always
aware of – ‘You’re about to run a race!’ (Jade smiles and Julia laughs) I ask her E
chromatic hands together softly. She plays fluently overall (That’s pretty good) E-flat
Major arpeggios right hand – you should be using 2124. She fixes it up (good – use 4
on top Jade not 5 – where is your arm, push your leg in and lean over the notes – play
louder – that’s better). A minor arpeggios left hand – she is good at it (lovely job). I
say that overall her technique is of a B+ standard (Jade nods), but if you do a few
extra things between now and next Friday, you’re quite likely to come up another
level (Jade nods, OK) I say that it’s not like it’s awful, it’s quite good, but I do think
that there’s room for improvement there. Hopefully I’ve been able to help you and not
made you feel like you couldn’t do it. In summary, your scales sound fine, be quicker
with melodics, more athletic with you staccato (I say that I’m not that athletic – ‘let’s
go and play tennis!’ Jade smiles broadly and Julia laughs, but you have to when
you’re playing piano; yep; and all you have to do is use your arms; Jade copies my
gestures), contrary motion – get up and involved rather than sitting back and hoping
for the best, chromatics sound quite good, and arpeggios need to be a bit louder. I
think you are doing a good job though overall, it’s a massive improvement. Jade nods
and Julia says good. Julia says that we have our audition tomorrow. Julia says that she
has a clear week before the exam, ‘which is a miracle’. Jade says that she has a
graduation dinner the night before, 5.30 – 8.00. I ask her to clap the rhythm of the
following piece, she runs back to the piano and claps. Good – duple or triple time.
Incorrect. I play another one – (mostly right) duple of triple – incorrect. Intervals –
sixth, third, seventh, third, fourth (3 out of 5 correct). She is good with H and L and
middle note. Sight-reading: no. 9 in F Major (AMEB 2004 book): I ask her to peruse
without playing; notice the B flat? (Mmm) I ask her to play the first line – it’s not
good in terms of fluency. ‘OK, all right – That’s not a great effort – you’ve got to go
slower and not stop and start; the rhythm is the most important thing and the notes are secondary, you just played too fast and you missed all your B flats. Get the rhythm and the beat right and then lay the notes on top of that. She tries again while I click and count ‘Not too bad – obviously it’s an area to improve as we go through the grades. So, if you can keep your practice going, it means that we will have time to develop other areas of your playing, not just things that I’ve asked you to do 15 times, ok, I’m not trying to pick on you, but you have to understand that you make my job a lot harder to help you if I have to repeat things more than twice. I don’t mind repeating, that’s fine, but the only person that misses out is you (Jade nods and says yep) I will be able to give you more instruction on areas of sight-reading and aural if you can get a bit more independent with note learning and partial practising, OK, all right, I still think that you’ve done a good job to come this far. (Thank you Mark) It’s just a learning process, it’s not like you just do this exam and if you don’t get an A, well it’s time to go and hide in a corner.

Lesson 31: 1 November 2014

Reviewed 18 December 2015

- We talk about which scales Jade was asked in the exam. Also which extra list (Czerny Study), Julia – General knowledge? I mention that Neil didn’t play his List D. Jade said that she felt the sight-reading was good. Aural tests were good she says. Someone comes with keys. Julia says that her Grandad was pleased because she came out smiling. I mention that she was prepared and that’s when things will always go well for you. I say that I had photocopied Christmas Carols for her. I give her some sight-reading and ask her what key it’s in. As she’s not sure I ask her to look up ‘your wheel’. I remind Jade that she needs to get practising because she has still got two concerts – you can never stop practising, except for a few weeks at the end of the year. Julia said that she did a good audition; I mention that Angela said that she has really come on. Julia said that they all had a celebration that night – a significant moment and the start of next year’s commitment. We Three Kings: G Major or E minor? What’s the first chord in the left hand? Jade plays E minor chord and says the key is E minor. I say yes, and that is what often happens is one half will be Major and one will be Major. Jade plays the hands together first page well; I help her to identify the D7 chord at the start of the next section. It’s slow, but she has it. When she finishes, I give her a clap. Oh Come All Ye Faithful: What key is that one in? She
mentions G Major (probably). I ask Jade if she would like to come to the Intermediate Concert tomorrow (no, we can’t). Jade plays hands together slowly but accurately. I say that I’m going to photocopy the other Czerny Study Op. 299 No. 1. While I’m gone, Julia says to Jade that they could go to the 1 pm concert but they both agree it would be too much of a rush. Julia asks Jade if she would like to play her composition ‘Time never stops’ in the concert, but Jade says that she doesn’t really want to. Julia says that she has just ordered the video from the choir concert. Julia sings while Jade plays Joy to the World. Julia says that she has to keep in the rhythm (not stop). Jade does seem to stop and start a lot. Julia says, ‘Remember, keep the rhythm right, slow but in time’. Jade moves to the next one – Silent Night. Julia asks what key it’s in, Jade says C. She plays and Julia sings, she asks Jade to sing along and then starts clapping. Jade stops and says stop it; sing along if you must. Julia says keep it in beat. Jade plays hands together and I walk in just as she is finishing. I ask Jade what velocity means. I say fast – how fast you go. She mentions that she thinks she has it at home. I sit down and play the Study with hands together, but there are errors. I then start playing the first few bars faster. I mention that we will look at the chords first; I give Jade a pencil and suggest we analyze the chords while we learn it. I explain what the G7 chord doesn’t contain the D (in the other hand; sometimes we drop out the fifth). Bar 4: G7 again but this time with D on the bottom. I coach her and we play G7 all notes in root position, first inversion, second inversion, and third inversion. I ask her what it feels like (a bit strange). I ask her to do a couple of isolation exercises with single notes and then double notes. I suggest that she do some of these at home, but not for too long, lest you get tendonitis. I mention that I used to do these a lot – they build your technique. I mention to Jade that technique is not just about fast fingers, but rather about hand/eye coordination and agility, but most especially tone – if you haven’t got a good tone, you haven’t got a good technique. ‘Technique is all encompassing – a good sound, good gestures, agile mind, agile fingers and a connection to the music’ I ask Jade what the next chord is. She plays it and then comes to root position (answers C). What inversion? I coach her with each inversion. She writes in C first inversion chord. I ask her if there are any C second inversion chords, we’ll find out. Next chord – she answers F root position correctly. I ask her if she notices space/line combination for different inversion of the chords. She plays the next chord correctly and I ask her to tell me what chord it is. She balks says she doesn’t know, but I say that she does (3 times already). I ask her what note is missing
here. She answers correctly (it’s in the upper hand). ‘Get it?’ I say that her homework is SR, harmony of the new piece and obviously some right hand. Julia says that there is no trouble for the lesson time next week ‘Great’. Julia says thank you for all of the Christmas Carols – singing around the piano these holidays. I suggest that Tristan might like to have a go too. Julia says that it’s certainly all been very good learning for her (Jade).

Lesson 32: 8 November 2014

Reviewed 18 December 2015

- The lesson starts with Jade looking at pieces from Frozen (Laura’s book of Frozen). Julia says it’s huge at her school. Jade sight-reads with the right hand and I exit the room. Julia talks to Jade about rehearsal on Friday. I come back in and sit down next to Jade at the second piano, playing the harmonic outline while she continues with the right hand. I ask Jade if she’d like a copy of anything to ‘fiddle with’. While Jade looks at Laura’s book, I play the version of Imagine in G Major; she says that she doesn’t know it when I ask her. Julia says she also likes In Summer. I check her singing range with a couple of phrases, deciding on G Major being better for her voice. I ask to hear her pieces for tomorrow. I mention that the performance is like being an actor – open your eyes widely, look people in the eye, imagine what you might look like – it’s a presentation not a lesson. ‘Put you back into it … Have some caffeine or something’. I exit the room and Jade plays La Vision with beautiful sound and phrase shape but she does tend to ‘hang’ off the keys a little still. She only falters once and there is a beautiful expressive connection, though she loses this slightly in the cadenza. Julia says, ‘Good girl!’ and then Jade plays the study. It is fast but she can’t maintain the tempo consistently all through and breaks down half way; the second half is untidy and she stops again. It takes her some time to recover and she plays the second half again. After she finishes, she looks at the score and then tries the second half again, but is having difficulty coordinating the two hands. After she finishes, she turns around and starts talking to Julia about choir ‘stuff’. I give her the music (thank you) and I ask to hear her ‘presentation’. I suggest that if she smiles when she feels stressed, it may make her feel better. I ask her not to plod; I mention that she reminds me of Tristan sometimes. Julia says have confidence in her body, not ‘this shoulder thing that you get into’. Jade plays La Vision, but it definitely doesn’t have the same sense of expressive purpose or involvement that it did when she played
it earlier in my absence. She seems to look at the score much more and doesn’t move from the fourth beat to the first beat with quite the same conviction. She also falters during the final bars. I come over and coach her with the pedal here. ‘That’s pretty good … it’s got a nice sense of climax over here … I really liked it’. Jade scratches her neck nervously. I sit down and play the end of the cadenza, asking her to take you pedal off here. I ask (and demonstrate at the second piano) her to lean forward, put your back into it Miss West. ‘Good girl, at the masterclass you were looking like you were sleepwalking … Put your back into it (I gesture a forward movement with my hand and whole body). You’ve got a beautiful basic sound but the whole thing’s quite flat. I do a critical comparison – I can’t generate any sound (doing that) I play again, this time leaning forward from the hips towards the top note while singing ‘and put you back …’ I continue to play while doing another critical comparison, this time without speaking or singing … ‘Put your nose over the notes’ (Jade smiles). She starts again and I come over to help her lean forward on the top notes of the phrase. I continue to use expressive gesture and body movement to conduct her. Interesting, she doesn’t seem to need to look at the score this time. I say, ‘different colour for minor … ring, ring, ring … and up again … E Major’. I say that’s a lot better already, you’ve got to put your back into it. I ask her not to let go of any long notes, lest she loses physical and expressive connection to the note. I demonstrate ‘The previous note creeps out of the G, but if you let go of the G, you’ve got no reference point’. I play again saying that’s the first phrase; don’t take your finger off. She tries again, but I say that the right hand has to be more dominant. She tries again, but then I say that the G is too loud. She tries again, but I say that she crept in but then didn’t follow through; you just kept creeping. She tries again while I use gesture, words (creep and follow through; roly-poly and rolling for me) and expressive body movement; she plays really well. I then suggest that I am trying really hard, but it’s got to come from her (it’s an act – I don’t go around the street like this) Jade smiles, nods and says yes. As Jade shifts restlessly on the seat, I say, ‘You’ve got to be an actor; show me how you’re going to play the first part – you’re gonna sink and creep and roll and act’ She plays and I ‘sing’ use words such as, ‘I have a story … highest note’ I interrupt her saying that we will have to stop there, it’s so much better already; I feel like a connection to the piece. Jade nods. Julia says, ‘Just from my point of view, the second piece, what pace?’ Jade says that it’s kind of different every time. I ask her to play, and she does, but then I interrupt saying go a bit faster. ‘Shape, put your back into,
come on Jade West – are you a musician or a mouse?’ The playing has energy, even though she falters a little as before, it always increases when I encourage her to be energetic. Good, OK. I ask Julia, ‘The sound is so different isn’t it when she puts effort in … If you don’t put effort in, it sounds a little bit pathetic, sorry but it does, but when you put energy in, it sounds completely different (Julia – and the audience goes whoo!) … The sound starts to sparkle, that’s all you have to do … It’s an attitude thing … it’s got nothing to do with skill or talent (Jade nods and says OK) … OK? See you tomorrow (Yep) … Come on Jade West, are you a musician or a mouse!’ Julia laughs and Jade says ‘musician’. I say, ‘You’ve done all the hard work, please don’t sabotage it, there’s no point, you already can do it’ Julia says, ‘There’s no reason to’.

A3.3 Case Study 3: Finn

Lesson 1: 15 February 2014

Reviewed 10 February 2015

- The lesson starts with Finn smiling for the camera, but as soon as I say, ‘Don’t worry, it’s just there’ (referring to the camera), all joy evaporates from his face and he becomes very self-conscious. Mentioning that we had discussed Titanium previously, Sarah talks about a song that she thought might be a good song for Finn. I somehow read her mind and ask if it’s All of Me, singing the start of the chorus. We mention how weird it is that we were so in tune with how the other was thinking and laugh. Finn is so expressive with his face here, he seems to change facial features constantly, according to what Sarah and I are talking about, e.g. with regard to the key that best suits his voice. Sarah and I both mention how much we both love that song. Finn is so in love with his Mum that I think that he would learn the song whether he really liked it or not! We talk about a mark on the piano keys. Finn says that when he and Sarah were walking into the Conservatorium, he said, ‘Oh, I’ve missed this place’. I smile and say, ‘Did you … oh that’s funny’. Sarah is playing the song on her phone and Finn begins to pick out the melody at the keyboard. Then I start playing the introduction on the second piano. Finn is so happy and says, ‘I sounds just like it’. I continue to play and Finn says, ‘I don’t know the words yet, but I like it’. I write down to bring it and Sarah thanks for me for pointing her to the website where you can change the key of the song. Sarah talks about us being friends on Facebook, and
asks if I saw the wedding photos and I say that they’re lovely. We talk more about our favourites. Finn says, ‘Yay!’ when he realises he’s discovered how to play the opening part with the right hand. Finn talks about how his Mum found the song for him. I come over and show him how to play the opening chords, trying to correct his fingering – he instinctively avoids using his right hand fifth finger. When I do show him, he finds it difficult to form a rounded hand shape, despite many years of tuition. Away from the piano, I work opposite him trying to find a loose hand shape with his palm facing upwards and his arm resting on his thigh. The view is rather obstructed, put I demonstrate and say, ‘It’s really important with chords that you don’t poke the notes’. I show him my upturned hand in a rather contorted way, and he agrees it doesn’t look too good. I ask, ‘Can you do this?’ before quickly moving direction, asking Finn if I gave him a ladybug. He says yes, but I mention that I don’t have mine here. We move on and I work with Finn at the two pianos on forming soft fist on the keys, ‘Don’t try to shape anything’. I ask him to move the chair back, reminding him that he is getting taller and needs more room for his arms and legs. I ask him to sit forward on the chair. He asks if it looks OK. I agree and mention that he has very long legs when compared with the length of his trunk. We talk briefly about individual differences here. We go back to the open fifth, F and C and I encourage him to ‘angle it to the corner of the room’. He copies me as I drop loosely on the keys with a closed fist and then gently open the fingers out. I say, ‘So you don’t want to activate the middle fingers, just let them sit’. We move to the open sixth, F–D flat, but he over-extends fingers 2, 3 and 4, a common problem in general for Finn. I ask him to copy as I demonstrate and avoid ‘reaching’ between one chord and the next. He tries; I go on to mention that because his fifth finger is very flat, it will tend to make the middle fingers over-activate. While Finn sits, I come over and adjust his shoulders back. I ask him to feel like the sound is coming through the very tip of his fifth finger, and to lead with that finger, rather than leading with the thumb (‘the thumb’s just coming along for the ride’). I encourage him, ‘Excellent’ and remind him not to twist towards the thumb, as it tends to make the fifth finger fall flat. I ask him to stop on the E flat and B flat, and I adjust the shape of his fifth finger, reminding him to think of leading with that finger. Finn says, ‘Before, when you just said that this one was leading and this one was following, I thought of a train carriage’. I say, ‘Oh, so this (the fifth finger) is the leader’ and Finn agrees. I go on to demonstrate and paraphrase the importance of not leading with the thumb, lest the wrist twists, the fifth finger flattens and the
middle fingers over-activate. I suggest that when he is singing and playing, it’s good to have the hand looking as natural as possible, rather than awkward. I adjust his head to extend away from his shoulders, while loosening the top of his spine. Then I adjust his hand, asking to notice how I tilt the hand inwards as the fifth finger sits up and in on the keys. I suggest that he slow down a little so as to avoid ‘grabbing’ or ‘reaching’ as the thumb plays on the black note. I continue to help him keep the shoulder down, the forearm pronated, the fifth finger leading and ‘letting go’ in the wrist while having the ends of the fingers ‘tight’. I review the concept of adjusting the fifth finger first before considering the thumb. He keeps trying, as I ‘tilt’ his forearm inwards so that the hand faces the corner of the room. I ask him to play one chord at a time and not be in a rush so that he can further concentrate on building his hand shape. As he ‘rests’ on F and C, I ask him what it feels like inside his body. He shows me, saying that he feels very strong in his upper arm. I agree, going on to feel as though he is leading with the fifth finger, as that will help ‘tilt towards the middle’. I demonstrate in the air what it might look like if he was to lead with the thumb instead of the fifth finger and he paraphrases his own observation, with his own right hand. I agree, saying, ‘Don’t reach for it, pick up your hand and drop into it’. He plays again – ‘Good, that was much better, but just take a bit more time so that you’re not stiff there’ (between the last chord change). I work with him again, encouraging him to keep his upper body extended (‘switched on’) and his forearm pronated (‘tilt towards me … no that’s too much’). I mention to Finn that it will be really interesting what he watches the video of the lesson (Sarah is recording), as it will help him become more aware of his overall technique. Finn is really engaged here and the dialogue between us is free flowing. As he plays the final chord, I continue to adjust his body – shoulder down, tilt towards me (not too much), sit up … he seems to be enjoying the process. I work with him again regarding moving smoothly from F–D flat to E flat–C without reaching. Finn says, ‘Like glide down to it’. I say, ‘Yeah, just before you play it, give yourself a moment to think about what it’s going to feel like’. He does quite well this time, except for the last chord, where he flattens out his fifth finger and the hand tilts to the right. I adjust his hand, asking him not to ‘sink’ to the right. He says, ‘So, I’m pushing all my weight on the pinky … and that’s not good’. I further adjust him, encouraging him to bring his fifth finger towards the back of the key while having it ‘stand up on the tip’, while extending his head upwards and tilting slightly forwards. He plays again, and I say, ‘That’s so much better’; Finn nods. We move on to the left
hand, and I go on to outline the chord structure first in letters and then numbers, singing this information using the melodic line. Finn sees that the left hand is playing single notes. I then explain to him that the hands divide the notes of F minor, D flat, A flat and E flat, playing root position chords in the left hand. Finn mentions that it’s similar to another song that he has learnt. I agree and write the chords in his score – Finn plays the chords with his left hand; I give him some guidance when he plays F Major, D Major, but he seems to find them relatively easily. I sit down at the second piano and play with him, asking him to play the chords as semibreves. Using my hand in the air, I ask him if he is ‘squashing’ the chords or ‘fitting into them’. He agrees that he probably was squishing them, and I say, ‘I can tell because everything went sort of tense and flat’. I ask him to copy me as we do some closed fist exercises on the keyboard, before opening out into chords. When he adjusts his own hand, I say, ‘Good! It’s mainly your fifth fingers – if you’re fifth fingers are rounded and on the tip, you almost have to pronate inwards to get them to sit like that’. I go on to demonstrate what Finn’s has the tendency to do, deviating his ulnar to the left instead of the right (‘and that flattens and twists and makes everything more difficult’). He tries again, ‘Good boy Finn, it’s like Emilio’s tennis … it’s forehand … (I play an f minor pentascale to the right and Finn copies the movement) … Don’t face backhand, face forehand’. As I play pentascales in contrary motion, I suggest that that’s how the arms are designed. I ask him to copy, starting on any note, which he does. I ask him to hold his arms like he is riding a bike, before doing C Major pentascale slowly; he copies. I ask him not to collapse on his fifth fingers. He copies me as we increase the speed a little each time. I ask him to try it so that his elbows are in and his wrists are in ulnar deviation. He can see which on feels better, but I say that he often plays the piano in that way, without really realising. He asks me if that’s just him or if everyone has does that. I agree that everyone goes through a similar stage, and he nods. I go on to say that he has many other gifts. Finn says, ‘Everyone is unique’. I say, ‘My job is to help people’s (Finn – weaknesses)’. I remind Finn that he will sell more records if his playing looks more natural. We all laugh and Sarah says that I will get a free one. I ask if I can get a signed one with a backstage pass and we laugh again. I say, ‘You never know, people have dreams, and if you work towards them, you’ll get there’. Finn says, ‘I’d like to do that’ and I say, ‘Go for it’. We move back to the left-hand chords in root position, continuing to emphasise the inward pronation. I say that he is getting much better with it, and pretty soon it will become more second nature. Finn
goes on to relate a story about his singing teacher doing something similar, emphasising breathing from the belly instead of the chest (muscle memory). I say, ‘You want to try and use movement that’s very functional and that suits the human body. Piano playing is a lot easier, and you’ll get a much better sound if you use your muscles the way they’re designed. That’s why people are usually better at forehand than backhand, because they’re designed to go forehand’. I go on to demonstrate that right scales descending usually feel easier than right-hand ascending. Finn paraphrases in his own words, and I go on to suggest that like with any skill, it doesn’t mean you can’t ‘learn’, but the body has its own preferences. We then move back to keyboard harmony, and I suggest that this year, I would like Finn to cover Major chords and scales in every key. We move to C Major scale – Finn plays right hand one octave as it sit beside him. Using a pencil, I ask him not to let his distal joints ‘fall in towards you’, and to avoid gripping unnaturally in doing so. I say, ‘Gee you’re really picking it up well today’. I mention using the ladybug – he asks me what for. I suggest that he could gently squeeze it with the tip of his finger, helping him to engage the muscles in the forearms, a concept that seems new to him. I mention that there are no muscles in the hands, but this is dubious. What is clear is the concept that the fingers and the forearm are part of a single unit, and need to work together. I ask him to not think of fingers, but the whole body and how it supports what the fingers do. We start C Major primary and secondary chords, and I ask him to watch for good alignment of the arm and hand (‘we don’t want a big u shape there’). I ask him to think of where his elbow is in space, while maintaining roundedness of the fifth finger. We work through each chord, as I ask him to make adjustments with knuckles, shoulder and elbow. As we arrive at the upper tonic chord, I remind him that when he rounds out the fifth finger, he ‘automatically pronates, which is exactly what I want you to do (Yeah) … It’s really good’. I mention that we are doing this activity for chord knowledge more than anything, but we can still work on technique at the same time. Finn mentions that C Major uses the white notes because it has no sharps or flats, but as we go through the keys, more black notes will be added – I say, ‘You hit the nail on the head, you’ll have a working knowledge of all Major keys’. I ask him if he knows roman numerals (mostly). We go through each chord or C Major, identifying Major or minor quality (he says he can tell the difference) and he writes in the letter names for the chords himself. I exit to have a drink. When he comes to B diminished, I tell him the answer. I demonstrate the difference between a minor and a
diminished chord, and he sees that the top note is lowered a semitone. He easily applies the knowledge, noting the difference between B diminished and B minor. I tell him that he is clever and that his strengths are chord knowledge and aural. He plays the minor/diminished again, saying ‘that sounds nice’. He asks me if every chord has a diminished, and I tell him that he must have read my mind. He laughs as I tell him how to write diminished (dim or with a circle) and he says he has seen ‘dims’ before. He asks me which one is preferred, and I say that either is fine, though he may see the circle more often. With Finn’s help, I go on identify which of these chords are primary and which are secondary. I go on to say that in Major keys, the primary chords are always Major. He asks me what about minor keys, but I suggest that we will do those in Term 2 and we both laugh. I repeat that the primary chords are always Major, chords 2, 3 and 6 are always minor – Finn asks me, ‘What about seven?’ I tell him that chord seven is always diminished and he seems surprised. He moves on to play the primary and secondary chords (root position) of G Major with his left hand. When he gets to chord 5, he realises that he is playing D minor, so I ask him what he is missing, i.e. what’s the key signature of G Major? He quickly realises and fixes the chord. I ask him to play G Major scale with his left hand. I ask him to build the G Major chords, including F# this time, giving him a small demonstrations of the first few chords. As he plays the chords, I write the letter names in, except for F# dim, which I ask Finn to write himself. He mentions that the diminished chord sounds a bit odd and I say, ‘Hey! Who are you calling odd!’ We both laugh. As we finish, I mention that we did two Major keys today and that we have another five pages to go. He asks me if there are another six pages for minor keys (yes). I mention that he can play these chords in the first inversion, and he is quick to demonstrate. I say that in order to learn more about ‘music’ this year (i.e. keyboard harmony), it will be even more important that he comes to lessons prepared, so that we are not fixing previous errors, but moving forward each week. I show him a piece of cardboard with all the chord combinations on it and he mistakenly thinks I’m giving it to him. We laugh and I suggest that I could give him a copy instead or order some more from America. As we look at the chart, he sees C+ and asks me what that means. I go on to show him the difference between C chord and C augmented chord in root position. He asks me to clarify diminished. He says that he has just figured out that Major/augmented link and the minor/diminished link. I ask him to digest what he has been taught in the lesson today, ready to lay the next step on top. I ask him to try to be aware of what he
is practising at home and why he might be doing so. I mention that that is why the lessons go so fast, because we are working ‘in the moment’, and that sometimes practice can take longer than it needs to if there is a tendency to become distracted. I say that I would like him to make piano a greater priority this year – school is important, yes, but make sure piano doesn’t get left ‘at the bottom of the work pile’. I say, ‘If you do nothing, you’ll get nowhere, but if you do something, you’ll get somewhere’. I suggest that even 5 or 10 minutes of practice is better than sitting and worrying for five or 10 minutes, as that’s how people progress, it’s often the small concentrated amounts that add up that make all the difference. We move on to Nocturne, and I ask him how he went with his learning goal to fix the transitory section. He takes a while to decide where to go from, so I suggest that he ‘Just do it!’ and we both laugh. He plays the section with hands together, but it really is quite messy. I say, ‘Well, that is definitely better, but I wouldn’t say it was fixed up though’. I say, ‘You probably haven’t played it today’, and he says, ‘I played it today’ (Oh). I ask him to question himself, ‘Well, you’ve got to ask yourself, was it too fast? Was I reading the music? (I wasn’t). I say, ‘Slow down and try to get it accurate, otherwise it’s not fixed up’. He goes on to talk about how the pedal should go for that part, but I caution that the pedal is something that he might add on later, like ‘the icing on the cake … You can’t ice a cake if you haven’t made it’. He nods and agrees. I go on, ‘You can make the icing, but you can’t put it on until your cake is made. So don’t worry about the pedal … get your notes and your fingers and your rhythms right’. I ask him to play again, do a quick demonstration of the tempo first. He does quite well, apart from the last few chords. I reiterate that it is much better, and not to be too disappointed, but I remind him that could be even better still. I demonstrate ‘getting something wrong’, writing in the score that I would need to practise that until it’s right. I ask him to play the left-hand chords in blocks, as I check the notes and adjust a couple of fingerings and notes along the way. He goes back to using pedal and broken chords, but I ask him to use block chords, asking him why he might do so. He starts saying, ‘So I know where to move’, but I interrupt saying that it will help him stop twisting – I say that he is moving in and out too much, but this probably needs further clarification. He starts playing block chords, (good boy) and I say that is what he is going to practise this week – bars 11 and 12 left-hand chords. I pick a sticky note at that point in the score to help him remember. I briefly type something on the computer and then come back, pointing out that Finn is using incorrect
fingering and he is rolling his hand out towards the fifth finger instead of pronating inwards, both of which will make it more difficult to get a good sound. I adjust his hand, reminding him that we lead with the fifth finger, rather than the thumb – ‘when you lead with the thumb, everything will twist and flatten’. He agrees and continues. I help him fix up his F7 chord, and suggest that he play each chord a few times, checking for good quality hand and finger shape. It’s time-consuming, but he doesn’t seem to mind – I continue to help him avoid twisting or ‘reaching’ unnecessarily with the thumb. I mention that we’ve run out of time and that it’s so good to have longer lessons – ‘you could almost have an hour and a half, a bit expensive though’. We all laugh. I mention that he does need a fair bit of remedial work with his overall technique. He asks me what remedial means – ‘very slow and careful, to build a foundation (where) you can go further’. He nods in agreement. I say that I want him to learn the piece, but I would like to spend the first month of so of his lessons this year revising chord shapes, especially in terms of leading with the fifth finger or the outside of the hand, rather than the thumb. I am physically demonstrating deviated wrists and I ask Finn what he notices about my shoulders – I say that that will go straight into the piano sound. I sit down at his piano and critically demonstrate how leading with the thumb creates a soft soft loud sound, which will make the playing sound clumsy. I say, ‘The way that you hold your hands affects the way it will sound’. He paraphrases me and says that the hand will look and function better.  I say that he will end up with a better technique – ‘Technique isn’t about how fast you can play, it’s about how you hold your hands and whether you can make a good sound through that’. Using Hanon, I go on to demonstrate and say that often technique is thought of as how stiff the hands need to be correct, but rather it’s the opposite. Finn adds the words ‘loose’ and ‘smooth’ to my explanation. I go on to say that he is perhaps at the right age where he can understand where I’m coming from more clearly. I add that I would like him to watch the recording of this lesson and to reflect on what he sees. I suggest that he may develop a mental picture of ‘what you look like and what you feel like as you’re playing’. I add, ‘I call that a kinaesthetic sense – you build up a sense of how you sit. Like you sort of imagine yourself in a movie’. I mention that this takes time, but it’s important. Sarah likens it to driving a car and I agree. As the lesson finishes, I suggest that he look at the right hand of Jinker Ride as we have been focusing on chords in the Nocturne. I mention that chords are tricker than single notes
and we have to be aware of that – it takes a while to build up refined chord technique, but it is possible.

Lesson 2: 22 February 2014

Reviewed 11 February 2015

- The lesson starts with talk about Finn and Emilio’s new haircuts. I ask him how his practice went this week. I suggest that we do chords and scales first up and Sarah comes in. Finn mentions that he is going on camp this week; Sarah says that there might not be much practice this week (Oh, that’s all right). He shows Sarah his new page of chords – he’s pretty interested! We are both excited to be doing Majors and then minors next semester. He starts playing D Major scale right hand 1 octave but says he’s forgotten the fingering. I suggest that when he forgets, he could refer to his ‘picture scales’. He plays the right-hand two octaves and I remind him to curve the distal joints. He plays two octaves and I coach him with his elbow and upper body position. He says he has a question – ‘Is the fingering the same for C Major two octaves?’ and we have a laugh when I pretend not to know. He mentions that my piano looks nice on full stick. He says he was watching the video of last week’s lesson and realised that the pianos sounded different from each other. I ask him what it was like to view the video – he turns to Sarah and puts his thumb up. I ask him if he enjoyed it, or was there anything he noticed. We laugh about possible options, and then he mentions that he noticed he was a bit slouched a couple of times. He says that he looked a bit tired, but this week he’s happy (Yay!). I ask him if he noticed anything when watching the segments where he was playing chords. He says that he noticed that he sometimes over-exaggerated the extent to which he held his elbow out. I say that Finn is developing a kinaesthetic image of how his body looks and functions, without having to ‘look’ at it. I make the analogy of walking down the street and not having to ‘look’ at oneself walking. Finn is playing chords on the piano, but seems to be listening. Finn makes the link that he can’t look at the music and still be aware of his body yet. I say, ‘That’s OK’ and then continue, ‘I have a sense of where my body sits in space’. We talk briefly about the Band-Aids on Finn’s fingers to get rid of his warts. We move on to the left hand for D Major, and he plays a two-octave scale, slowly. I put the metronome on 100 and ask him to do one note per beat. As he plays, I ask him to have an image of what he looks like and what it sounds like. After he finishes, I ask him, ‘What did those last five notes sound like?’ (He replays) and
‘What did the fingers look like?’ He plays again, but there is significant overlapping of the fingers here. I ask him if it sounded clear – he says a little bit and then replays. The clarity is better but he finds legato difficult with the left-hand finger 3, 4 and 5. I tell him that the fingers are too disconnected now and he seems surprised. He plays again, with better legato, but I ask him to lift up his finger 3 as he plays finger 4. He finds it very challenging, but I encourage him to keep experimenting, and ask him to curve his distal joint(s). I liken practice to ‘experimenting’ and then briefly touch on the principle of alignment, but then try to help him avoid ‘gripping’ (over-extending) the other finger as he plays finger 4. I ask him to play the fifth finger without moving the rest of his hand and arm. He keeps trying and I say, ‘That’s better!’ He still finds it very difficult, but I encourage him, ‘You’re getting much better there’. I turn the metronome off and briefly talking about thinking/working hard and feeling happy simultaneously. I tell him that the concept is called ‘critical thinking’ and involves reflecting on how one can improve one’s skills while practising. I do an imaginary role-play to demonstrate this process, emphasising self-reflection rather than mindless repetition. We move on to the primary and secondary chords of D Major with the right hand, and I help him to apply the key signature, while adjusting his hand shape and overall posture. I compliment on his ability to think in chords. I ask him can he feel the difference between an optimal/less optimal hand shape. He mentions that he is over-extending the second finger somewhat and I encourage him to sit taller and reduce his elbow width. I adjust the shape of his fifth finger in C# diminished chord and using a pencil, I remind him to drop his right shoulder muscle and turn on the deltoid muscle instead. Finn asks me to clarify the names of the muscles (trapezius and deltoid). I mention that most people get very tight in the trapezius muscle. I give him a pencil and ask him to write in the chord names on his sheet, giving him intermittent help capitals/lowercase and Major/minor. I demonstrate the ‘danger’ diminished chord and we all laugh. He seems to remember the different chord qualities in Major keys when prompted. He is interested, so we talk about the diminished chords further and he reminds me that minor is like diminished chord except the top note is a semitone higher. We move on to Nocturne, and he plays hands together with pedal. I compliment him on his improvement with the chromatic interchange. I interrupt and suggest that it might be a little fast – ‘don’t you think?’ I start playing at the second piano a little slower and Finn tries to join in. I stop and he plays briefly before I say, ‘Anyway … look … good for you!’ Finn smiles and I say
that he has improved. I ask him to slow down a little and put the metronome on. He
starts playing at quaver = 120. I suggest that he needs to move the piece towards a
more expressive result, which he interprets as ‘louds and softs’. I say that it really
goes beyond that. He says, ‘gestures’ and when I say it even goes beyond that, he
seems surprised. I ask him what ‘nocturne’ means, but he says he doesn’t know. I say
that it’s a night piece (nocturnal) and I ask him what he could imagine. When he says,
‘an owl’ and I start hooting and playing Chopin’s *Funeral March*; we all laugh. I say
that I was thinking more of a nightingale, but mention vampires and start playing the
theme from Dracula. I go on to say that one thing that will make it sound more
expressive is a legato touch in the left hand. He plays the left hand with the pedal and
I say that it’s a bit better already. I demonstrate what it sounds like with non-legato
and suggest that it sounds ‘passive’. I go on, ‘If you really believe in something, you
have to put yourself into it’. He plays the left hand again and I say, ‘That’s so much
better’, but as he goes on, the sound ‘drops out’ which I point out and ask him why
that might be. He has his own idea (let go of pedal), but I say that his finger collapsed.
I liken it to a building falling, saying that, ‘technique is so important to a good sound
and an expressive result’. I remind him that that is why we have been reviewing his
technique, as it will help with overall sound production, not because I like rounded
hands (he laughs). He tries again, and I mention that ‘the other’ notes are starting to
get too loud. I start to show him a double rotary movement that he could use for
‘loud-soft-soft’, but abandon this idea, reminding him to lead with the fifth finger
rather than the thumb. As he plays again, I adjust his hand and elbow in order for the
hand to align, asking him which muscle is keeping his arm high, which he answers
deltoid. I go on to describe (and demonstrate in the air), the idea of feeling where the
bottom of the key is, and then making a chain from the bottom of the key, through the
finger all the way up to the top of the arm. I say, ‘You don’t go past that (the bottom
of the key) or not enough to it’. As he plays, I adjust him, saying, ‘So put enough
weight in that you feel the bottom, but not so much that you end up squeezing the
note’. He plays again, and I say, ‘Oh that sounds so different – Finn – yay!’ He smiles
and says thank you. He says, ‘It did sound smooth and connected’ and I say, ‘It
sounded real’. I go on to say that if you don’t play it connected, it will sound
‘disconnected’, and Finn says, ‘robotic’. I agree, saying that it will sound like you are
disconnected from what you are doing, in effect, pressing buttons. To demonstrate, I
sing *Ave Maria* with a disconnected and flat vocal tone. He says it sounds a bit boring
and I say, ‘There’s no life in it’. As I play the right-hand melody, I narrate, referring to the sound going out into the world and the nightingale coming down to the nest and the end of the second phrase. As I dramatise bird wings, I suggest, ‘You can almost see it coming higher and higher, and lower and lower’. Finn is very engaged here, though he does yawn briefly. I ask him to use gesture as he begins the right hand. I ask him not to use his whole body to move, just his arm, suggesting that, ‘God gave you a shoulder joint so that you don’t have to use your whole body’ (Finn – in piano). We both laugh. I take his hand and guide him through the phrases, rolling from note to note and use vertical movements at phrase ends. I ask him to try. He does quite well – I coach him with rolling towards the highest note, encouraging him to ‘fall away’ and ‘try and be elastic’, as I demonstrate again. I suggest that he use his third finger on the A flat, lest he has to stretch, which tends to restrict gestural movement. He really takes to it, smiles, and says, ‘Thank you’. I ask him to write it in and we discover that the editor has written in 4. I suggest that it’s a bit unusual and Finn reminds me that the score is sometimes not correct in terms of fingering. I suggest that it’s not sometimes, but always – perhaps an overstatement? He asks why, and I say, ‘They play with their mind, not their body’. We briefly talk about this concept, but seem to go off on a slight tangent. I then demonstrate hands together, saying ‘rock and roll through the notes’ as I play. Though seated, Finn is very involved physically, as he moves his upper body with the phrases. I ask him to play hands together, but without the pedal yet. He is really trying, but when he plays with both hands, I say, ‘Isn’t that interesting, as soon as you play the hands together, it’s gone back to (Finn – stiff) what I call ‘baby play’ (?)’ Finn looks perturbed. I say, ‘I’m not trying to be mean (Finn – yeah, yeah), I know it’s in you (Finn – It’s just hard to get to) … Well it’s a physical thing with you’. I ask him to play hands separately again. As he plays the left hand, I ask him if he could simultaneously imagine and visualise the gestures of the other hand. He is finding this very difficult, so I ask him to start the left hand again, demonstrating beside him – ‘Can you come back to that sound that you were doing earlier?’ As he plays the left hand, I encourage him (using gesture) to ‘keep the hand moving through’. After a little while, I take his arm and loosen it manually, saying, ‘Hang on, it’s all stiff and you’ve lost momentum’. As I move his arm anti-clockwise, I say, ‘Keep your arm moving in order for it to live’. He agrees. I then take him through add-a-note with the left hand, but Finn starts to yawn with more frequency now. It starts quite well, but then he starts ‘poking’ at the notes. I ask him if
he is losing concentration. While he doesn’t say so, I ask him to stand up and go for a
walk around the room. We do some jumping jacks together. I say, ‘Let’s look on the
positive side (yeah), you’ve done your practice (yep), your notes are accurate (mmm),
you don’t sound horrible (yay), you could sound better, but you don’t sound horrible.
When you do the hands separate (Finn – it’s all good, but together, it’s … mousy)’ I
ask him to put that all into perspective and tell me what he should do. He correctly
answers separate hands, and I add that the next step would be to simultaneously
visualise the other hand. He suggests that he could use one half of his brain to play
one hand and the other half of his brain to imagine the opposite hand. I say that it’s
not easy to play piano with this level of expression, but without it, you’ll never sound
like a true musician (yep), you’ll sound like a note player (yeah). I say, ‘I know that
you can do it, so we’ll just keep working on it. You’ve come so far in the last few
weeks, you’re lessons are much more prepared and everything’s flowing a lot better’.
He agrees and says, ‘I think more work’s being done’. I agree, and say, ‘Of course it
is’, doing a brief role-play of what it could be like, mentioning that that is what slows
people down. He reminds me, ‘I remember I used to come back the next week and it
wouldn’t be any different’. After a brief pause, I ask him to play the right hand again.
He says, ‘Oh, so with the left hand it’s loud soft soft, but with the right hand it’s rock
… (He shows me)’ and I agree. He tells me that that’s probably the reason he gets a
bit mixed up with the hands together. I smile and say, ‘Of course it is, that’s very very
reflective’. I sit down at the second piano and ask him to keep in time. I coach him
with a couple of instances of rolling forward to create a softer note while lifting at the
ends of phrases here. Without any prompting from me, he says, ‘We should be getting
softer because we’re lifting up’. Excitedly, I say, ‘Correct! The upward movement
makes it softer, because basically you’re taking away weight away from the key
instead of into the key’ (I use gesture to explain myself here). He goes on to show me
how the upward movement then becomes the downward movement to begin the next
phrase. I coach him with ‘taking a risk’ when going for the top D here, rather than
‘stopping’ the momentum. I demonstrate and explain that usually at the end of a
section, we not only get softer, but we also (sings) ‘slow it down’ (Ahh). I ask him if
he can do that (yep), which he does very well. I say, ‘That’s beautiful, that’s how you
play expressively. If you don’t do that, the audience will miss what you are trying to
say’. I sit down and dramatise pseudo expressive playing, thinking about ‘how much I
love my parrot’, but not really taking care of how the piece actually sounds. I say,
‘I’m thinking about how much I love my parrot while I’m playing, but what is being heard is something quite different (Yeah). It’s got nothing to do with how you might feel, but it’s the acoustical variations that you produce that makes the listener think, oh that’s really expressive (nice).’ I further demonstrate the reverse – how it might be if I played with good sound, but without any real personal intent, referring to this as ‘faking it’. I suggest that if I was to think about how I feel about my pet parrot, and use gestures at the same time (I demonstrate), that might be the best combination. Finn says that it sounded nice and I looked happy when compared with ‘the other time’. I refer back to the Ave Maria example from earlier, suggesting that perhaps I sing it well and in tune, but there is a lack of personal involvement. Finn refers to my lack of facial expressions and reflects on his watching the recording of last week’s lesson, where I suggested that he be more aware of his ‘hand expressions’ (he demonstrates a fluid approach as opposed to an over-activated one). I agree, ‘Yeah, you’ve got to look the part’. I sit down and play with exaggerated gestures, cautioning him against doing ‘hand ballet’. I suggest that it’s really annoying and we both laugh. He sits down and dramatises, as I suggest that we need to find a happy medium. I say, ‘That’s what I call non-functional gesture. We want to use gesture so that it’s functional in producing the sound and giving the listener an idea of what’s happening (I’m using my hands a lot here) (Finn – yeah) … but we don’t want to go to the point where it’s like, oh my god, is this kid for real?’ Finn says, ‘They didn’t come to see the ballet’. I suggest that you don’t want your piano playing to become a caricature. I ask him if he knows what that means (no), so I demonstrate, cautioning him against trying too hard (Finn – kind of showing off). I do another demonstration of ‘a happy medium’ and Finn says, ‘You want it to sound nice, but also look good and not show off’. I ask him to keep trying hard so that we can go even further into the piece, referring to rubato that we touched on earlier. I suggest that we usually stretch a little at the end of a phrase, though not always, lest the piece starts to sound predictable (Yeah). I (we) do a vocal demonstration of too much rubato, and we laugh when I suggest it will make people seasick. I say that usually you reserve rubato for the end of a section or a very expressive point. I demonstrate (using gesture) how an opera singer might sing the final phrase of a section, but then how the music moves on a bit at the start of the next section in order to ‘catch up’. I go on to talk about ‘robbing’ time with the analogy of a bank. He seems to be in agreement, but I think I’m either talking too much or he is losing concentration again, or perhaps both. I say, ‘Wow
we’re doing music, not notes (Yay) and it’s all because of you’. I mention that Khoa is away today and we can go a bit longer. Sarah asks me if I managed to get the music for *All of Me*. I say that I have it here. Sarah says he’s very keen to start that one. We laugh about the ‘brag’ aspect of the arrangement (share songs you can brag about), and I say that why not – you want to share it and feel good about what you’re doing, rather than doing it to only please me – ‘do it for yourself’. I go on to say that I’m very good at organising people and their tasks, but it is for a greater good so that people don’t drift and waste the potential that they have. He starts playing the hands together as I write chord numbers on the score. I play the accompaniment while singing the chord numbers. Finn asks me about John Legend – I say the guy who wrote the song. I go on to say that the chord numbers in this song relate back to the primary and secondary chords that we were studying at the beginning of the lesson today. I write in the key of A-flat Major on the score. I start to work with his technique, adjust his fingering so that ‘we tilt inwards rather than outwards’. He seems to have forgotten the fingering and technical detail from last lesson, so I keep adjusting his hand, reminding him with questions about whether he should lead with the thumb or the fifth finger. I mention that he has very long fingers, but he asks if that is good or bad (I say it’s a good thing). I mention that he can drop out the middle note of the F minor chord now in order to play the open fifth, saying that the additional note was to encourage rounded knuckles. As a brief exercise, I ask him to hold down F and A flat while playing the C with his fifth finger. I then ask him to hold that shape while returning to the open fifth. He is doing better now, but I stop him when he twists to execute E flat and C. I show him what to avoid, and ask him to ‘shift in’ with the fifth finger instead (lead with the fifth finger). As he plays the final E flat – B flat I ask him to refine the shape of the fifth finger and then say, ‘What’s your shoulder doing?’ He adjusts and continues to play the right hand while I improvise on the second piano. We discuss that he will play the accompaniment while singing, and I sit down and demonstrate what this might look and sound like. I make a lot of mistakes, and as I finish, I laugh and say, ‘This is kind of hard – good luck with that!’ I play an improvised solo piano version instead. Finn says, ‘After I sing with it, I want to play it; I like it’. I say that I know it wasn’t fantastic, but he says it was beautiful – ‘Oh, thank you mate’. I say that we might play a little game together – G Major key. I ask him to copy what I play by ear. We sit at the two pianos and continue – he does quite well overall. He says, ‘Yay! That’s so fun!’ I ask him if I can hear
Jinker Ride, mentioning that his ability to concentrate has really improved lately. I remind him that he was going to look at the right hand for homework, but he says that he forgot to. I ask him how he might remind himself. He is looking very embarrassed, so I ask him what grown-ups do when they want to remind themselves of something. He suggests that they put a dot on themselves. I laugh and say they carry a diary with them and write in what their assignment is. He seems surprised. I say that I have several, plus a calendar. He asks if he should bring a notebook for me to write in. I say that I’m not a secretary, but if he would like to write notes at the end of the lesson, he is welcome to. Sarah says, ‘It’s just like school darling, no different’. I suggest that he not beat himself up, but if he is prone to forgetfulness, he has to take steps to ensure that that doesn’t happen often, so perhaps taking notes is a good idea. I paraphrase, ‘Everyone forgets, but if you are prone to forgetting, you have to put in a strategy that will stop that from happening’. He nods in agreement and I ask him to try some of the right hand. I ask him to slow down and read the notation. It’s very slow and he misses the key signature. I suggest that he have a pencil beside him to notate any fingering and to ‘do it by sight’, rather than by sound. I say that I want him to study the piece, rather than pick it up by ear. I encourage him to write, ‘ask Mark’ if he is unsure about anything while practising, giving him a few examples, including a silly one (he laughs). I say that he did a good job today (thank you), but you are a week behind with Jinker Ride though. Sarah reminds me that he is on camp this week. I say that one week of no practice can turn into two weeks – ‘Do something when you can’.

Lesson 3: 8 March 2014

Reviewed 15 and 18 February 2015

The lesson starts with us talking about Finn’s camp – he came home with a cold, though he said it was pretty fun. He plays with the ladybug while he talks. Despite all of this talk, I say, ‘So, how did your practice go?’ I’m not sure if I totally understood that it was unlikely that he had done any practice at all! He says that he had started to do Jinker Ride and I ask if I can hear it. Sarah reminds Finn that there was a section that he wanted to ask for my advice. He takes the music out, points out the section and asks me about E# being F. I agree, demonstrate, and point out that the two-note slurs, highlighting them in his score. I demonstrate again, and he plays, asking what fingering to use. I move his hand up the octave, suggest 2-3 and move his arm up and down while he plays the two-note slurs. I encourage him to be loose, saying, ‘That’s
it, just let it go’, before singing the song. Finn smiles and I ask him if he knows the
song. He says, ‘It was on the movie’ and Sarah says, ‘Frozen’. He plays the two-note
slurs again, this time on his own. I say that he is over-activating the up movement,
and then demonstrate, suggesting that he be ‘strong then lazy; that’s better; even still,
can you …’ I demonstrate again and he tries, before we move on the ‘hand-over-hand
technique’. I ask him hold his hand above the keyboard, before going on to
demonstrate via critical comparison the variation in speed of the upward lift. He
smiles as I say, ‘Try not to come up that fast’. He starts using fingers 1 and 2, so I
correct him and move his forearm up and down. While doing so, I ask him to let
everything go loose on the way down (‘on the 2’) and then ‘turn the muscles on
slowly and softly on the way up’. We repeat this process before I add, ‘off on – off on
– off on – off on’. He smiles and then tries for himself while I repeat ‘off on …’ I get
excited and say, ‘Hear that? (He smiles and says yeah) … That’s good!’ Finn makes
the analogy of someone flicking a light switch (on and off). While gesturing, I say,
‘You would think it would be on off – on off, wouldn’t it be, but it’s off on – off on’
Finn gestures and says, ‘Off to just let it drop and then on to pick back up’. I agree
enthusiastically and Finn seems very happy. I continue, ‘But you don’t go off – ON;
it’s just a soft on; off on – off on’ and Finn concurs. As I demonstrate the two-note
slurs, I suggest that the off is more powerful. Finn copies and does very well. I say to
Sarah, ‘I must say, he’s really starting to get it now and he says it back to me’. Sarah
says, ‘He’s comprehending it’, and Finn smiles proudly. I continue, ‘He’s really
trying hard to get it … and you can hear it in the sound (I sit at the second piano to
demonstrate) … If you really listen closely you can hear it’. I do a critical comparison
of the two-note slurs, and Finn says, ‘I can tell’. I say, ‘that sort of sounds …’ I
gesture stiffly and Finn says ‘robotic’. I then play hand together while smiling – ‘That
sounds like it’s smiling’. Finn says, ‘I like that song’. I say, ‘I’ve only taught that song
to one other kid (Finn – who else?) … Adrian is doing it’. I say that he is doing really
well with the piece and that I teach him ‘the same’, but then clarify, ‘the same type of
concepts’ as no one is the same. ‘You teach everyone differently’. Finn agrees and
says, ‘Everyone’s got different personalities’ and I say, ‘They’re all different,
everyone’s different; no two students are alike’. We move on, and I suggest that Finn
can apply the two-note slur principle elsewhere. I demonstrate the two-note slur
followed by two staccato notes and Finn tries – he does well with the slur, but finds
doing the two staccato cumbersome. I encourage him (good boy), but it becomes
obvious that the less confident with the notes, the less able he is to merge the gestural concepts. He asks me about the notes here, and I demonstrate the alternating E# and E natural. I demonstrate the fingering and then write it in the score while singing. Though it sounds a little mechanical when he tries, it is accurate and I encourage him saying, ‘Wow, the change in you is unbelievable’. I adjust his posture and Finn smiles proudly. ‘You’re starting to get it, yeah (Yay) … You’ve always got it … musically you’ve always got it, (but) but the way you’re employing your body is quite different’. Finn nods and smiles, and we review the E# - F# fragment. I demonstrate and ask him to ‘drop down and do two ups for the staccato’. He tries, but has difficulty with the staccato, so I demonstrate staccato, saying, ‘To get the staccato, you need to turn the muscles on’. He tries again, this time with more success (good boy). I sit beside him, and demonstrate, saying to turn the muscles on slowly for the up movement of the two-note slur, but then turn the muscles on quickly for the staccato. Finn nods and briefly tries, before I take his arm and move it accordingly while saying off/on but without actual notes. He has another go (good) and then I ask him to prepare for the ‘hand-over-hand technique’, saying that that proved helpful earlier in the lesson. After demonstrating, Finn smiles and says that he should do what I said not to do earlier, i.e. come up quickly for the staccato rather than slowly for the two-note slur earlier in the lesson. He says, ‘Ah, so I’m doing what you like said not to do before, like bang up’ and I laugh, saying, ‘Yeah, yeah, I want you to do that this time’. Finn nods and says OK. He tries a few times and I say, ‘Finn, that’s terrific!’ – his smile beams with pride. I say, ‘I think that hand-over-hand thing really works for you (Finn agrees and starts to demonstrate the process himself) … Because you can feel the speed that I’m coming up (Yeah, and then …).’ We repeat the process twice, the second time I ask him to lower his hand a little. I say, ‘Can you feel that?’ Finn smiles and says, ‘Yeah … and I know like, when you’re like turning them on ‘cause you move up fast (he gestures and say yeah)… and then when you loosen it, you just like, lift up slowly (gestures)’. I say, ‘Floating’ and he agrees. I ask him to try again. As he pats his deltoid muscles, he continues, ‘When your muscles are loose, you’re just lifting your whole arm up here’; I agree. He identifies the deltoid muscle and I praise him (very good) – ‘Gee, you’re becoming an expert, aren’t you? (Yay!)’ I go on to suggest that most of what I’m telling him is not written in a book – ‘Most people would tell you to do short and detached, (but) I think if you understand how to do it, it’s sort of easier’. Finn touches his upper arm and says, ‘Yeah, which muscle to turn
on’ and I say, ‘Yeah, and how the muscles apply (to playing) … See if you can do that again’. I demonstrate the two-note slur followed by two staccato motives and Finn copies. I suggest that he might find it a bit ‘crazy’ before interrupting to remind him of the fingering, as I write it in the score. He agrees and tries again – I say, ‘almost’, you’re doing pretty good’. I play on top of his hand and then take his arm to help him recreate the gestural detail; I remind him of the fingering. I ask him to ‘let go of your muscles on the way down’. I take him through the gestural detail again, slower this time and talking him through it – ‘Let go, and lift up slowly, and lift up quickly, let go, turn on …’ He is doing quite well here and I encourage him to drop into the keys using random notes thereafter. Then I ask him to implement the notes back into the overall gestures. I take his hand, cautioning him, ‘No don’t flick … just lift up slowly’. I put his hand above mine and then do a critical comparison using the ‘hand-over-hand technique’. He asks me if I can do the two staccato so that he can remind himself what they feel like; I oblige. Finn nods and says, ‘Oh yeah’. He plays much better this time and smiles when I say, ‘Oh my god, that works so well for you. I’ve never done that for a student before’. Finn gestures and says, ‘What the hand above?’ I say, ‘No, I’ve never tried it (Yay, I’m the first) … Yay, it works really well for you (Cool) … It’s because you’re feeling the sensation (yeah) rather than thinking it’ (Finn – and being told it). I gesture and continue, ‘Yeah, if you feel it, you’ll be able to reproduce it … Can you do it again? Imagine what it feels like, not what it thinks like’ (Yeah). After Finn tries again, I say, ‘Oh, that’s so much better, wow’. He smiles as I demonstrate and ask him to apply the same idea to the next four-bar fragment, using the same fingering. He paraphrases, saying that he will move his second finger up one note; I agree. He shows me – ‘instead of going …’ I show him the two-note slur and he copies before we move to ‘hand-over-hand’. He agrees that it’s very similar to previous phrases (the articulatory detail is identical – two-note slur followed by two staccato). I say, ‘Good boy’ before mention that he has a bit of tension in the top of his shoulder and I adjust him. I encourage him to let his trapezius muscle ‘go’ while activating the deltoid instead – ‘Yeah, that’s better – very good!’ I encourage him (using gesture) not to hold the sound in his shoulders, but let it out through his arm. He says, ‘Like you said at the beginning (of the lesson), let it go’ and I start singing and playing the song, which makes Finn smile. He says that his sister wants him to teach her how to play the song. I say that the song is very popular at the moment – ‘It’s like a sickness, it’s doing the rounds’ and he laughs. I show him how
to play a little of the melody with the right hand and without instruction, he uses
gesture on the third note of the first phrase – I say, ‘Ooh, gesturing’ and we all laugh.
I encourage him to keep going, using his ear – ‘You never want to lose what you are
truly good at, and that is you ear playing and your singing – those are your strengths’.
Finn agrees and tells me about how his singing lessons are going. Going back to
Jinker Ride, I point out that even though the notes change, the articulation is
consistent, and therefore so too would be the gestural detail. He agrees, saying that the
melody ‘moves higher’ (Yeah). As I demonstrate the first section of the right hand, he
is very involved physically, moving his leg and head with the music. We ‘realise’
together that the last bar is slightly different in terms of articulation, and I write
fingering into the score. Finn plays the two-note slurs, and I ask him for ‘more on the
first note’ while demonstrating at the second piano – ‘Off on off on off on off on’. I
ask him what finger would work best to finish the phrase; we concur it would be the
thumb and I adjust the score. Finn becomes very excited and animated when I say to
Sarah, ‘I can’t believe the change in him Sarah. I can just feel it, it feels completely
different to the end of last year’. Sarah suggests that it could be because of the amount
of percussion he is doing, and I say that I think he is ‘connecting’ better. Finn
suggests that maybe ‘the wire wasn’t connected’, but I say, ‘No, I think the
foundations were there, sometimes it takes longer to turn on (Sarah –
developmentally), yeah, physically; developmentally’. Finn paraphrases, ‘You’re
saying I had the plan, but I hadn’t done it yet’ and I agree. I say, ‘Playing the piano is
not a mental activity, it’s a physical activity (yeah) that is helped mentally (Mmm),
and sometimes people take longer to develop physically. Some kids and adults go
through life and they have no idea of their body. Their body to them, is just a vessel
for their brain, but you can’t play piano with just your brain’. Finn says, ‘It also
requires your fingers and your arms, and your feet use the pedals’. I say, ‘It’s
everything’ and he agrees. I ask him to stand up and I play Jinker Ride hands together,
saying, ‘The way you move on the keys …’ Finn says, ‘It repeats’, and I laugh,
explaining that I decided to play it again, as I wasn’t happy with my first attempt. I
say, ‘For me to play well, I need to know the notes well (Finn – yeah, ‘cause if you
don’t …), and that’s what you as well; all musicians. In order to switch off and know
the gestures, what do you have to do first? (Finn – you have to know the notes) …
you have to learn the notes, then you ‘gesturise’ it’. It’s really interesting to note here
that Finn is having some difficulty maintaining his balance while he stands, and
actually almost falls over a couple of times. I make the analogy that it’s like marinating in cooking – ‘You start with the ingredients, you marinate it, and then you serve, but if you haven’t done the lead up properly, you can never feel like, oh isn’t this fabulous, I’ve cooked all this lovely stuff, (instead) you’re sort of thinking, oh god, I didn’t have time to cook the beef properly, it’s probably raw, and you’re sort of sitting there on edge hoping someone doesn’t get poisoned. So it’s like being a chef – if you’re really confident that you’ve done your best, you can go, ‘Oh, I know I’m so good, I’m the best cook in the world’. So it’s like that with piano …’ I sit down and play the first six bars of Jinker Ride before stopping, saying that that is all I know confidently (without the score) because that’s all I memorised when I was doing it with him. I go on to say, ‘You read the notes, you stay with the notes, you don’t memorised (I move my head down), keep looking at the notes, you texturise and gesturise, then you will start to commit it to memory, just by doing it over and over (Finn agrees, but I think I’m losing him a little here), and then that’s when you can truly just sort of … (I start playing the right hand of Jinker Ride). You don’t have to go (I play the right hand slowly while exaggerating on/off gestures) … you practice until it becomes automated’. I go on to suggest that if one spends the time preparing well, it will all ‘happen’, rather than having a ‘mad rush’ two weeks before the concert to ‘learn’ everything. I explain that because piano playing is such a physical thing, you need time for these skills to develop. It very much sounds like I am describing the cognitive – associative – autonomous stages of skill acquisition here: (http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/learning-process-when-acquiring-motor-skills-similar-for-all-individuals). I go on to simulate how I might ‘digest’ the gestural movement of the right hand, pointing out that I’m feeling rather than looking at what I’m doing, incorporating critical comparison and ‘hand-over-hand’ as I practice my skills towards an optimal result. I ask Finn to note how I’m being my own teacher and encourage him to work independently. I praise him for learning what he has, and encourage him to keep going with it. In retrospect, what I should have done was set him a smaller, more definitive goal of how much to learn, as at this point I suggest that we move straight on to scales without any further feedback. I say that I’m really impressed how well he picked up what we were just doing. I suggest that he plays A Major this week and Finn plays the right hand 1 octave. I suggest that we set the metronome on 120 and I praise him when he says he remembers the tempo from two weeks ago. He plays the right hand, one note per beat, first one and then two
octaves. I ask him not to overlap the tones. He tries again as I adjust his arm and tilt his trunk forwards, saying, ‘Feel like you’re over the notes’. While standing, I demonstrate and remind him not to sit back, but to lean over the notes without pushing. He plays the right hand again and I adjust his elbow outwards, encouraging him to let go of his trapezius while switching on the deltoid. As he plays, I say, ‘Lovely clarity, good boy. Lean into the notes – hear the sound changes?’ While I shouldn’t be surprised, it actually does! Finn falters with the fingering here, so I ask him to repeat the descending segment of the scale. As he plays, I adjust his elbow, while tilting him forwards. I flop his arm around and he smiles. He plays descending while I hold him in position, praising him for keeping his shoulder joint nice and loose. I ask him to play the primary and secondary chords of A Major with the left hand. I give him the pencil and he writes in the chord names. I remind him of capital for A Major and while I type on the computer, he finds chord 2, ‘reminding’ himself that it would be lowercase b m. He continues to find the chords, deriving them from the A Major scale and writing them in independently. I stand back and observe, reminding him that in Major keys, chords 2, 3 and 6 are always minor and giving a hint for diminished. I say, ‘Well done Finn, you’re really picking this up well’ before referring him the circle of fifths handout, suggesting that he may have seen this before on YouTube, as I occasionally send interesting links. He realises that the next key to cover would be E Major, and we briefly talk about enharmonic equivalents, referring to B/C-flat Major. Finn experiments with this concept at the keyboard while I give feedback. I give him the handout for future reference, and then show him on the second piano the circle of fifths, giving the tonic of each Major key; he seems to understand. I then play through one octave of each of these; I can tell he understands because he prompts me when I pause to remember C# Major. I say that western harmony is built on the circle of fifths. I remind him to play his scales, two octaves, MM crotchet = 120. I suggest that we move on to All of Me. After discussing which version to learn, I sight-read the accompaniment while Finn sings. The accompaniment seems very ‘busy’, but Finn is clearly loving the experience and turns to Sarah a couple of times. As we finish, he rubs his hands together, saying, ‘That was awesome! So cool!’ Sarah asks if it’s achievable for the concert, and I say yes, though I go on to demonstrate how we might simplify some sections, as he will need to sing too. I ask him to show me the beginning of the piece – he plays the right hand open fifths and sixths and left hand triads in root position. I demonstrate and ask him to
simplify the notes and rhythm of the left hand, which he copies. I briefly give him feedback on the fingering and referring to his hand shape. I ask him if he wants to look like a spider on TV; he laughs as I help him adjust. We take out his ladybug, and I use it to coach his hand, wrist and elbow positions. I ask him to use the fifth finger for the right hand top notes, reminding him not to twist, but to ‘move your thumb back and your fifth finger in, so you don’t end up twisting, because twisting will make you stiff’. When I say that it’s time to finish, Finn does a pretend sad face. I remind him to play single notes in the left hand and right hand ‘no spiders’. I demonstrate what happens to my shoulder when I twist and lead with the thumb instead of the fifth finger – ‘That’s why we ride bicycles like this and not like this, because it doesn’t fit the hand. OK, so you want to be ergonomic on piano. It looks better and it feels better (Finn – and it sounds better’).

Lesson 4: 15 March 2014

Reviewed 18 February and 1 March 2015

The lesson starts with Finn working with his ladybug and we eat chocolates. I ask him how his week was, and he says he’s pretty happy, as there is only 3 weeks of school until holidays. Finn says, ‘I’ve almost done a quarter of year 8’. I ask him how piano is going and he says, ‘Yeah, it’s good. I finished Nocturne’. I ask if I can hear it and he agrees, saying, ‘I just think now it needs to … make sure it’s all correct … I know all the notes and stuff, but …’ Sarah says, ‘Now you’ve got to work on … what? … Once you know the notes … What comes next after the notes?’ Finn says, ‘Well, playing it perfect kind of … Not making any mistakes with the notes … then what about gestures’. I ask Finn, ‘Why do we do gestures?’ He says, ‘Well it makes it sound nice’. I reply, ‘Makes it sound expressive’. He asks me if he is sitting optimally. When I praise him for taking greater responsibility, he smiles and ‘drums’ his thighs; Sarah laughs. Finn plays Nocturne hands together as I come to sit down. While he plays with pleasing accuracy, he is playing the piece without finger legato or tonal variation, despite receiving feedback to the contrary. He also avoids looking at the score. The only time he does, his playing falters. The final page isn’t fluent, though mostly accurate and he stops playing around the second-last line. He says that he’s not sure if the notes are correct as it ‘doesn’t sound right’. I ask him to stand up for me and I play the last two lines, pointing out that the top note is E flat rather than G. Finn tries to correct himself, but puts the hands together without really having
much idea what was wrong in the first place. I help him correct the sixth – D to B flat, writing them into the score. He first tries D and E flat, then D and D flat, before I correct him again. He tells me that he thought I said D flat, not B flat. I ask him to play the last half page again, asking him to drop out the left hand. I check his fingering and notes. I correct some obvious fingering errors as he plays and write a couple of others in the score, mentioning that the fingering choices need to reflect the principle of legato touch in phrases. He asks me if the last line is correct, so I check that and ask him to maintain legato here too. Thereafter, I stand, asking him to roll his shoulders back while I give him a two-note slur to copy. After his imitation, I add the high G, pointing out a ‘swing back’ movement, thereby avoiding the need to stretch. I then demonstrate the double rotary movement inherent within these notes, but he is having difficulty maintaining accuracy of fingering here. I point out that if he keeps his fifth finger flat, he ‘won’t have the right angle’ (to roll). Further, I point out that his fourth finger is actually facing away from the subsequent note when the fifth finger is flat, and ‘that’s when you’ll have to stretch or use a different finger, and a different finger’s going to be no good, because it interrupts what’s happening next’, meaning that it would make twisting the wrist more likely. I ask him to copy G–E flat, before adding B flat and then illustrating the inherent double rotary movement from B flat to G as the sequence continues. While he uses his thumb instead of finger 2 at first, he does get there – ‘very good’ and Finn smiles. I demonstrate and ask him to add the G below the E flat next. He struggles a little here, as his default position is to stretch and avoid finger legato. I remind him to play legato, pointing out that he has a very large hand, yet he tends to lift unnecessarily. I suggest that if he holds his fingers flat, it is more difficult to achieve a wider, more flexible span. I ascertain how big his hand span is and remind him that flat fingers mean no flexibility in the finger joints. Finn paraphrases what I say based on his own observation regarding flat and curved fingers. I go on to say that if he were to reach with the fourth (flat) finger, then the second finger would go into over-extension too, causing tension up the arm. Finn says that it doesn’t look or sound good and I agree, referring to them as noodle/crazy hands and we both laugh. He plays again, and does better, though I remind him to maintain legato, and not ‘lift’. I ask him to hold the G while rocking to the right, before rocking back to the left. He keeps trying – it’s challenging for him, but he does better when I ask him not to lead with the thumb (think of your fourth finger and then pop your thumb into that). I praise him for not twisting in with the thumb when it’s not
necessary. As an experiment, I ask him to play his thumb further forward to feel the discomfort before asking him to play his thumb on the edge of the key as before. I ask him to take the thumb ‘out’ momentarily, and then we move to emphasising ‘the looser you are, the wider you’ll be able to stretch. Make all your fingers and muscles elastic …’ Finn seems surprised, and does his own experiment, first loose and then stiff. We start with fingers 4 and 5 again, before adding the thumb back in, but I point out to Finn that the way he is over-extending his second and third fingers would indicate he is stiff. He tries a couple of times, before he says, ‘Oh, I realised before why the fingers can’t stretch as much, because when my muscles are holding it (tightly), it’s not going to move’. I say, ‘That’s right’ and Finn nods. He plays again and I work to adjust him, essentially ‘turning off’ his second finger as he moves from fingers 5 to 4. Further, I ask him not to ‘widen’ the hand, but rather ‘fit’ into the notes while keeping the thumb from becoming stiff. I ask him to leave out his thumb ‘for now’ and we continue to experiment. Taking a step back, we start to review the soft/loud aspect of the G–E flat, using double rotary movement. He keeps trying and I remind him not to open out his hand into over-extension. I ask him to feel my forearm as I compare and contrast a loose forearm/tight forearm due to over-extension of the fingers. As I ask him to ‘roll’ on the notes, he tells me that he could feel my forearm was thin at first, but then when my fingers went into over-extension, my forearm muscles ‘got bigger’. I agree, saying that he should avoid that, as over-extension of the fingers causes all the muscles to tighten around the tendons that work the fingers, causing playing to become more difficult. He asks me if it’s bad, and I say that it’s bad for you and the piano. He seems surprised when I suggest that stiffness can lead to long-term damage of the arms due to muscle overuse. We repeat the two-note slur from G to E flat, noticing that there is no need to do anything more than what is physically required. I make the analogy of walking down the street in a relaxed way rather than in an exaggerated manner (‘that’s too exhausting’), which is quite funny. When I say that there are quite a few problems in terms of notational accuracy on the last page, Finn grimaces and agrees – ‘You need to separate the hands on the last page and work out what your notes are’ (Mmm). I say that I can go through the notes with him, but it will take time (out of the lesson) and I would rather work with him to improve the first page. I ask him to stand up so that I can show him a few things that he could improve straight away – I show him how to pedal the chromatic transition with a ritardando. He asks me if he pedals after each chord and I concur. He tries, but
is unsuccessful, so I ask him to stand and I demonstrate (lift – down, etc.). When he
says he needs to slow down, I agree and say, ‘Pretend (that) it’s not even part of the
song’. He does better, but the notes suffer from a little inaccuracy when compared to
before. He plays again, but doesn’t refer to the score and it becomes apparent that he
is not using the written fingering in the left hand, causing him to twist. I review the
left-hand fingering with him, reminding him not to twist, and avoid ‘leading with the
thumb’; my tone is a little curt here. I say, ‘Lead with outside fingers; when you lead
with the thumb it’s the equivalent of walking like this … (I walk pigeon toed, and
Finn seems surprised with his analogy) … When you lead with your thumb, you end
up leading with your toes, instead of leading with your heels ‘(I continue to
demonstrate). Finn says, ‘Oh’ and I continue, ‘Your hands are not made to lead with
your thumbs – your hands are made to lead with the outsides of your hands where
your elbows are’. I show him as I speak and he starts experimenting with his own
arms. I continue to gesture and say, ‘When you play the piano, we don’t reach in, we
reach out … (We both smile at each other) … and that’s why the fingering is designed
that way, to stop you from doing that. You’ll have to do it though; you’ll need to go
through this again (I point to the last page and Finn agrees) … fix up the pedalling
and the fingering. He starts playing with hands together and the pedal and I ask him to
play the left hand alone. He plays the left hand and pedal while I put a sticky note on
the fragment I would like him to practise. I ask him how his pedalling is going there –
‘Are you doing a good pedal there?’ (It sounds quite ok in retrospect). He says no and
tries again, but I pull him up after the first chord, saying, ‘No, you’ve got the
fingering wrong already’. Finn looks defeated. I start to become frustrated, turn and
walk away, saying, ‘Try to just stop what you’re doing and relearn … no stop …
relearn it … Just stop what you’re doing and relearn it’. Finn peers at the score and
says, ‘Ah’. He pauses and then tries again, quite well this time. I say, ‘Now that’s
what you need to do over here as well (I point to page three) … so get out of your
hands and onto the page and see what’s going on, OK? (Finn nods) … Otherwise, this
piece will either go one way or another. It will either stay where it is, or … Get up
from here, and start relearning. I know that you know it, but it’s all a bit scrambled,
especially on the third page. So you’ll have to stop looking at your hands, and start
looking at the music again (Finn nods). You haven’t done a bad job (Yep), this is
normal for people – they sort of get to a certain point with the music, and they can’t
get from stage 1 to 2 unless they do something new. I click my fingers and Finn nods
again. OK? Finn nods and says, ‘So I have to … Oh, so maybe like finish the test but you have to … finalise it … before moving on to the next part’. We both nod and I say, ‘So make sure what I’m telling you to do doesn’t go in one ear and out the other, and doesn’t get done (Finn nods). It’s a bit like … (I go on to describe a half finished house with the analogy of saving some money …). This seems a bit pointless to be honest, and describing the stages of motor skill acquisition would have made so much more sense! I say, ‘You’ve come so far with it, please … I’m begging you; don’t leave it half done. Please? We have an understanding? (Yes) Please, you’ve done so much good, I can actually teach you something (Finn nods) … But we’ve got to attend to the notes, so that we can … Mmm-hmm’. I talk Finn through what we have covered in the lesson so far – the ending, the notes here and the fingering (page three), Finn says the chords on page two, and I say the pedal there too. Finn does a quick verbal review of how he will do the pedal and I say, ‘Look, I’m even writing these fingers in here for you’. Perhaps with Finn, this needs to be done before starting the piece. As I write the fingering into the score, Finn plays the right hand. He corrects me at one point (thank you) and I encourage him not to over-extend his whole hand. I then realise that playing the fifth finger on the black note is making him ‘reach’, so I suggest that he use fourth finger. After altering the score, I further alter another spot, saying, ‘It’s going to suit your hand better’. Finn reads the score and implements this fingering – I put his shoulders and say, ‘Good boy, Well Done’. I go further, demonstrating the next part while saying the fingering: 1 5 4 3-1, and Finn say, ‘That sounds nice’. I say, ‘Thank you – you can do that too, just by using your gesture’. I take his hand, loosen his wrist, encourage him to soften his thumb, and finger by finger, I encourage him to release the muscles of the previous finger, in this case the large thumb muscle when moving from 1 to 5. I do a critical comparison of moving from 1 to 5 with a loose thumb and without a loose thumb, and ask Finn to feel each variation (‘this is what you do’). He smiles, nods and I ask him if he can do that/not do that! As he plays, he feels his own thumb with the other hand. I praise him and then ask him to roll onto the fifth finger faster for a louder sound. He tries quite well, and I ask him not to collapse his (fifth) fingertip, lest he will ‘lose sound’. As he aims to firm up the fifth finger joint, he tends to tighten his whole hand, which I ask him to avoid. I kneel beside him, and we work on the firming up fifth finger while ‘letting go’ of all other fingers. He finds this combination very challenging, but we continue to experiment. After a while, I turn his palm over and describe that when the fifth
finger plays, ‘this’ muscle is strong, not this one (the thumb) – ‘You don’t have to make all muscles strong to play one finger (Yep)’. I ask him to feel the condition of the muscles on either side of my hand as I play again, both optimal and less than optimal. He clearly understands what I’m saying, but it’s the actual physical implementation that is challenging for him. Nonetheless, on his next attempt he is able to reproduce the muscular combination well – I say, ‘Oh, very good boy’ and he says, ‘Yay!’ I remind him that we need good fine motor skills to play piano well, and that’s what we are really aiming to improve here. I ask him to stand as I demonstrate the first phrase with hands together, rolling upwards on the last note of the melodic line. I say, ‘So that’s your first phrase, so roll from this one to that one’, meaning the first B flat to E flat of the melody. Finn sits down and plays, and I ask him if he can apply the same idea as the upward two-note gesture covered earlier in the piece, and then if he can let go of the grasp reflex in his fingers immediately after impact with the key-bed. I praise him (Good!) when he does get there. When he plays the first B flat louder than the prevailing E flat, I say that ‘No, you’re playing this one louder than this one, and we want the opposite’. He keeps trying, and I say, ‘Finn, you’ll have to play the thumb softer, look (I begin to demonstrate); feel the bottom of that key after you’ve played it, then rotate to the right’. He does so and I enthusiastically say, ‘Good! Now make sure you don’t collapse all the joints in the fifth finger. He asks me about what I mean, and I go on to demonstrate and asking him to keep the distal joint of the fifth finger rounded and firm. He ‘makes’ a hand shape, but the grasp response is strong, and the fingers tend to over-activate. I show him again, talking him through each step; ‘So go like this … so you play that one softly (B flat) rotate, the brace the end of the fifth finger, let everything else go loose’. He does a good job and I say, ‘Good, excellent’. I say worriedly, ‘Will you remember all this? (Finn – I think so) … It’s crucial that you do; the piece won’t improve otherwise’. He takes a pencil and I sit down and watch. He decides that it might be a good idea to write in some gestural choreography – ‘I’m just trying to think of the symbol’. He asks me for advice and thinks a little more. After he finishes, I say, ‘Mate, that’s good’. I take the pencil and as I draw the shapes, I say that sometimes I come down, rotate to the left and then rotate to the right. Finn appears to understand, and I demonstrate while pertaining to each step in the sequence. I ask him to try that idea – ‘You’re on the right track’. He tries the opening right hand sixth again, and I say that it’s good, but ask her not to brace the thumb as he plays the fifth finger (‘You don’t
need the thumb’). After his next trial seems to work, I say, ‘Lovely, and you get this softer, more soulful sound. If you’ve got tension in the limbs (I gesture/dramatise), you won’t get a good sound. (Finn nods) … You’ll get this fake sound’, after which I demonstrate both ‘versions’. I continue, ‘It’s so simple, yet so tricky’. Finn tries again, but I tell him that his thumb was louder than his fifth finger. At the second piano, I take him through each step – ‘So play this, rotate to the left, and as you play the fifth finger, let the other side of your hand go loose; no you thumb’s still braced. He keeps trying and I eventually exclaim, ‘Good! That’s it! I saw all the muscles go…. It was like they’d turned off, that’s it (Finn slaps his legs excitedly – except for the fifth one) … Yeah you don’t need all the fingers to play (Finn – ‘Yeah, ‘cause that’s overusing them’). I excitedly agree. We move on, and I demonstrate rocking to the left and in multiple directions within the opening melody before rolling forward on the E flat. Finn tries, and he has a basic concept there. To enhance the decrescendo at the end of the phrase, I say, ‘Now he’s a trick – we’re going to get softer at the end of the phrase, so rather than me saying get softer …’, finishing with saying roll to the penultimate F quickly before rolling slowly forward and up to the final E flat. I demonstrate again, referencing to each ‘step’ along the way. He tries and does quite well, but I immediately say, ‘OK good you rolled too slowly and you missed the note, good boy’. Seems a little confusing? Finn says, ‘Oh yeah’ quietly. I play F to E flat again, saying, ‘Quick one, and then a slow one’. When the second note doesn’t sound, we both agree that it was ‘too soft’. He tries again, after which I demonstrate, saying, ‘Don’t start rolling up before you need too; stay down, then roll up when you need the note’. He tries again, but rolls up too early – ‘OK, you’re starting to roll up too early, that’s why it’s too soft’. He nods and tries again, but I criticise him having an over-activated hand shape – ‘Hey, get rid of that thing’, but at least I make a joke of it. He tries again, before I take his hand, saying, ‘Play this (F), don’t move, then roll up (E flat)’. Finn says, ‘Ah yeah’. He tries again, but I say, ‘If you look in the video, you’re actually rolling the whole time’. This would probably been a good opportunity to use visual feedback. Nonetheless, I do a critical comparison – ‘this is you … and this is me …’ That seems to work and I say, ‘Good Finn, that’s it!’ Finn smiles. I ask him to put ‘those’ together, demonstrating the sequence and all associated micro-movements. He tries, but doesn’t get far, as he plays the first B flat louder than the following G. I suggest that he is ‘stiffening on the thumb, that’s why it’s too loud’. He tries again, and does well, though he rolls up too soon on the final E flat and therefore it doesn’t
sound. He plays again, and shows improvement. I pat him on the shoulder and say, ‘Wow! There we have it – the expressive sound’. Finn smiles and says, ‘It sounds nice’. I say, ‘It sounds lovely’ before retorting, ‘You’ve got so much work to do, honestly’. I seemed to cut Finn off from what he was going to say (and then it repeats …) I continue, ‘The whole piece has to be worked out’ and Finn nods slowly. ‘The good thing is that now you’re on to it, sorry to turn that into a negative (I’m clicking my fingers here and Finn makes no response) … now that you’re on to it, you’ll know what to listen for and how the gestures make the sound. You’ve got to stop gripping and overusing your muscles. (Finn nods) … It’s sort of been holding you back for a number of years, but now you’re at the stage where you understanding what I’m saying, and you’ll find that you’ll accelerate quite quickly. You’re taking responsibility for your own learning, that’s a huge step (Finn nods). You understand that fingering is the key to gesture, so the fingering and notes have to be set (Finn – before you can move on) … Yeah, and eventually they start to tumble together (I gesture and roll my hands), and everything gets done at once (Oh), but in the early days, it’s quite slow. Finn nods again. We spent the whole lesson on this piece, but I hope it was worth it (Finn nods). I feel like you’ve come a long way even today. Finn agrees. It probably doesn’t seem like it because I was no, no, no, but it’s crucial, otherwise you’ll be like that house in the street that’s half finished … You want to finish this one, you’ve come so far’. Finn nods and says, ‘I like this piece’ and I say, ‘It suits you’. Finn starts to say, ‘I like all the … like …’ before I interrupt and tell him that his left hand sounds a bit lumpy. I demonstrate, playing the left hand with a heavy thumb, before suggesting that he leads with the outside of his hand and roll up on the thumb. As I demonstrate, I ask him what he thinks a heavy thumb does to the flow of the piece. I agree when he says, ‘It stops it a bit’. I say that it sounds like a tug of war and we both laugh. As I demonstrate, I ask him to show me the left hand. He plays first without and then with the sustain pedal. I ask him to watch and see how I ‘drop and roll’ – ‘Why would I do that?’ Finn says, ‘It just flows well I think’. I shake my head no (!) and say, ‘The drop generates momentum, and more momentum equals more volume’. I demonstrate again, and then ask him to try ‘that idea’. He tries, but after a while, I pull him up and say that he is now ‘detaching everything’, i.e. not playing legato. I demonstrate and ask him to ‘hang on to the thumb’ before rolling to the next note – ‘hold onto it, roll … hold onto it, roll … hold on to it, roll’. I go on to play hands together, adding a turn. I say, ‘It’s no accident that mine sounds like that.'
It’s not because I’m talented. It’s because I can manipulate the sound at a more sophisticated level than you, at the moment. (Yeah) … That’s why I’m teaching you’. Finn says, ‘Yeah, a couple of minutes ago, you mentioned that when you get more talented at it, it starts to come together (I interrupt here) … does that mean therefore you learn quicker?’ I say, ‘It took me two years to learn how to play properly, and I was a lot older than you. Well it was more than two years, but for two years my teacher was like (I make an angry grimace) … I could tell, I just wasn’t getting it (Finn – 2 years to understand?) … I just couldn’t get it, I was like, what are you talking about? For me, music was all about my head, and then when I understood that it was about the body, and the roly-poly, and the gestures, and how you land on one note and then roll to the next, and don’t grip the muscles (I am moving and gesticulating a lot here) … You start to, make a better sound’. Finn nods. As the lesson ends, Finn thanks me for giving him the ladybug, and I say, ‘Good lesson!’

Lesson 5: 22 March 2014

Reviewed 2 and 4 March 2016

- The lesson starts talking about food and how Finn’s practice went during the week. Finn opens his music and asks me about some notes he is unsure of as they ‘don’t sound right’, but on closer inspection, they are (part of a B-flat chord). I ask if I can hear Nocturne from the beginning. He adjusts the chair and asks me if it’s OK. Sarah says that he should start to know that now. I ask him how it feels, ‘Does it feel too close?’ Finn says that he feels a little too far away, so I suggest that he move the chair forward a bit. There is some discussion regarding the cost of the piano chairs, general maintenance, university study and the Loreto school dance. After about 7 minutes of conversation, Finn plays Nocturne with hands together. I stop him after the end of the first section and say that it’s improved a lot, though ‘I wouldn’t say it was anywhere near finished’. Finn nods and says, ‘Yeah’. I carry on to say that there was ‘one’ part in there, where the tone was excellent. I sit down and start playing, thereafter saying that ‘basically’ the right hand needs to be louder than the left hand. I take down the lid of the piano, asking him if he is left- or right-handed (right). I demonstrate, asking him to make a fist and tap the right hand louder than the left hand. Finn is worried he will break the piano lid, but I reassure him that he won’t. Sarah reminds me about the inverted cymbal, and then I ask Finn to try and get the hands to ‘land at the same time’. Thereafter, I lift the piano lid and demonstrate, asking Finn to transfer that
concept to the keys. He has mixed success, so we work on the right hand as per last week, trying to get the first B flat softer than the second G, ‘releasing muscles on impact’. He continues to try, and then I stand and come over to manipulate his hand, starting with releasing lateral wrist tension. After I move his hand, Finn tries for himself, but he is still finding the double rotary movement awkward. I take his hand again, asking him to ‘release his hand on the way (through)’. After he tries a few more times, I demonstrate again, suggesting that he aim to play the G with the fifth finger further out towards the edge of the key. He tries again, and I ask him to make the tip of his fifth finger firmer, landing on the G faster (compared to the B flat). I then ask him ‘to put in a soft E flat’ in the left hand. He does well (good boy) and then continues with hands together. I stop him and demonstrate the gestural detail of the last part of phrase 1. Finn copies. He is much more refined with this when compared to last lesson. I demonstrate the right hand again, doing a critical comparison, and referring to ‘rocking’ from note to note without the F–G notes being too soft. Finn tries, but I criticise him for starting louder and then fading to soft too quickly. He tries again as I coach him verbally, he does better this time, but I tell him that the final E flat was too soft. Using gesture and vocalisation, I critically compare how a singer would shape the same phrase, before turning back to the piano and referring to the final E flat ‘matching’ the previous F, though my language could certainly be more clear (how soft is that, how soft is that, how soft is that, how soft is that). ‘Listen to how soft it’s become, and then move in a way that’s going to meet … how soft it might be if you were singing it’. Finn appears distracted here. I prompt him to try to the F–E flat slur again – it’s quite good, though I tell him it’s ‘too soft compared to the other note’. What is clear is that he is much more skilled than last lesson. He tries again and I say that it’s good. I ask him, ‘If it’s too soft, what does that mean? That it’s too soft, or that you’ve moved too slowly?’ Finn says, ‘Well, I think I’ve moved too slow and haven’t like, put enough pressure on the note. I concur and demonstrate the phrase again. He nods and tries himself, though I say that the F–E flat ‘didn’t sound any different, so roll forwards slowly’. He tries again, better this time and I say, ‘That’s lovely’. I then ask him use the previous notes to crescendo towards the penultimate F. He nods and I demonstrate the phrase shape vocally. Finn plays as I coach ‘the steps’ – he does quite well. He plays again, but this time he comes in too loudly with the second note of the phrase (F). I say, ‘No, you went (demonstrates vocally) and it creates like …’, but I don’t finish, instead playing the first phrase again.
with Finn joining in too. I say, ‘Good boy’ before moving to the second phrase. Finn
plays the second phrase, and though looking a little stilted, the sound is quite good
overall – ‘Lovely mate’. He moves to phrases 3 and 4 as I coach the fingering. As he
finishes, I say, ‘Yeah, that’s really improved Finn. The challenge for you will be, can
you do that when you’ve got the other hand going’. He says, ‘Yeah, cause … yeah’. I
reiterate that though he has improved, there is still quite a lot of work to do. He seems
disappointed and asks me when the next concert is, clearly worried. I say that the
concert is in June, but there is another concert in May for, ‘kids who have been
working hard … whether that includes you is up to you’. He nods and I say, ‘Have
you been working hard?’ He tilts his head from side to side and says, ‘Yeah I guess …
I don’t know’. I ask him how many pieces he has learnt. When he answers, ‘One, kind
of’, I say, ‘That’s not working hard, that’s working steadily’. He seems very surprised
when I say that a couple of students have 6 pieces to play and will split them between
the two concerts. I think that I have rattled his confidence a little, but go on to say,
‘You can do this, you’ve improved so much, please don’t get all negative. I’m just
trying to give you a push – Come on!’ Finn goes from slouch to sitting tall and stops
twiddling his fingers. I go on to say that I chastised at a couple of students earlier
today as they were starting to take me being nice for granted – ‘No, it’s not good
enough’. Finn nods. We move on and I show him how to ‘catch’ the note before the
wide interval with the pedal. I ask him to try, which he does. I coach him with a
forward roll to soften the end of the phrase, before adding the change of pedal too. We
start the first phrase of the piece again, and I point out that he is not joining the first
two notes legato. He tries to joint them with the pedal, but I ask him to use the fingers
instead. I then say that he is ‘landing awkwardly’ on the G – ‘If you don’t land on you
(finger) tip, you won’t have the force to go into the key’. I show him how ‘all the
force goes onto the floor’ when the G is played with a flat finger. I ask him to try
again, but pull him up, saying that his thumb was louder than the fifth finger. He tries
again, with a good result. I ask him if he can form a kinaesthetic image of ‘what that
looked and felt like’. He tries again, but I say that his ‘tone has gone all soft again’.
He tries the first two notes again, and I remind him to angle the fifth finger so that it
makes contact with the edge of the white key (G). After he tries again, I say that I can
hear a gap between the two notes, and the thumb is louder than the fifth finger. He
tries again, with success, and I ask him, ‘Good, now what did you do differently
there? Because, rather than me correcting you, you’ve got to start to take
responsibility. How am I actually producing that sound? Finn correctly ‘explains’ what he is supposed to be doing, and I criticise him for not ‘doing that every time’. He tries again, and again, I pull him up for ‘going too slowly to the right’. He tries again, and I demonstrate, before showing him ‘what it feels like’ by playing the two notes on the top of his shoulder. I then critically compare what I do with what he does. He seems to do better this time, and I remind him to play closer to the edge of the white key. After he plays again, I say, ‘Good, now pretend that you’re looking at yourself in the mirror; try it again’ and Finn nods. I exit the room briefly and Sarah says, ‘Too soft’. As I return, I ask him to put the hands back together. He doesn’t get far, before I say, ‘OK, good, but you forgot to lift and then drop and roll for the second phrase’. Finn drops his head – I can tell he’s becoming worried that he ‘isn’t doing it right’. I exit again (?), and Finn plays hands together; Sarah tells him a couple of times when the upper notes are too soft and she ‘can’t hear it’. I come back in and say, ‘No no no no no, Finn when you put the pedal down, you always do this, I’m not sure why, when you put the pedal down, your fingers start patting all the notes (Finn – and when I don’t) … and all the legato goes; you can’t play piano like that, it’s not a xylophone … you don’t play it like this (gestures), you need legato’. I can sense the frustration in my voice. As I sit at the second piano, I demonstrate hands together saying, ‘Lift … lift … everything’s connected except this lift … Just leave out the pedal maybe’. Finn starts playing hands together, but doesn’t lift at the end of the first phrase, so I interrupt, saying, ‘Look …’ Finn clearly appears disheartened. I remind him via demonstration of the right hand to lift at the end of phrase one. I ask him to ‘just do your right hand’. He plays the first two notes but I correct him, saying that the first note (B flat) is too loud. He tries again and I say, ‘good’. He does lift at the end of the phrase, but plays the final E flat too loud – ‘No, that note’s supposed to be soft Finn’. I demonstrate and he copies with success, however he doesn’t connect the first two notes of the next phrase, so we review that. I say, ‘OK good’, but then with an air of slight condescension, ‘Now see all those lifts that you’re doing in the right hand (Finn nods), when you put the left hand in, they’ve still got to be there (Finn nods) … you’re not doing that, (finger clicks) and that’s what you need to practise. You need to be on that piano all the time, rehearsing this; it won’t happen. You’re just trying to play handball when it’s the Olympic Games. It’s not handball, otherwise you’ll just play handball. (Finn nods) … If you want to be in the Olympic Games, you have to train for the Olympic Games’. I play the first phrase with hands together; Finn starts
to join in with the right hand. I say, ‘So now add your other hand back in … but you
know you’ve got to think with two sides of your head, not one or the other, it’s both
sides. That’s what piano is’. Finn nods, but his eyes show that he feels defeated. He
starts playing hands together, but is very cautious; I help him to lift his right hand at
the end of phrase 1. Without giving any positive feedback, I start playing the fourth
phrase of the first section, criticising him for not playing smoothly. He ‘corrects’ it,
but I give no feedback at all, instead saying, ‘So when you put the other hand in,
you’ve got to be thinking about that, and do it (Finn nods and takes a deep breath) …
You’re getting all your left-hand fingering wrong now, well not all of it (Finn – some
of it) … some of it, yeah. Piano is a multi-tasking instrument, you can’t just do one or
the other; it’s both hands, and practice until you can do it fluently’. Finn nods and I
ask him how much practice he does. He answers, ‘like 45 minutes’. I ask him how
many times a week – ‘a few’. I say in a pitiful tone that he needs to be doing at least
6–8 hours a week. I go on to say (while clicking my fingers) that he started the year
really well. I say to Sarah, that this is what happens at the end of term when everyone
starts getting a bit tired and busy. She adds, ‘and exams’. Finn is looking like he’d be
anywhere else. Sarah tells me that he was practising between 7 and 8 pm every night,
but with the pressure of school exams, the less time he has for piano. She says that he
tries to ‘catch up’ on Saturday morning. I say that it ‘won’t happen’ and that Finn is
‘starting to fade away on me’. Finn is close to tears and I suggest that we try again. He
starts to play the right hand and has tears running down his face now. I remind him
that there shouldn’t be a ‘gap’ between B flat and G at the beginning of phrase 2. As
he wipes his face, I ignore his distress, and carry on, saying that the top C has to be
louder than the G as you would if you were singing the melody. After singing the
melody expressively, I say, ‘On the piano, singing louder equals moving faster’. I
play a little more of the right-hand melody, adding, ‘You’ve got to roll faster when
it’s louder’. I move to Finn’s piano, playing the right hand and demonstrating the
double rotation required. He tries and shapes the phrase well (good!) but then I correct
his fingering at the end of the phrase, asking him why we would use 4-3 instead of his
3-2. He mentions that it’s to be ready for the next phrase, but I suggest that it’s so that
it ‘fits under the hand’. I don’t think he understands, as I recorrect his fingering on the
next attempt – this time he uses his thumb on G instead of 2. He tries again as I
verbalise the fingering in real time. I ask him where that is on the score. He shows me,
and incredibly, the fingering has not been written in! After writing it in, I say that
using the thumb (there) is going to make it harder to get the ‘right’ sound. Finn nods and I say, ‘The fingering is everything … please don’t start changing the fingering. You’ve worked hard to get it there; try again’. I demonstrate the second phrase and he takes it from there. Finn plays well as we focus on the fingering and lifting at phrase ends. As he finishes, I say, ‘OK, good, now practise your left hand’. Finn nods and plays a few bars of the left hand, though many notes are inaudible. I ask him, ‘Does that sound any good though?’ Finn shakes his head and I say, ‘No’. I start playing the left hand, reminding him that it’s in triple time as I gesture and click with the right hand. I suggest that he listen to his playing while he is playing, rather than aiming for ‘the notes’; he tries again. I demonstrate the slight decrescendo for each group of three quavers, but don’t actually verbalise this request. Finn tries and say, ‘Your notes are not different though’, followed by coaching him (after a critical comparison of his loud-loud-loud) with loud-soft-soft. He tries a few times, but I correct him when he does loud-medium-loud. He struggles with a clear sound, so by way of slow demonstration, I ask him to avoid holding any notes down for longer than a quaver. Finn nods, but immediately overlaps the notes, which I quickly point out. I say, ‘The two things you need to do with the left hand are loud-soft-soft and no overlapping, or no non-overlapping’. Finn nods and I say (while ‘chopping’ my hand down on the top of the piano), ‘It’s loud-soft-soft, and a clear legato, and you practise until you can do that, and if that means pulling the hands apart and no pedal, that’s what you do. You can’t ignore it though, otherwise your piece will be like one of those houses that’s half finished that I was telling you about’. Finn nods and says, ‘Yeah’. I continue, ‘You’re starting to stop work on it now, so it’s becoming you know, a waste site. You’ve got to put life into the piece, keep working on it’. Finn nods again. I play a little of the left hand slowly, starting with the B-flat7 chord and Finn copies, albeit with overlapped tones. I say, ‘No, listen to what you’re doing’. He fixes two of the broken chords, but overlaps the fifth finger with the third broken chord (C minor). I pull him up again a few chords later. I ask him, ‘Do you hear that?’ When he says yes I say, ‘How come you don’t lift it up?’ He plays with better clarity this time, and I remind him that, ‘all of them need to be played like that’. As he nods, I continue, ‘As I said, when you put the pedal down everything goes completely haywire’. He asks me what haywire means, and I say that he uses non-legato with both hands. I sit down and demonstrate, saying, ‘You went like this …’ I play non-legato first with and then without the pedal. I tell Finn that I used to teach another student (Liam) who did that too. I suggest that,
‘it’s a percussion thing’, going on to explain the difference between the two instruments: ‘This is not a percussion instrument; you don’t play it like mallets; you’ve got to hang on to the notes’. Finn nods and there is further discussion regarding Liam, but there is a distinct lack of positive energy in the lesson now. Finn is slouched, has his arms folded and looks defeated. I try to be enthusiastic by saying, ‘How are you going with Jinker Ride?’ Finn taps his hands nervously and says, ‘I’ve been working on this (Nocturne) a bit …’ and I respond, ‘All right, well I think you need to pull your socks up a bit and try and fit some piano in, all right?’ (Franco nods). I know you’re busy with school … don’t cry over spilt milk … it’s all right. Just come on let’s get back on the road (finger clicks). It’s not like you can’t play it at all, you’re still doing fine, it’s just I can sort of see you fading away on me. Come on; yes Mark’. Finn nods and says, ‘Yes Mark’. I ask him where Jinker Ride is. I remind him that we’ve had a few good lessons on this piece and he plays the right hand, though he clearly hasn’t been practising. I ask him if he remembers the fingering. He has retained much of the gestural, tonal and articulatory detail and I say, ‘That’s actually quite good’. I demonstrate the two-note slurs for E#-F#, saying, ‘It’s quite loud there so you need more movement’. I suggest we move on, and I demonstrate the following bars of the right hand. I ask him to ‘get to the end of the page this week; both hands?’ and Finn nods. I continue, ‘That’s your assignment; you’ve got a piano exam next week, right here’. Finn smiles and nods, and Sarah says, ‘End-of-term piano exam’; I agree. I let out a big sigh and there is a long pause as we look at each other. I say, ‘Are you going to play handball or go to the Olympics?’ He says, ‘Go to the Olympics’ and I respond, ‘It’s up to you; I’ll help you but …’ I change the mood by suggesting we learn a new scale and key. I ask Finn if we have done E Major; he is looking very glum. We refer to the circle of fifths handout (4 o’clock). Finn plays the scale one octave, and then we build the primary and secondary chords of the key with the right hand. After asking him to right the chord names in, I ask him if he practises these scales and chords. When he says yes, I reply, ‘Great!’ When I remind him of the requirements, he says he hasn’t been using the metronome. I say, ‘Sounds like you’ve got a bit of work to do’ and Finn says, ‘Yep’. He continues to write in the chord names as he ‘find’ the chords with the right hand and I comment, ‘You’ve got a real strength in this area, it’s good’. Finn nods as I reiterate which keys to practise. I say, ‘Come on Finn you’ve got to keep moving, OK? You don’t just get to the middle of the term and then stop. I don’t care if you’ve got exams, you’ve got to find the time’.
ask him what he does in his spare time. When he says iPad, I suggest he, ‘Get off that iPad and get on that piano’. I show understanding that everyone gets tired at the end of term. I say that he hasn’t done anything ‘wrong’, it’s just that he needs to take things further during his home practice and ‘get so good at it that you could do it underwater, or in your sleep’. I say that while his keyboard harmony is good, he will need more practice to ‘overlearn’ the pieces, especially in terms of becoming physically adept.

Lesson 6: 5 April 2014

Reviewed 6 August 2015

- Finn makes unusual facial gestures (smiling) all through the lesson (?)
- Keyboard harmony of Say Something, all without the score
- Discussion regarding ‘Drum Line’ and other percussion activities that Finn is involved in
- Jinker Ride: Right hand he is improvising the rhythm at first, so went through the right-hand fingering and phrasing in detail. I wrote them in, but he is very slow to digest what is written; two-note slurs are well developed. I caution him not to ‘muck around’ with the score, maybe save that for your own arrangements. I set a verbal and written goal to fix up right hand this week. We went through left hand and discussed overall topography (in and out/pronation of forearm), notes ‘spot the difference’ and fingering (Finn wrote in some of these). I gave him a timeline of progress thus far. I say, ‘What will you play if you don’t have notes to play – keep pushing ahead’, I set verbal goal of doing page two separately with Finn to write in the fingering
- Gave music for Czerny Study in C, Op. 299 No. 2; I set a verbal and written goal of ‘starting the left hand’
- Nocturne: he is still playing non-legato when pedalling. I wrote in some more fingering; reviewed right hand tonal depth, tonal shape and using arm to roll through the notes; he doesn’t do this when adding left hand and then further still when adding pedal; left hand is still slow to acquire tonal control; hands separately and emphasising the technique of piano, not that of glockenspiel, singing, or drums; ‘that’s it!’; ‘usually it’s the highest note that’s the loudest’ made sense to him; really good analysis/review of phrase shape here. Finn: ‘it sounds connected and realistic’;
go through and plan the expression of every bar – it’s often more about being organised than musical or talented; singing demo where someone pokes you suddenly; have the fingering and legato in order to judge how much to roll to the next note to generate tonal shape; ‘professional amateur’; build your kinaesthetic ‘program’. He’s been busy with exams so tries to ‘shortcut’ progress instead of regular rehearsal. I give him a timeline of progress which has receded somewhat.

Lesson 7: 10 April 2014

Reviewed 7 August 2015

- Talked about Holly being in hospital; he shows genuine concern

- Czerny Study: analysed and played left hand scales/modes, referencing number of octaves and tone/semitone structure (without directly reading the score). Finn is genuinely engaged throughout this process and comments on the unique sound of each mode. During the revision process he needs no prompting to remember the structure; whole body awareness/visualisation activities for left-hand fifth finger (imaginary string attached to the wrist); he comments of upper arm muscles feeling ‘turned on’; ‘how does my body look and feel in space’; right-hand fingering and activities for forearm pronation ‘towards the mid line’; set a verbal goal for both hands up to middle section; discussed and learnt sequences; discussed ‘deactivating’ fingers that are not being used when playing right hand sixths; kinaesthetic awareness for right hand fifth finger; ‘Can you feel if you are over-extending the fingers’? Imagine the sensation between you and the fifth finger’; he acknowledges the importance of body/instrument connection; proceeds to read through the right hand notation; worked on held notes and voicing; demonstrated to Finn the ‘athletic’ components and then how that facilitates the expressive components – Finn seemed to hear where I was coming from; ‘study’ the physical aspects of the score this week

- Jinker Ride: he’s able to see (and write in) fingering correlations; played right hand page two – notes/fingering and phrasing were hesitant (often looks at his hands, is playing too fast and doesn’t seem to ‘see’ details of fingering, notes and articulation simultaneously). Finn writes in the fingering as he ‘tries’ it; Finn highlights the phrases in yellow (lifting pen/hand analogy); Google Earth analogy for seeing detail of fingering but seeing the bigger picture of phrasing (he ‘gets’ it intellectually); ‘zoom in a bit closer there’; he asks my opinion regarding fingering; exercises (on
knee) for lifting forearm without activating fingers; preparing up movement by connecting to lifting elbow and ‘fine point’ of the fifth finger; he really got it here: ‘As you lift, turn on the arm muscles not the fingers/the whole idea when lifting is to refresh the muscles/one set turns on and the other turns off, and then the swap/you keep recycling the energy’. Finn seems very engaged and offers his ‘take’ (‘their having shifts’). I set a verbal goal of first two pages hands together, but Finn seemed concerned and wanted to know when the next lesson was. He played first ½ page hands together but has difficulty combining phrasing (gestures), fingering and notes simultaneously and tends to avoid looking at the score if possible. He still doesn’t seem to see the connection between systematic (written) fingering and gestural facilitation. Again he is able to see the challenges intellectually but actually doing it is problematic. He has another go but avoids a slower tempo, misses details and becomes distracted. ‘Try not to perform it before you know it … block everything out and get the notes and fingering right/movement will then be easier to digest/movement is the key to the sound’. I demonstrated tempo adjustment and more focus is needed. Finn’s younger brother is impulsive and distractible. I demonstrate getting notes wrong and model writing in the score, tempo adjustment and ‘more practice’ and a step-by-step approach that might lead to physical comfort, gestural uptake and expressive sound. I gave him the practice test tube; discussed lesson with Sarah; they’re going away on the weekend.

- Nocturne: reviewed right hand, still had hesitations with notes and fingering, Finn writes in more fingering for the middle section. Holly and Emilio on the couch. Feel the notes rather than thinking them – ‘How might you look, how might you sound’. A short discussion with Sarah – ‘He’s becoming more aware of where his body sits in space/I do see progress there’.

Lesson 8: 26 April 2014

Reviewed 17 August 2015

- Discussion regarding the lost music for Jinker Ride, the purchase of a second-hand acoustic piano (which never has eventuated), the importance of respecting a person’s time that they give away freely, Finn’s ambitions to lead his school’s Drum Line in the years to come and whether he is ready for a performance at the workshop next week.
- *Nocturne*: he is still resistant to direction regarding fingering and gestural interplay, the tone is poetic but thin, and the playing lacks purpose, confidence and forward flow. I played the piece at the second piano, including a few mistakes; he is upset; reviewed right-hand fingering and gestural economy. ‘When you put the hands back together, you will need to do that, and if you can’t, then you have to practise more’. I wish I could make it easier for you, but you just don’t work at it. Playing more complicated music will require a different attitude and improved work ethic’. The drive to succeed is just not there at this time. ‘Having lessons doesn’t equate with long-term improvement … you have to do your own work’. I think Finn finds prioritising what needs attention difficult and he becomes overwhelmed. ‘Let’s do phrase 2 for five or 10 minutes’. While I am finding his inability to ‘think for himself’, I think that he genuinely finds it difficult to break down tasks into manageable steps, even though he has been coached previously. I worked with him on the steps to develop two bars and stressed that it was excellent that improvement was made in the lesson and that the same can steps be applied to the remaining 27 bars … it’s really the only way’. I accused him of being lazy, but he says he has been playing it – ‘practising and playing are not the same thing’. Continued to work (practise) with him on bar 3 and similar: left-hand block chords/right hand/hands together with block chords/hands together with broken chords if feeling ‘confident’. ‘Now that you are familiar with the notes, you have enough spare mental resources to turn your attention back to the sound that you are creating’. Chord naming and writing into the score, which in retrospect I probably should have done much sooner. I am getting frustrated as he continues to play either non-legato or overlaps the notes – ‘It’s just not good enough’. It’s pretty hard to hear this section of the lesson, because I call Finn out on his tendency to ‘stop and start’ his progress. ‘You have to take more responsibility for your own learning!’ 5 x 40 minutes = 200 minutes = 3 ½ hours or you won’t finish. ‘You have to be realistic about what it takes you to achieve your learning goals’. George comes back into the room – I ask Finn to demonstrate how he is to practise during the week (5 minutes each of left-hand block chords/right-hand phrase/right hand and block chords/right-hand and left-hand broken chords/tonal balance and expression). Frank discussion with George regarding what the issues are – ‘Finn needs to knuckle down and do what I ask him to do – even though we cover the practice procedures in the lesson, he seems to ‘forget’ what is required’. He has a few good weeks of lessons but for whatever reason he stops practiseing and forgets
everything quite quickly. I reinforce, as does George, what is required for Finn to move forward, and that really is a combination of practice commitment, practice strategy and greater ownership and responsibility from Finn himself (this is followed up in subsequent lessons in an inherently practical way, where Finn makes notes/learning goals in his own handwriting at the end of each lesson). ‘Wrong fingering is like wrong spelling – you’re not a bad person, but if it’s wrong, it’s wrong’. Good segment explaining (with demonstrating) how phrasing is to sound ‘like a singer’. Stressed to Finn that because of his long-term memory being stronger than his working memory, he needs much more rehearsal as the repertoire increases in difficulty – ‘it won’t happen any other way … you have so many other gifts, but when it comes to piano playing, this is what you need otherwise your self-esteem suffers’. Reviewed each of the steps that are required, not superficial practice, but an honest acknowledgement of what is required to progress – intensive practice doesn’t mean that you’re defective or not talented, it’s normal and this is what everyone goes through. Finn seems much more engaged and is facing me and is really listening to what I am telling him. He plays the piece again and I ask him to reflect – ‘were there any parts where you felt unsure of? What would be your next step? This is a hard piece, and therefore, you have to practise hard … If you don’t know the notes, you’ll never be free to be expressive; you’re using all your cognitive resources on the notes, rhythm and fingering and there’s nothing left over for the expressive elements of the piece – with intensive rehearsal, you can make everything more automated so that you don’t have to think so hard – your working memory is getting overloaded. Don’t try and take any shortcuts, because the only person you are short-changing is yourself. As the pieces get harder, there is a greater need to be thorough in the learning, rather than relying on instinct and ear alone. I’m a musician – I know what I’m talking about. Don’t waste your energy on being sad – chin up and get on with it.’ George – rather than worrying and focusing on what Mark’s going to think, just put it the effort and focus on what you have been asked to do. I think that Finn has sat and worried about not getting anywhere all week and that’s exactly what has happened. George – the best way to fix anxiety about not doing well is to just get on with the work that is required to do well.

Lesson 9: 3 May 2014

Reviewed 4 and 7 March 2016
I ask Finn how Nocturne is going and if he’s been practising. He says yes and I ask if I can listen. Sarah asks if she can video him playing. I ask Finn if he is playing at the workshop tomorrow – he says he’s not sure and Sarah says that George and the boys are going to the soccer grand final, as George had told her that he wasn’t playing (after last week’s lesson). Finn plays hands together, and while the notes are there, the playing is still hesitant and inaccurate, the tempo fluctuates, and finger legato is poor. Despite this, I say that he has improved ‘heaps’ since last week, and I ask him how he managed to achieve this. He says that he had been followed ‘steps’ and not just playing it, but partial practising specific bars. I say, ‘studying it’. I liken the process to ‘Google Earth’ where you zoom in and focus on each ‘house’. I ask Finn which part we might need to ‘zoom in on now?’ When he suggests ‘gestures’. I say, ‘Well no, you can’t do gestures if you’ve got wrong notes (Oh yeah) … You’ve got to get all the notes before you can feel comfortable’. Finn points to the score and says that he thinks he made a mistake there, and I say that there was quite a few there. I clarify, saying that the whole piece hangs together quite well now and that’s good – ‘tick!’ I point out one of the bars that he seems to be having trouble with, but Finn looks to a different spot and asks me to check the notes; all fine there. I suggest that we do one thing at a time, and direct him back to the spot that I previously referred to. I ask him to play the left hand in block chords as I write the chord names into the score in red pen. When I ask him to name some of the chords, he does so correctly and smiles proudly when I praise him – ‘Out of all the students I teach, you’ve probably got the best chord knowledge’. He seems surprised. I go on to demonstrate the left hand in broken chords, after which he does so too. I ask him to ‘roll across the notes’ so as to avoid overlapping. He does much better this time and I direct him to copy the first two notes of each chord group with a two-note slur gesture. He copies, and I ask him not to move his body per se, but rather use his arm and ‘follow through’. Interesting, he has some difficulty combining the correct notes within this context. I ask him to ‘stay in the air’ and think of the upcoming notes before coming down to play them. I then demonstrate the chords as three-note slurs, which he copies. I take his left hand and encourage him to ‘keep everything moving’. Thereafter, I ask him to use the third note of each broken chord to employ double rotary movement instead of lifting completely off the note. He has difficulty with this, as he either rolls with his body or plays solely with the fingers. I take his left forearm, encouraging rotary movement, while asking him to use his arms more in playing. While he plays, I try to encourage
this process, reiterating that the quick movement to the left is what gives the bottom note of each chord the required volume. As I demonstrate loud-soft-soft with the double rotary movement, Finn nods. He has some success and I say, ‘Good boy’. I ask him to move to the right hand. I demonstrate the right hand for those couple of bars. Finn starts to play, but then stops and asks if he should use the written fingering. I reply, saying, ‘It’s no good is it’ and he agrees. He continues to play as I write the fingering in. He asks if I’m writing it in because then it’s the same as the first section and I say, ‘yes’. Finn plays the next phrase of the right hand, as I look on. He asks if he should end on the thumb and I agree. Finn says that we should change that fingering on the first page two. As I make the corrections in the score, I praise him for raising good questions. I ask him while demonstrating if he can play the right-hand melody and block chords hands together, and he starts playing. He seems to be reading the score well now. It just reminds me how much there is contrasting between preparing the music thoroughly in terms of fingering, harmonic detail, and information regarding form and another perspective where a student’s questions do tend to arise out of solving problems in real time inside the lesson and then writing them in with minimal preparation. The latter tends to be lead to more questions coming from the student, but it is a slower process. After this time, I then ask Finn by way of demonstration to separate the chords in a broken style. After he tries for a few bars, I ask him to remember that his left hand is rolling inwards, and I move his forearm in doing so. I make the point that the right hand has its own ‘pattern’, implying the two different movement sequences of the hands. While his attempt is a little awkward looking, it is interesting that I calmly say, ‘Good. Now you would need to sit there and practice that for five minutes or so’. Finn nods his agreement and starts doing so. After this next attempt I say, ‘Good boy, so go …’ and I play the first two notes of the right hand with an expressive gesture to the left – Finn copies. After he does this, I say, ‘Now don’t move backwards and sit in the armchair … sit up’. Finn moves back and I suggest we start again, before asking him to put his stomach in and his has hyperextend his pelvis. I demonstrate and ask him not to overarch his back when I ask him to sit up, as this tends to ‘make the weight go backwards’. I demonstrate the right-hand melody again and Finn copies, after which I say, ‘That’s it. I can hear more colour in your playing. I can … it’s starting to come good’. Finn plays hands together again and I say that his right hand is lovely, but his left hand could be better thought of as a clockwise movement as I use gesture to simulate my
words. After I demonstrate the left-hand choreography, Finn tries. I come over and work his hand and wrist in a clockwise direction with a faster shift towards the bottom note, giving verbal cues of the ‘time’ (10 o’clock, 12 o’clock, etc.). Finn tries himself, and I remind him to keep his body still and move his arm; I move his whole arm clockwise, while saying, ‘10, 12, 3’. He looks quite awkward, so I ask him to ‘let go’ of his arm, which he does. I then continue and it looks far more natural. I remind Finn that he has to know his notes so well that he can concentrate on the movement that connects the notes. I say, ‘As soon as I ask you to do the circles, your notes go missing, so you’ve got to bring the two together’ (Finn – the circles and the notes). I agree and Finn nods. I say that it’s absolutely essential that you know your notes for all of this to work and Finn agrees. I go on to say, that’s why we’re doing the movement because his note knowledge has improved. I summarise his progress with each page: ‘you’ve done that well, this is good, needs more practice’. I ask him to play the left-hand broken chords again and Finn plays with the clockwise shape. I give him positive feedback and he tries again, this time I assist and say, ‘Play this one on the way up and through’, referring to the bottom note of each chord. I assist as he plays again and shake his wrist loose when finished. I go on to move his hand further, saying, ‘The clock comes around quickly there’ as he heads towards the bottom notes. We both gesture in the air, ‘round and quick’ the different velocities; I ask him to use his left arm. As he does so, I ask him not to grip. As he tries, I click and say, ‘ah uh, your notes are gone … you’ve got to keep your notes as well’. Finn agrees. He tries again, and I become very animated, ‘Yes, good boy, that’s it’. Finn smiles and nods. When he tries again, I say, ‘not as good’, as his movements weren’t as fluid, as he ‘sort of stopped sometimes’. I review the movement in the air with him and I ask him to ‘keep everything moving’. He points out that the concept we are dealing with here would also apply elsewhere in the piece. I say that the whole piece uses this same concept, and rather than me hearing the whole piece and then asking him to ‘practice’, I am showing him how to do so, ‘I’m trying to make it easy for you, even though it probably doesn’t seem like that’. I suggest that if Finn could get to know the shape of the chords without looking, then he could ‘just work on the movements; don’t let the notes hold you up’. Finn nods and says, ‘Then when we’ve been doing the movements for a long time, when we do that, we’ve got somewhere to go’. I agree, and say, ‘That’s why I got you to do these steps, so you can know the notes better, so you can do something with it … (Finn nods). Expressive and confident playing comes from
knowing what you’re doing and hard work, not from talent … (Finn smiles and nods).
You’re already talented’. He replies, ‘But you have to mix the hard work with it’, and I say, ‘You do Finn, it’s the same with all the kids. If you come tomorrow, you’ll see that all the best kids are the ones who work hard’. I say that there are some kids who will do 5 pieces, and then others who will do 1 and that’s OK, as it’s good that they get up and play something that they feel confident with. I demonstrate at his piano the Nocturne hands together and he copies. I say, ‘Well Done. Now add the pedal in, but don’t change what that feels like’. I caution him that usually when pedal is added, things start to ‘change’. I say that the pedal is ‘the last thing you put on what’s already good’. Finn says, ‘Like a cake or something’ and I agree. He plays the hands together and I get very excited when he finishes, saying, ‘Yay! Very good, very good’. Finn starts bobbing and smiles. I go on to say that while it took 20 minutes to get that one bar out of 38 or something (26), he studied that bar and ‘did it good’. I encourage him, saying, ‘So you need at least an hour’s practice a day to do this’ and Finn nods. I go on – ‘You want to give yourself a chance to do well. I want to move on and the singing and the chords.’ Finn says, ‘Like All of Me’ and I agree. I say that I want him to study it and that while I can show him what to do, it really is up to him. He says, ‘I have to do the work’. I say, ‘You’ll have to … I don’t live with you so I can’t supervise. It’s up to you, you’re old enough’. I say that when he leaves today, he has to make a real effort to retain the information that he’s gained from the lesson and apply it. I go on to say that it heartens me when Finn asks me about the fingering as he ‘never used to say stuff like that’. Finn is smiling and he asks me, ‘When you say like heartened, does that mean it makes you happy?’ I say, ‘Yeah, it makes me feel like we’re moving forward’. Finn seems very pleased with himself. I suggest we move on and apply what we’ve been doing to the next bar, left hand first. He asks me if we should try block chords first and I agree. I go to explain the F7 chord and why it only has three notes here. He plays the block chords a few times and then I ask him to ‘circle the clock’. Finn laughs when I draw a silly clock on his music’. I lead him towards playing the right hand. After playing the phrase, he asks me about the fingering, as the score says something different to what he’s been using in the first section. I say that it works well. I say, ‘That’s nice’ and then lead him into add-a-note drills in the direction of melodic travel. He copes me and I adjust fingering. He tries again, and while it’s awkward for him, he does understand the concept. I say, ‘Your phrasing’s really improved since you started learning this piece. It’s quite a difficult
piece to play … there are some advanced things that you’re learning… (Finn nods) … Rotary movement, phrasing, pedal … it’s difficult to play and you can’t do it on less than 1 hour’s practice a day … and detailed practice, like you have this week’. Finn nods in agreement. He plays again, and I demonstrate, emphasising the heavy amount of ‘rolling’ involved as the notes change direction. Finn tries, but over-exaggeration of the movements leads to difficulty and I ask him to make the movements smaller. I go on to suggest he do them big at first, before demonstrating a three-note slur to the left. He copies and I then coach him to start moving to the left from the first note. He tries, but it is quite uncoordinated. I demonstrate again a couple of times, and suggest that he ‘start with an in-breath’. When he takes an audible breath with his fingers, I laugh, and then show him again; he smiles. After he tries, I say, ‘Good, so you start with movement’. Finn tries several times, and gets there in the end – ‘Good boy Finn’. He nods and I ask him to add the hands together for that bar, which he does. After that, I ask him to rotate his arms from the shoulder to cross the middle of his body. We do it together. I sit down at the second piano and demonstrate, pointing out that each hand is doing ‘different rotations’ simultaneously. As he tries, I coach his left hand, saying that it is moving inwards, while the right hand is ‘going up and around’. I use gesture to illustrate. Finn tries another couple of times and I say, ‘Very good’. He gets a little excited and I say, ‘So that’s two bars’ as I look at my watch. He asks how long that bar took and I say around 5 minutes. I go on to suggest that each bar will take less time as he gets used to the idea and because he knows the notes well. Finn shows me in the score where similar bars are, despite having one or two differences. I pause for a while, and then suggest that we ‘fix up this bar here, hey?’ I demonstrate the descending chromatic sequence in the right hand and he copies, though there are many mistakes. I give him the red pen and suggest that we write in the fingering. Finn plays small segments and writes in the fingering. It’s time-consuming, but worthwhile that he is so involved in the process. After a while, I coach him with the right hand, asking him to play a repeated note while playing the first on the way up and the second on the way down. After he tries with good success, I praise him for ‘building what we call a gestural vocabulary’. We are both smiling here. I say, ‘Very good mate, and that’s why I sounds good’. He says, ‘It does sound good’. After he tries again, I suggest that that attempt didn’t sound as good, though the reason is not clear and could have been explained better. I go on to suggest and play with him, starting with a breath in, and ‘drop and roll, drop roll, drop roll, drop
roll, drop’. He plays for me, and then I ask him to watch me as I do a critical comparison moving through the notes and moving only on the last note of the slur. He tries again, before I say, ‘No, but you’re arm’s still … drop into it, and then as you play the next one (note) it’s (your arm) already moving’. As Finn tries again, I say, ‘Very good … good boy’. Finn smiles. I stand and say that it’s like walking and then you just sort of stop. Finn adds, ‘and then go again’. I say, ‘Yeah, just because your fingers are playing, you’re arm doesn’t stop … it’s always moving’. I gesture and Finn agrees. I sit down at the second piano again, and then ask him to repeat the down-up sequence. As he tries, he tilts his head awkwardly, and I stop him and ask him not to do so. He repeats again, and I ask him to ‘roll up slowly on the last note of the phrase’. I go on to suggest that when you roll up slowly, it gets softer; my voice becomes softer. I go on to ‘sing’ that the vocal shape helps it to sound happy or content. Finn says, ‘like proud of yourself’. I play again and Finn tries to join in, but I go on to play as he listens. I stand up and say, ‘It doesn’t matter how much you might feel like that inside, if your arms don’t manipulate the piano in a way that makes it sing, it won’t sound real’. Finn says, ‘Hmm’ and plays the right hand again. I give him a pat on the back and we smile at each other. He suggests that we could add the parts together, and I agree, saying, ‘That’s it, just start with something you know and then add things around it. You build the piece up (bit by bit) over time, but you can’t take a holiday. You can’t just decide not to practise for a week or two; then you’ll go backwards… You’ve got to be constantly on it’. I aim using gesture to almost dramatising what I’m saying and Finn agrees. I go on, while clicking my fingers, ‘It’s like a tree, you can’t just go away for two weeks and not water it (Finn – it will die) … It needs constant supervision. You can still relax and chill out, but music practice comes first. It’s a motor activity, it’s like fitness – you stop going to the gym for two weeks and you’re back to square one, and it takes you a long time to get back into it’. I go on to say that despite this, he’s now ‘back at the gym’ on the treadmill. He smiles when I pretend to be on the treadmill at the gym. Finn says, that we should ‘increase the speed as he keeps learning more and practising more’. I agree and then start playing the right hand, asking him to ‘add this bit in’. I review his rhythm, adding in fingering. I ask that we practice that segment. He tries a couple of times and I ask him to imagine his arm moving. He does well – ‘very good boy’. We go on add notes to the phrase with gesture; he copies me. When his rhythm is incorrect, I ask him if it sounded right. I suggest that even though he ‘knows it’, it ask him to look at the page
and ‘check’. After his attempt is correct I ask him to practise that segment for five minutes; he does. I walk away, but I eventually say that his rhythm is wrong. I come over and point out that one fragment here is the same as an earlier phrase, and therefore using the same type of gestural pattern. When he tries again, I praise him and say that I can see the finish line, and we wave at the metaphorical finish line. It’s a nice moment. I say that last week he was back at the start, but within a week he was back in the game, ‘good for you’. As he tries again, he ‘stops moving’ and suggest that as soon as that happens, ‘the sound goes dead’. I ask that he ‘lift up and breathe life into it’; he tries and does well. I say that we are coming up to finishing, and that he should perhaps go to the soccer tomorrow, rather than playing at the workshop. I suggest that he go to the soccer and enjoy himself and continue to keep working hard too. I say, ‘You’ve done a good job, yay!’ and Finn says, ‘Thank you’. I ask him how much practice he did, and he says, everyday about an hour. I say that it really shows and that it sounds like he knows what he’s doing. I dramatise a person in the dark, feeling their way about before banging into something, which he seems to enjoy. I go on to say that when he adds the pedal, he tends to abandon the detail with the hands, so practice mainly without pedal is probably best. As he plays hands together, I point out the ‘missing’ notes that are inaudible, even though he ‘knows the notes’. I ask him why he thinks that might be. He says, ‘hesitating’, but I say, ‘No, you stopped moving’. I demonstrate hands together, gradually until there are inaudible notes. I say, ‘As soon as you stop moving, your fingers don’t activate properly. You’ve got to breathe life into both hands’. Finn nods. I demonstrate a little more and then I ask him if he is ready. I say, ‘big breath in; drop and roll’ and Finn follows. He plays well, but forgets where he is in the music. I suggest that he has to have one part of his brain on the notes, and he suggests the other concentrates of moving. I agree and say, ‘So you’ve got to be looking, listening and moving. It’s multi-tasking; try again’. He plays the whole section, while I make adjustments. I say, ‘Good boy, that’s nice’. He smiles and nods. I play the left-hand broken chords and I ask him to copy me. I suggest that I move his hand and arm as he plays, and we review ‘round the top of the clock’. When he stops moving and the notes become inaudible, I encourage him manually to ‘collect the notes on the way through’, before going on to ‘lean – throw’. He plays the left hand while I use gesture and movement to encourage him not to ‘stop’ to get the notes right – ‘the notes should be in there already’. I ask him to ‘add the right hand back into that’. He does so and after half a section, I stop him, saying that he doing a
nice job, before pointing out a fingering issue. He seems surprised having not noticed there to be a problem. I say that he has done a good job, and ask him to keep it up. I ask him to apply the learning concepts to segments on page three for homework. I say, ‘Don’t do everything; just do one thing’. I talk him through how many bars he might practice each day, reminding him that of *Jinker Ride* too (has to be ready in 5 weeks). He asks me if he has to play it in the concert and I say yes. He says he likes *Jinker Ride* and *Nocturne*. I ask him how *Jinker Ride* is going – it’s good until the third page, when he says, ‘Yeah I have to get on to that’. I say that the library book is overdue. I mention that I got a traffic fine last night. I end the lesson saying that I have given him enough attention and encouragement, and that now ‘it’s up to you’. I give him a hug and say, ‘Keep it up, promise?’ I ask him what he could do next time he gets ‘stuck’ and he says, ‘Ask for help’. I say, ‘Do one thing at a time’. He says that he could laminate the four steps that we made, and I say, ‘Do it’.

*Lesson 10: 10 May 2014*

Reviewed 8, 18 and 21 March 2016

The lesson starts with talk about the soccer and the roar. Sarah asks me how the workshop was and I told her it went for 90 minutes. I ask him how he’s going with it and he says, ‘Yeah good’. I ask him how *Jinker Ride* is going, and he says that he’s a bit behind because of lots on after school. Sarah says that he’s worked a bit on *Nocturne*, and Finn agrees, so I ask him if he wants to play *Nocturne*. Finn agrees, but says that he does want to work on *Jinker Ride*, so I suggest that we will if there is time. We laugh because there are two versions of the music. I ask him if I can hear him play and we adjust the seat. He plays hands together from the middle section. I ask him to try to unify the tempo of each section, though I probably could have explained it more clearly, without so many words. We play together, but after a while, I stop and watch. He has clearly improved through the week. I stop him and say, ‘OK, that’s nice, yeah, good boy, good boy. You’ve improved your left hand … a lot, and your pedal’s good and your fingering’s excellent, that’s nice’. I go on to ask if he can play his right hand a bit louder than the left hand, but for some reason, I do it in an unusual way, saying, ‘Your right hand’s a bit soft compared to your left hand’. I ask him if he’s left-handed and he says that he’s right-handed. I demonstrate dropping into the keys freely with the right hand and Finn copies. We go on and he copies me as we transition into building a five-note gestural fragment, ‘finding’ the shape of the
gesture through defining the direction of travel, one note at a time. I point out to Finn that overall, the movement of the right hand is more exaggerated than that in the left hand. Finn plays hands together and when he has a blank, I say, ‘almost’. I demonstrate, and exaggerate the lateral movement of the opening G-F-G-F-Eflat motive in the Nocturne. He copies me and I say, ‘Good, now, you wouldn’t have them all the same loudness’ as I demonstrate with more dynamic shape and while singing words (…’and to there and soft’). As he drops and makes a harsh tone, I suggest that he let go of the muscles on impact with the keys as I gesture and play; he tries again and I say, ‘lovely’. Finn tries a couple more times, and then I ask him by demonstration if he can arrive at the penultimate F loudest. He tries but over-emphasises the F, and I say, ‘That’s good, that’s the idea, now just try to blend it together a bit more’. He tries again, and I say, ‘That’s nice, now add the other hand’. He gets going as I write something on his score. ‘Good boy’. As he goes on, I ask him to ‘rock into the E … E’s your main note’ and I demonstrate the right-hand melody. He tries the whole phrase. It’s a bit awkward, but it’s there. When he misses the last note, Finn comments that it’s (the note) too soft. I say, ‘Not too soft – too slow’. I caution him not to lift up too slow on the last note of the phrase – ‘It’s slow but it’s not slow’. When he does better, I pat him on the shoulder and say, ‘Good’ and Finn smiles. I say, ‘A slow lift will give you a soft sound, but if it’s too slow, it will give you no sound’; Finn nods. I point out a similar gestural pattern in the piece, and he plays it, though the last note of the phrase is ‘too slow’. I say, that if the phrase were sung … and then demonstrate saying that it doesn’t make sense (to have the last note inaudible); Finn nods and agrees. I ask him to think of the speed of how his arm moves into the keys, and he tries a couple more times. I say that it’s good, but don’t slow down the piece, and then start gesturing and singing, ‘keep it moving …’ Finn tries and it sounds quite lovely this time and I clap and say, ‘That’s it! Good’. I ask him to add the other hand in. He does well initially, but then he appears to grind to a halt when he stops moving, literally. I say, ‘Don’t stop moving because that makes it harder to roll anywhere’. I ask him to keep everything moving, and then dramatise what it would be like if I was doing long jump – I wouldn’t stop during the jump. I say, ‘Even if you’re trying to slow down, keep everything moving’. I go on to help him with the right hand. He plays and then says that it’s similar to the other section; I agree. I point out (and sing) that it sounds like it’s sighing. I go on to explain an appoggiatura – a note that ‘doesn’t belong to the chord’ and is used for expressive
effect, taking a large sigh. I say, ‘In order to make someone feel like that when they’re listening to it, that’s what you do with the sound’. I demonstrate different parts of the Nocturne, emphasising the forward movement of my trunk on the appoggiaturas. I say that it’s not necessary to be a genius – it sounds like it’s come from heaven, but it’s just a skill that can be refined through training. I praise him for knowing his notes so well, allowing time to … (Finn – work on it?) and I agree, saying that I’m excited to be helping him. Finn smiles and says ‘Yay’. I make a note on the score, asking him to lean into the appoggiatura, and point out that any note at the end of a phrase is going to be softer; Finn understands. Thereafter, we move to right-hand ‘add-a-note technique’ and I ask Finn to let his arm go soft. I ask him to do a double rotation on the penultimate note of the phrase, pointing out that that will generate momentum. Finn tries a number of times and has success – I say, ‘See how that generation of momentum gives you the added impetus to make the louder?’ Finn nods and smiles. I demonstrate again, noting that, ‘you don’t get this squeezed sound’. I show him again, saying, ‘I sort of move my arm in a wave’. Finn tries and has success, though his approach is still a little awkward. Nonetheless, I say, ‘Yes! Yay!’ and clap; Finn gets excited. I point out another double rotation when moving from G to F. Finn continues to play and I say, ‘Now we’re getting there, now we’re getting there’. As he comes to the last phrase, I demonstrate and ask him to ‘send’ the high note ‘off outside’. Finn tries, but moves his arm awkwardly. I sit down at the second piano and demonstrate, asking him to move his right arm sideways after playing the initial B flat, before moving on to ‘just collect the fifth finger’ on the way through. After he tries again, I ask him not to over-extend his other fingers as he plays the top note. We move on, and he copies me as we practice playing the top note and then ‘rolling’ away from it in order to deactivate the fingers after initial impact. After a few rounds, I say, ‘Good boy, this has improved’. I give him the thumbs up and he says, ‘Thank you’. I ask him if he can remember what we are doing, and he says he can but asks me what ‘the term’ is. I remind him, ‘double rotation’, before going into a detailed description, demonstration and rationale for its execution. Finn nods and says, ‘It sounds nice’ and I agree, before moving to a short demonstration of the hands together. I suggest that all great pianists have some type of movement in their playing, albeit sometimes very small. Finn asks me, ‘Does it make it sound different by putting smaller movements and bigger movements?’ I say, ‘I don’t think so; you don’t get as much wood in the sound’. I demonstrate quite a lot of variations of tone quality here (depending on how
much functional movement) and then suggest that movement also serves a visual purpose (‘it looks like the note is going longer’). We move to the next page, and I remind Finn that I asked him to study this page during the week. I ask him how he went – he says, ‘good’, and gives me the thumbs up. I ask if I can hear it, and he plays hands together, but it still sounds tentative. I interrupt and say that some of that had really improved (‘that’s excellent there’), but other spots still have errors with fingerings and rhythm. I ask him to play the right hand. We both tilt forwards at the end of the phrase; it’s a lovely moment. He asks me, ‘Would that be a 4 on the end?’ I agree and ask him to write it in. As he writes, I sit at the second piano and complement him (using critical comparison) on how he dropped into the first note and then used his arm to shape the rest of the phrase. I say, ‘Your movement created a very subtle difference in the sound. Can you hear?’ I do another critical comparison and he agrees; ‘It was really nice, very good’. Finn smiles. We then review some more fingerings, with me trying it out on the second piano before he implements it. Moving on, I review the legato connection between the B flat to B-flat octave, and I suggest that Finn keep his body relatively still. I point out that the movement is really another form of double rotation. I ask him not to stretch out his fingers, which we workshop a few times. I then ask him to free-fall into the keys with a loose wrist (he has trouble letting go at first). We then take turns with the octave shift, as I coach him towards functional movement. I ask him to start from the upper B flat and play the four-note gestural fragment, with follow-through movement to the left. As he tries, I ask him not to over-extend his fingers when not being used. I ask him to ‘use’ 4 and 5 rather than his thumb and the other fingers. He continues to try as I coach him, asking him not to exaggerate his elbow movement quite so much. I suggest that Finn has large hands and he doesn’t need to overwork them. As he improves, I add another note to the gestural fragment, encouraging him to ‘glide through the notes’ as I play the phrase faster. I then ask him to use the same type of fluid movement, though slower – ‘still gliding, just slowly’. As Finn tries again, I coach him with aligning his fourth finger with the C rather than ‘doing anything extra’, which seems to be the cause of his over-extension. Finn notices that it (the fourth finger) ‘fits’. I agree and he plays the phrase again. I ask him not to ‘try not to strike the notes’ as I ‘play’ on his shoulder. He tries again, and I say, ‘Good boy. You don’t need to come that far out to play these notes … Just be comfortable in the back of the notes’. He plays again, after which I demonstrate a two-note slur while lifting on the thumb, as he is
pushing down on his thumb instead using it as a lateral pivot to move to the following note. I encourage him not to over-emphasise individual notes, but rather the overall gestural movement of the notes combined. As we move to adding more notes, I help him to move his arm to the left, saying, ‘That’s it, think of it like one movement’. I can see that Finn isn’t using much preparatory movement here. I ‘draw’ the gestural trajectory in the air as he plays, pointing it out to Finn; he chuckles. ‘Nice big circle; a little one and then a big one’. I he tries again, but I ‘say’ through gestural demonstration that his circle was lopsided. I draw the spatial shape in the air again, and then move Finn’s arm in a similar way as he plays. He plays again – ‘Good! Now add the next note, back this way’. Finn tries; he is very awkward the first time, but the second time he really ‘slides’ into the shape without over-extension of his fingers or exaggerated movement of his arm. He continues to add notes and I continue to help move his arm from the elbow in the direction of travel. We then join the two fragments together, before ‘adding’ the longer note that connects the two fragments together to form one longer phrase. It takes him a few attempts, but Finn does get there. I suggest, ‘Even when you have a long note, keep moving; it’s like I’m breathing’. As Finn plays again, I say, ‘breathe’ as he plays the long note. After he plays again, I dramatise, asking him not to use any jerky movements after the long note. Finn laughs and tries again – ‘Very good, that’s it. Any straight lines will make a straight sound; everything has to be curved’. Finn agrees. He plays again, though his movements are still a little unpredictable and he ‘surges’ on a couple of notes. I say, ‘Good try’ and then sit at the second piano and demonstrate. After Finn tries again, I remind him to use legato between the B-flat octaves and avoid ‘shifting out, as it’s harder to get the gliding’. He tries again, but I pull him up for using a jerky movement with his shoulder; he gets there in the end. We both laugh and Sarah says, ‘It’s all body mechanics’ and I agree, saying, ‘It’s totally body mechanics. That’s how you play the piano, it’s a motor activity’. Finn plays again, and has greatly improved in the last few minutes. I remind him, ‘You’ve done your work, and that makes it easier to look behind what’s written’. He asks me what I mean. I say, ‘Well, none of this is written down (Finn – Yeah) … is it? (No)’ I go on to suggest that this kind of information is closely guarded and not often shared, as it takes the ‘mystery’ away from expressive playing. Sarah says, ‘Like a magician’ and I agree, ‘Yeah, a magician doesn’t show his tricks’. I reiterate that to learn how to play with expressive intention, ‘You have to have a good awareness of the notes, so that we can move past that to
what lies beyond the notes; what movement connects the notes, because that’s what will make you sound good … The only thing that makes you sound good is hard work, and inspiration, but you’re already talented, you don’t need to pray for any more inspiration. What you need to do is do your work, which is what you did’. Finn is nodding in agreement and I give him the thumbs up. ‘You might not have got all of it right (page three), but you got some of it right’. I demonstrate one of the phrases of page three and say that he played it beautifully earlier – I ask him to play it again. Even though it’s not entirely rhythmically accurate and Finn realises as much, I say, ‘That’s nice’ before going on to coach him with the rhythmic subdivision. It’s not perfect and looks a little awkward, but I say, ‘Ever since you did that Jinker Ride, your down/up movement has really improved’. I sit at the second piano, playing an excerpt of Jinker Ride, before saying, ‘That’s what starts the whole thing off – the down/up movement, and then it becomes a down, round up movement, or (playing the first phrase of Nocturne), a down, down, double rotation, down, round and up’. I chuckle and Finn nods. I say that he has come a long way, referring to Mozart K5. I suggest that he didn’t quite get it at the time. He asks me when that was. I say, ‘About three years ago, you’re starting to mature now. It’s good’. Finn nods. I suggest that this is only one element of his learning, going on to refer to pop, chords and improvisation, but I make the point that ‘this is the foundation of how to play an acoustic piano … this is how you get the sound (Finn nods)’. We go on to discuss learning to sing and Finn offers his perspective regarding breathing technique. I say that what I’m teaching him may not be relevant to everyone and may have its opponents, but he says, ‘It’s important’. I agree, suggesting that it’s how to make the piano sound like a ‘real’ instrument rather than where it sounds like buttons are being pushed. I go on to play a little of All of Me and Say Something; Finn nods. I then do a critical comparison where the sound is one dimensional, suggesting that that is still good, but ‘… there’s something extra you can learn than just what the notes are’. He nods in agreement. I go on to demonstrate (and sing) the expressive melodic line of Say Something, asking him if he can hear the ‘tiny shading’. He agrees. I go on to say that it’s still OK to sing or play at one dynamic level or ‘with crescendo and decrescendo’ (though I suggest that it doesn’t sound right). I play the melodic line with expressive nuance and then suggest that it doesn’t mean you just play quietly, go on to play an improvised version of the song. We ‘twinkle’ our fingers (I think to suggest touch sensitivity) and then say to Sarah that he needs an acoustic piano, as it’s
a totally different instrument. Finn goes on to describe what his father has been thinking regarding the set-up of their new home, including a grand piano. I suggest that the electric piano that he has will still be useful too, perhaps to learn notes on, particularly if he uses headphones to avoid being distracted. I dramatise how he might do that, but suggest that to employ gesture and tonal shading, he needs ‘the real thing’. I ask him if he will study the last page this week and he agrees. Finn plays the last half page with hands together – I say, ‘that’s good’ and then ask him to leave his pedal down for the final three chords. I remind him to use his fifth finger on the top note, and we work on the gestural interplay of the last three chords; it’s interesting to watch how Finn finds it difficult initially to copy the choreography, confusing wrist movement with movement of the elbow, and then over-exaggerating the wrist movement. Nonetheless, he does get there in the end. I ask him if he can make the fifth finger ‘ring’ above everything else, and he asks me, ‘So play it louder?’ I agree, and suggest that he momentarily brace one side of the hand, but not the other. We work on achieving a gravity drop, and after several attempts Finn is able to fall freely into the keys. I then ask him to ‘feel the weight more on the right hand side’ and he is able to voice the chord to good effect. Thereafter, I ask him to add the pedal and then the left hand, before moving on to the ‘catch, catch and lay it down to rest’ analogy for the last three chords. I then coach him on the last chord, encouraging him to bring his elbows out slowly. It’s interesting that he finds the slower movement difficult to gauge, at least initially. As he says, ‘It’s a bit silly’, we laugh and I say, ‘It’s OK, you’ve got to start somewhere’. I coach him again, adding breathing in and leaning in with the pelvis. I ask him to play the last three chords again and then we experiment further with the pelvic tilt. As expected, he finds the subtlety of the movement challenging, and I offer, ‘… do it slowly, like a flower opening’ analogy. He tries again, and I smile and say, ‘Yay! That’s getting more natural’. Finn rubs his hands together gleefully and says, ‘I like it’ and I respond, ‘You like it? It’s a source of creativity (Finn agrees); you can find your self-expression through the piece’. I encourage him, saying that he is on the right track, though the last page needs a bit (a lot) more practice. I demonstrate how he might go about that, and Sarah laughs saying, ‘Bookmark it in’. I say, ‘Good on you Finn; you remember this day’. He is very proud. I remind him to not get slack and to keep going, giving him the gym/fitness analogy, which he seems surprised to hear. I link the motor aspects of piano playing with sport, suggesting that he watch other pianists and analyse how they
play (how do they sound/are they connected to their piece or do they look like they’re just going through the motions). I say, ‘Nine times out of 10, the people how sound the best are the ones who are connected to the piece, and the only way you can connect to the piece is through your body. I mean, you can connect to it (the piece) through your emotions, but the last time I looked up Wikipedia, ‘happy’ didn’t have little arms (we laugh) … Happy doesn’t have arms; you’re playing the piano; your body. You don’t have little wires that connect your eyes … It’s your fingers and your body that play, and if you have clumsy fingers and clumsy movements, that’s what sound you’ll get. If you don’t know your notes and you’re fumbling around, that’s what sound you’ll get … you’ll get a fumbly sound. If you take the time … those are the people who sound good; the ones who plan their performance. Even on The Voice – they work all week to plan their performance … It’s not an intellectual activity; it’s a whole person activity. You are a soul with a body … you have to use your body to play. So that means you have to get used to how your body feels. How does your body move from this note from that note? … It doesn’t matter how much inspiration you have, if you haven’t got the knowledge and the work to back you up, you can’t really show people what you can do’.

Lesson 11: 17 May 2014

Reviewed 21 March 2016

- I leave the room to get a drink, and Sarah tells Finn not to be nervous, saying, ‘Just be confident – if you feel nervous, you play nervous. Just go, check me out Mark, look how I can play’. She coaches him with how to sit as I return. I ask him, ‘What have you got to show me?’ I ask him how his practice test tube is going. He says he’s been doing an hour each time and that he’s almost finished. I praise him, and ask him if he’s met ‘my friend’ – a wooden hand. We review some of the joints and discuss the thumb and wrist. I ask him if he would like to start with Jinker Ride today, and he agrees. He plays hands together, but it’s difficult to know whether his hesitations and mistakes are the result of nerves or lack of preparation; the latter is most likely. Of interest is the way that he doesn’t look at the score once, except when he lets me know that he hasn’t got the last page hands together yet. I ask him to carry on with his right hand, coaching him with the rhythmic detail. Once he has the notation, I ask him to ‘interpret’ the slurs, deciding on what kind of movement (gesture) he would likely use. He initially mentions, ‘moving to the side’, but I ask him to describe to me in
terms of up and down movement, which he does. I give him a yellow highlighter,
pointing out that similarity between the way he uses the highlighter to draw the slurs
and how he would ultimately play them. He asks me about the tenuto markings, and I
explain. I ask him to do the slurs a little neater with the corner of the pen. Finn tries,
but I can tell that I’m becoming frustrated with his lack of body awareness. I sit at the
second piano and suggest that he ‘float’ off the notes instead of lifting, i.e. using the
muscles in the upper arm instead of the forearm, lest the movement becomes
somewhat jerky. I demonstrate again, asking him to note how I roll my upper arm
forward, rather than using an isolated movement of the forearm; he tries again. I take
his arm, coaching him to ‘turn on’ the upper arm instead of the wrist. It’s challenging
for him, and we keep trying. I turn his attention to the sound, saying that if it sounds,
‘clipped’, it means that the movement isn’t right. I mention that I can feel ‘electricity’
in his body as he plays the last note of the phrase when it’s not necessary to do so.
After he tries again, he asks me if I felt it again – I say that I didn’t, and ask him if he
felt it; he says, ‘I don’t think so’. We move to free-fall exercise at the keyboard, then
to the side of the chair, and then back to the keyboard. He finds ‘not stopping’ before
the moment of impact challenging, but we persist. The view is obscured here as I have
my back to the camera, and I can hear some frustration in my voice as I ask him to
move up slowly at the end of slur, gently rolling the upper arm forward. I sit down
and demonstrate, reminding him ‘not to do anything extra’ with his hand on the way
up. He finds turning the hand off challenging, but we persist, moving briefly to free
falling on his thigh and then back to the keyboard again. He keeps trying and I shake
my head (no); he is losing hope. We move briefly to free falling on to the thigh again.
I suggest that we move back to a basic two-note slur; it’s almost like his body
awareness has regressed somewhat when compared to previous weeks. I coach him
with the on/off interplay between the upper and lower arms. He starts to show some
improvement as we keep trying the two-note slurs, and I say that I can see he is
trying. We return to a free fall into the thigh, and I encourage Finn to lift up slowly
from the elbow rather than the hand and wrist. Shortly thereafter, we move to the left
hand and then both hands together – it’s slow but he is getting there. We do a free fall
together before ‘landing’ on the C’s. I encourage him to not think of ‘notes’ (i.e.
stopping to think of notes) but to think of the movement, referring to the quality of the
sound that gives me a clue as to what he is thinking. We keeping cycling through
these ideas, but he finds combining the free fall with the subsequent slow, soft roll
upwards challenging. I say, ‘That’s sort of one of the big problems when you don’t
know the piece, because you sort of “stop”. A true pianist will … (I play *Nocturne*)
even if the wrong note comes out, it’s the movement that creates the beauty of sound
(Finn nods in agreement). So that’s why you’ve got to know your notes well, and
practise well, so that you’re able to take a risk. When you don’t take a risk, (I
demonstrate) that’s when everything jams up and you don’t get the ring in the sound’.
Finn says, ‘I heard that’. I remind him that he is improving generally and that, ‘we’ll
get there’. I say that I admire and appreciate the fact that he has put most of the piece
(*Jinker Ride*) hands together, though there are some wrong notes. I suggest that we go
through the left hand together, and he asks me in which particular part there were
wrong notes. I start referring to and writing chord symbols into his score (A7). As he
plays these chords, I point out that they are not slurred, and need to be detached with
separate movements. I sit down at the second piano and ‘play’ 8 movements using
random notes. Finn smiles and copies me – I say, ‘Good, did you hear yourself get
tight?’, referring to the transition between the two chords when he stopped to ‘think’
of the notes. I explain to him that that is why knowing the notes is so important,
before repeating the above process. Finn is excited and agrees that it sounds quite
different. He plays the staccato again, and I say, ‘That’s it – it sounds so fresh and
fragrant, and alive (I gesture quite a lot here), rather than I’m a kid learning piano …’
Finn and I laugh. I go on, ‘You won’t sound like a musician if you don’t think of how
it sounds; music is how it sounds. It’s like when you hear someone sing, you don’t go,
Oh, what a nice pretty throat they have’. We laugh about focusing on a pianist’s hair
instead of how they sound. I ask him to put the hands together, demonstrating the
different gestural choreography of each hand. I demonstrate and ask him to play the
right hand as is and the left hand as random notes, but it soon becomes clear that
combining the two is going to be very challenging for Finn, despite leading him
through in a sequential manner. It’s interesting to note that the ease and quality of his
two-note slurs have regressed somewhat since the first part of the lesson. We spend
the next few minutes revising the right-hand two-note slur, and I remind him, ‘As you
roll forwards, can you let go of all the muscles around your wrist’. He tries again, but
I draw his attention to the resultant sound, indicating that the gestures are not optimal.
He tries again and does better this time. We continue to ‘experiment’, but his
movements are still rather unreliable. I remind him of the challenge ahead (combining
the two different patterns in each hand), reiterating that a clumsy movement will
result in a clumsy sound. We try again, but he is finding it difficult to let go of his wrist as he lifts up. Using my own arm, I remind him to turn all muscles off below the elbow as he comes up. As I take his arm from the elbow, I say, ‘Imagine you had a video camera, and you were watching yourself’, before I coach him further with letting go of the forearm muscles and wrist. He is trying, but his responses are still far from predictable, and I refer him to the resultant sound should the movement deviate. I ask him if he is listening to his sound, as I can hear the second note being played louder than the first. There is a very good part when he finally ‘gets’ it, and it comes after I manipulate him manually, encouraging him to let go of the muscles below the elbow. I mention that his responses are ‘fleeting’, though ‘it’s in there’. I remind him that pieces like Jinker Ride won’t sound cheerful if the movements aren’t ‘right’. We move on, and as I demonstrate, I link the left-hand staccato to a car putting along, and the right-hand slurs to someone singing. I ask him to play the right hand, pointing out a couple of errors and I help him to correct notes and fingering. I mention that perhaps his ‘old’ copy had these details and to be more careful not to lose this one. He plays quite well, but I point out that some of the notes are inaudible. He defaults into clipping the second note of the two-note slurs, so I direct him back to the simple exercises covered earlier in the lesson, before moving back to the piece itself. I say that his attempt was better, before coaching him with ‘letting go’ after the moment of impact, i.e. employing a follow-through movement, which I use a walking analogy to illustrate this more clearly (down – let go – come up). I let out a big sigh and ask him to try again. It’s unpredictable, but he is getting there. I remind him to listen for the sound – ‘If the sound’s right, the movement’s right’. I ask him to listen more critically, and after his next attempt, he mentions that he did hear one of the two-note slurs was more ‘sharp than the others. He plays again – ‘It’s good’. I remind him to always listen when playing; he nods. He plays the next part of the right hand after I ask him to, but I mention, ‘That doesn’t sound like a melody to me’. I use gesture and sing the melody expressively before asking him what movement he would use to achieve this sound. He doesn’t seem to know, so I demonstrate, adding that it is very similar to the Nocturne. Finn asks me if I mean the down and up movements, and I agree. As he plays, I point out that he played non-legato – why? Finn answers correctly – ‘… because I had the wrong fingering’ and I agree, reminding him that (good) fingering is very important, as it allows us to ‘roll’ over the notes with greater ease. I criticise him for looking at his hands, as he doesn’t know the notes yet, and I
ask him to look at the score while imagining what his hands are doing … ‘It’s multi-sensory. You’ve got to look, listen, imagine, and feel. Can you do of those together?’ Thereafter, we begin to add single notes in turn, throwing the arm to the direction of travel. Somewhat curtly, I remind him to look at the fingering. I mention that all phrases should be practised in a similar way, as this will allow him to build a sense of expressive direction into the phrases; he nods. Again, I ask him to pull the hands apart and review the fingering of the right hand while implementing the ‘add-a-note technique’. I remind him that the two hands usually have two different motor patterns, especially as repertoire becomes more advanced. I ask him to show me a little bit of his Nocturne. He starts, but only gets through two phrases before I criticise him. It seems that when he adds the pedal in, the hands start to default to non-legato and fingering becomes unpredictable. I ask him to leave out the pedal, and that does seem to help, but the second phrase is still non-legato and ‘jerky’. I ask him if he has practice – he says yes, but I suggest that the piece has ‘gone backwards again’. I ask him if he practices the hands separately and he nods. I ask him to play the right hand after demonstrating the first two phrases. I mention that it seems like he has forgotten much of the detail regarding rolling from one note to another at different speeds, which is ultimately how sound is shaped. Sarah says he has been practising; Finn looks defeated. Sarah says, ‘Body awareness?’ and I agree. As the class finishes, I say that unless he implements the gestural detail during his home practice, it’s unlikely that he will see improvement in the sound. I say, ‘Anyway, we’ll try again next week. Can you not put the pedal down? Can you listen to what you do? Can you be aware of what your body is doing?’

Lesson 12: 24 May 2014

Reviewed 22 March 2016

- The lesson starts with mixed lollies and chords in close position for Say Something. I demonstrate at the piano while singing the melodic line; Finn watches on. I mention that I feel that that is where Finn’s strength is. Sarah asks if he can sing (and play) more than one vocal item at the next concert, and I agree, beginning to play and sing All of Me. Finn sits at the piano and joins in. I coach him with the rhythm (123, 123, 12) and mention the challenge will be to sing while keeping this rhythmic detail secure. We tap the rhythmic ostinato on our knees while Finn sings the melodic line; he does very well and thereafter we transfer the ostinato to the piano. As I play, I ask
Finn to sing and then he does both himself, though the rhythm is challenging for him. I say, ‘Good boy, that’s what you’re going to practise’. I experiment with the B-flat minor section while Finn finds the score for me. I indicate that I’m looking at the overall chord structure and continue to experiment with the score open. I show Finn what to do when he arrives at the B-flat minor section. He asks me what to do in the left hand, and then copies my suggestion, employing hands together. Though his technique isn’t ideal, I make no mention of it here. I ask him to use the pedal too, demonstrating while singing the vocal line. Thereafter, I show him the A-flat chord that leads to the chorus. I ask him if he has ‘got that so far’; he agrees, so I move to experiment with the chorus. I ask him if he is enjoying this activity – ‘I love this’. I suggest a right hand figure in A-flat Major and Finn copies; all without reference to the printed score. I continue to coach him with hands together from the second piano, referring to the number of quavers within the bar. When he has success, I say, ‘Good boy, that’s the idea’ and later, ‘Good boy Finn, yay’. We continue to snack on the lollies, and then I show him the F minor (add 2) figure. He returns to his piano and tries the right hand. Thereafter, I show him on his piano, coaching him with rhythm and fingering. It takes a few minutes, but he gets there. It’s interesting that I still make no mention of technique or hand shape whatsoever. I set him the next 4 bars to learn ‘as is’; he agrees. We do a quick summary of the opening, adding more note repetitions to the left hand. I give him a demo of ‘what I would do if it was my song’, all while singing the melodic line. Finn starts singing too as I play. I suggest that he use octaves in the left hand during the second verse; Finn sits down and implements such, and recognises that this ‘makes it stronger’. He asks me about the ‘cause I give you all…’ part and whether we will play those bars as written. I say, ‘Probably not’ and then move to experimenting with the right hand. Finn copies me and then I ask him to add the bass in too. Thereafter, I show him manually what notes to play, including the left hand. He is very quick to pick it up and seems fully engaged throughout this process. I ask him to think of A flat (add 2) and E flat (add 2) and that seems to help solidify his memory. Thereafter, I show him ‘what you end up with’, though I sit down and demonstrate, saying that it doesn’t really matter which particular notes are played, just so long as the chord structure is maintained. When I improvise another version, he says, ‘That’s so cool … I like that’ and we smile at each other. I ask him if he can come for another lesson on Monday and Sarah agrees. I say, ‘It’s good Finn. You’re enjoying this, I’m so pleased’ and Finn responds, ‘I am’. I
add, ‘That’s great’. When I ask him how *Nocturne* is going, Sarah says that she videoed him playing at home, and that, ‘He gets a bit nervous coming here on Saturday. I think he gets stage fright; he does better at home’. While he plays fluently, he is still playing non-legato, particularly in the right hand. I don’t say as much, and listen instead, joining in when the theme returns. When he becomes a little distracted, I stop and then occasionally coach him verbally with tonal balance and phrase shape. While the unity of tempo isn’t good, he has the piece relatively fluent now. When he finishes, I say, ‘Yeah, that’s really improved, congratulations’. As him if he’s aware that the tempo is too slow near the end, and we agree that he is still focusing on the notes and tempo will be the next step. I suggest that he watch the video of his performance just now in an effort to unify the tempo, in an effort to induce a more ‘lullaby’ effect. I ask Finn to always play the right hand louder than the left hand, which he does. I suggest that he put his gestures back in and we play together. I remind Finn that even though the right-hand melody is louder overall, it still needs shape too. I demonstrate while indicating soft/loud for the melody and Finn notices those that don’t belong. I suggest that he record and watch himself play, in order to refine the tonal shape. I demonstrate another soft phrase ending and Finn copies; I suggest that he create ‘special moments’, so that the audiences goes … (we both sigh). I ask Finn if he knows what I mean and he agrees. I say, ‘It’s like when someone sings; take them on a journey, but don’t make them seasick’, and I refer to not playing faster on page two or too slow on page three. Finn seems surprised when I play page three slowly and says, ‘Was I playing it that slowly?’ I say that while he needs to even up the tempo of each section, his notes, legato and pedal are working well now. I remind him not to play the piece like a xylophone – ‘hang on to the notes’; I demonstrate. I add that part of being a musician is learning to listen to how oneself sounds, and recording and watching can be a big help. I say, ‘You did good!’ and Finn is pleased. I remind him not to get slack, and to continue his practice, saying that playing a piece such as Nocturne is more of a motor activity rather than an intellectual one, and therefore requires constant review (practice). He refers to my gym/fitness analogy from the previous lesson. I remind him of the three stages – ‘intellectualise, motorise and emotionalise’. I say, ‘You’ve got to have a good brain that knows all the chords and the notes, a good motor system that remembers the gestures and how to make sounds, and a good spirit that can listen and communicate to the audience’. I ask him to put himself into the audience’s shoes – ‘How would this sound to them?’ I give
him another practice sheet and he seems excited. I encourage him to go home, feel good and to keep practising. I add, ‘Don’t stop listening and feeling … don’t go into your head, keep everything in your body’.

Lesson 13: 31 May 2014

Reviewed 22 March 2016

- The lesson starts with me giving Finn his medal – it’s a lovely moment. I can’t see any faces to gauge his reaction, but Sarah says, ‘That means a lot, I can see’. I remind Finn that he is excellent, and that he can continue to improve. I mention that while a gestural approach is challenging for him, his skill with singing and keyboard harmony is unique. Sarah says that he has been practising All of Me a lot this week. I was sick on Monday and Sarah asks me how I’m feeling. I say that I was feeling OK, but not very patient that day and I was afraid that I would yell at someone. Finn tells me which sections he would like some help with. I ask him to move his chair back and mention that Finn is getting taller every week. Emilio moves next to me with his iPad. Finn plays and sings – he does well, but has difficulty coordinating the section leading to the chorus; he decides to stop singing during the chorus. I move closer to him; he asks me how it’s going and I say, ‘Yeah, it’s going good’. I help him with the right hand here. I reduce the notes to root D-flat and E-flat chords, which makes it far easier for him. I help him add additional notes and review the fingering. He is very quick to pick up the information when shown directly. I say, ‘It’s improved a heap, amazing’. He mentions that he was watching the video (?) while playing it, but wasn’t able to get the post chorus section. I show him, adding small fragments at a time, and he is quick to copy notes, fingering and in/out information. As we go on, I show him how the next fragment is derived from an A-flat (add 2) chord. Despite a small break due to Emilio playing with the pedal extender and a gaffer tape joke, Finn is still able to remember; we add the E-flat (add 2) fragment. After one attempt, Finn is able to chain all fragments together fluently. I say, ‘Yay’ and pat him on the back; he smiles proudly. I sit down and demonstrate the sub-section with hands together, pedal and the vocal line. As I return to the verse, Finn is quick to remind me that we decided to use octaves in the last lesson. We discuss the length of the song, and then the Intermediate exams that are being held tomorrow. I mention that Finn will be doing the Intermediate exam this time next year. Finn discusses with me his plan for the structure of the piece. I ask him what he is playing in the recital next week; he naively
says that he doesn’t think *All of Me* will be ready in time and I agree. We agree that he should play *Nocturne*, and he asks me if he should play *Jinker Ride*. I ask him if he’s finished it, and he (expectedly) says no. He mentions that he hasn’t finished the third page (!) and I say that it’s too late then. While I can’t see, I can tell that he is disappointed, but I say not to worry and that learning what it takes to prepare a piece in time for a performance is all part of the bigger picture. I refer to his medal, and say, ‘You’re still excellent, see – Award of Excellence’. Finn says that after the concert, he wants to do a couple more singing items, and I reply, ‘Well, you just get cracking boy’. Sarah says, ‘Let’s get prepared’ and I agree. Emilio asks if the piano is a percussion instrument and we have a discussion. Emilio says that the piano is ‘like magic’ and Finn plays Nocturne. While I don’t mention anything, the touch is quite unreliable, at least initially. When he finishes, ‘Nice ending good boy … (Thank you) … it’s lovely; you play it beautifully’. I ask him when he is going to fix up those (few) mistakes on the last page. Finn looks worried. I say, ‘Your piece, it shines, but you’ve got a few dirty spots’. I gently suggest that they probably won’t go away unless you do something about them. Sarah asks me if they are ‘the same as last week’ and I affirm yes. Emilio is a little distracting, but Finn and I carry on regardless. We work on the right-hand phrases towards the end, and I remind Finn to look at the fingering. I suggest that he practice that phrase 100 times until perfect; Finn agrees and plays the phrase five times. After that I ask him to ‘be expressive’, demonstrating at the second piano. I ask him not to play all notes at the same volume, and I sing expressively using words. I suggest that the leap of a 10th is like someone expressing a sense of wonder. I ask Finn to add the other hand, which he does. I remind him to always aim for a sense of clarity in the left hand bass notes. I review with Finn a roll towards the bottom notes of the chords – ‘much better Finn’. I ask him to play the right hand a little louder when he starts the piece: as I demonstrate, I say, ‘put some lipstick on it or something, it sounds a little bit pale’. I further suggest that we don’t want the piece to look ‘white’ under the stage lights, so ‘put some make-up on and make it stand out a bit’. Finn plays hands together with much better clarity and balance of register. I advise Finn not too have too much ‘make-up’ at the ends of the phrases, lest the piece sounds like a clown. I demonstrate, indicating the need for the softer moments. I ask him to try again, saying ‘no clowns’. I coach him with subtlety with the phrase endings and remind him to use full legato, before asking him to add the left hand back in. Soon after, his right-hand legato becomes amiss and
I pull him up. As he tries again, I ask him ‘to feel for the bottom of the keys’. I remind him to ‘catch’ the leaping notes with the pedal. I explain to him that sometimes he lifts the note up before the pedal is down, which causes a ‘hiccup’. I remind him that piano is a percussion instrument, but the way that we can use legato makes it unique as far as percussion instruments go. Finn agrees, though says a similar effect can be achieved with the vibraphone, as it has a pedal too. I remind him that legato helps us to ‘roll’ on the notes, thereby having a reference point in order to judge dynamic shape. I mention that we are coming up to finishing, and ask him to fix up the last phrase himself, though he plays it without error. I draw his attention to the F and FF markings, but he seems unaware that they were there. I suggest that this is the climax of the piece, which he correctly describes as ‘where the whole piece comes together’. I suggest that he needs to practise this phrase so that it’s much louder and more confident; I demonstrate. I remind Finn that ‘we’ don’t want wrong notes in the climax, and liken it to a soufflé that falls flat or a birthday cake that gets dropped right before serving; it’s an anti-climax – ‘wrong notes in the climax is not a good thing’. I say that seven out of 10 kids will make mistakes in the climax because they tend to be frightened of playing loudly and taking a risk. I suggest that the climax is usually the most difficult and is often not practised as well as the rest of the piece. I therefore ask him to ‘get into it’. Emilio starts play the opening of All of Me as the lesson finishes. Finn says that he feels very proud to receive his medal.

Lesson 14: 7 June 2014

Reviewed 23 and 24 March 2016

- The lesson starts with talk about Finn’s Drum Line video on YouTube, Liam and the school’s percussion activities. I ask Finn if he’s been practising All of Me, and he says, ‘yeah’. Sarah says that he had just sung for his Aunt. I mention that one of the students is playing and singing Skinny Love tomorrow. Sarah says she can’t make it to the concert tomorrow, the first concert she will miss, but George will be there to video Finn’s performance. Finn plays and sings All of Me – the first section is fluent and I play the vocal line when he is unable to combine both piano and voice. When he finishes, I say, ‘That’s pretty good. Can you play it without any mistakes though?’ He looks down and says, ‘Yeah, it was a bit …’; Sarah says, ‘Not quite’ and I say, ‘Not quite … keep practising’, Finn nods. I start playing a little slower and Finn joins in. I ask Finn to play a little softer and we start again. When we arrive at the B-flat minor
(add 2) chord, I ask him to play softer, ‘like a wash of sound’. I suggest that he roll his arm and thereafter, I coach him with the elliptical movement; first a three-note fragment and then a six-note fragment. I ask him if we are going clockwise or anti-clockwise, and he is quick to say, ‘anti’. I add a note to make a four-note gestural fragment – ‘round to the right and then through to the left’. Using my index finger, I trace the gestural direction, asking Finn if he can ‘see’ the clock; Finn moves his head in the same way! He does well, but over-exaggerates the movement at first. I encourage him to ‘start with movement’ and to make the overall shape smaller. We keep experimenting as I ask him to use a preparatory up movement and then ‘drop and roll’. I liken it to taking a breath, demonstrating vocally; Finn nods. I ask him to ‘breathe in with your arm, breathe out’. He tries, but I ask him not to ‘stop’ before playing the first note. It’s challenging for him, but he continues to experiment, before saying that his first note C was too loud, but I suggest that that is the one that we want to be louder. I demonstrate using critical comparison and Finn nods. I further suggest vocally the idea of the sound ‘swelling’, rather than being of all the same dynamic level. Sarah asks me if I’d like a Coke Zero – ‘Yeah, sure thanks’. Sarah exits and Finn and I review the four-note gestural fragment; his movements are becoming more functional, and I ask him to, ‘Hang on to that note (F) and then roll to the left’. He is trying, though it is clear when watching that he is moving his elbow too quickly. Nonetheless, we continue and I ask him to add the next note. He says, ‘I think I let go of the F’. He continues to experiment and I say, ‘That’s it; so you use the F to roll back. So if you let go, you’ve got nowhere to roll’. We continue to add notes, and my tone is noticeably positive, even though Finn’s gestures are somewhat clumsy. I play him the bar, indicating three gestures, before indicating, ‘So as you play this F, you’re already moving back to the left’. We review the three-note gestural fragment with a swing to the left as he plays the F before adding more notes back in. In order to reduce the amount of elbow movement, I ask him to imagine he is drawing a circle with his wrist. As he begins to gain more confidence, the movement starts to look more and more natural. I come over and help guide his arm using both of my hands, one on his elbow and one on his wrist, while he ‘holds’ C with his thumb. As I suggest, ‘the whole arm is rolling’, Sarah comes back in with drinks. I ask Finn to ‘add your notes into that (gesture)’. I say, ‘Good boy Finn’ and ask him to add the pedal. He asks me when to change, and I suggest to leave it down, to ‘make it sound gloomy’. He tries, but I gesture and say, ‘No hang on, you’ve started to finger
everything’. He tries again as I do a critical comparison, before saying, ‘Mainly use your arm to play rather than your fingers’. He tries again, and I ask him not to exaggerate the arm movement; it’s better the second time. Finn nods and I say, ‘Good. It’s really nice to see you not non-legatoing like you used to do in the Nocturne. Once you non-legato, you’ve got nowhere to roll to’. Finn nods and I continue, ‘It’s not like playing percussion. The piano is a percussion instrument, but it’s a keyboard instrument first and foremost, and learning to play legato is crucial to a good sound’. Finn is nodding a lot here. Using a preparatory movement (though somewhat awkward) he plays again. I demonstrate, asking him not to lift off the last note of the bar quite so quick, so as to avoid a bump in the sound. He tries again, asking me if the movement was too quick. I ask him if he heard a bump in the sound; he agrees and I say, ‘That means the movement’s too quick’. He tries again, and shows some improvement. I isolate the last two notes of the bar, demonstrating them as a two-note slur and he copies. Despite my demonstrating a loose wrist, he doesn’t seem to notice, so I ask him, ‘Let go of your wrist muscles as you play the D flat’. He continues to copy me, before I introduce the whole bar again. It’s interesting that he confuses the final lift with the rest of the bar, so I remind him that it’s a circular movement; he gets there and I nod. I demonstrate and ask him to join the two bars together, which he does well. I ask, ‘Imagine what that feels like, and then add the pedal but remain with the same feeling’. As I point out, as he adds the pedal, Finn defaults into a certain amount of non-legato, which he seems unaware. He tries again with more awareness; it’s fine this time – ‘Nice work’. I point out that he is really employing the same principles as he uses in Nocturne, and he agrees – ‘Mmm … Yeah, it’s pretty similar’. I ask Sarah if they are planning to buy an acoustic piano. She says, ‘It’s on my mind, but um … yeah’. I suggest that it will improve his playing enormously. I suggest that maybe they could hire one. I ask Finn if there is a (acoustic) piano at school that he could play … Sarah says that she saw the film clip where John Legend was playing on a grand piano. I ask Sarah, ‘How were his gestures?’ and she laughs, saying she was watching carefully. As I demonstrate, I suggest that it will still sound good without using gestural movement, but ‘this’ is more sophisticated. While dramatising, I say, ‘It’s almost like you’re breathing air into the notes’; Finn says, ‘Yeah, I personally like that one’. I do another critical comparison before suggesting, ‘It’s almost like you’re moulding the sound, rather than just throwing clay (I demonstrate and then dramatise), you’ve actually got clay and you’re moulding it, you know like the
wheel... you know how the pottery wheel goes around and around (Finn – Oh yeah) and you press on it and it changes shape? So that’s really what you’re doing with the sound’. I demonstrate again, starting with *All of Me*, moving to random notes, then morphing into *Nocturne*, moving to random notes, then morphing into *All of Me*, before moving to random notes again. Finn turns to Sarah and smiles. I ask if they can ‘see’ the pottery wheel, but Sarah is unsure whether Finn has seen a pottery wheel. She says, ‘Like play dough when you were a kid’. I say, ‘But if all you do is press buttons…’ and follow with a critical comparison. Finn says, ‘That sounds more like, smooth’ and I say, ‘Of course it does’. I play a little of J. S. Bach’s *Invention in C Major* before saying, ‘It doesn’t matter what piece it is, it could be blues’. I then play a little of *Willie Wagglestick’s Walkabout*. Finn and Sarah laugh. I gesture and say, ‘Shapes … It doesn’t matter what style of music you play, that’s the kind of instrument that the piano is. It’s a percussion instrument, but (I demonstrate) … that’s how you get variety in sound, by rolling through the notes with different weights. When you’re making play dough, you don’t just sit there and go (I use fingers in isolation) … you push it sometimes and pull it, knead it, roll … (I demonstrate) that’ basically what you’re doing with piano. You’ve got to get all the notes right, but use that sort of feeling’. Finn seems very engaged throughout this conversation. I hark back to Finn’s tendency to employ a detached touch when he adds the pedal and ask him to be careful not to do so, suggesting that that causes the playing to sound ‘plonky’, (I demonstrate using *Nocturne*) because ‘you’ve got no contact with the piece’. I dramatise, demonstrate and suggest that playing like that is like patting the play dough – it’s more difficult to shape. I ask Finn to join in ‘making shapes’ using his forearms and hands. He does so and seems to really enjoy it! I then ask him to play, which he does. While not perfectly legato, he does seem more ‘into it’. After a while I say, ‘That’s lovely’, praising him for his rubato. I use gesture to encourage his tonal shape and then join in playing too. When we finish, Sarah claps, Finn ‘bobs’ and I say, ‘Oh, that’s really improved’. I mention that he can do, but it just takes him a little bit longer. Finn says, ‘Than other people?’ and I nod. I say that I know what that’s like, because I was the same. Finn seems surprised. I do a critical comparison using the J. S. Bach *Invention*. I say, ‘Playing well to me meant lifting the fingers high and playing them hard …’ I go on to say that using the arms to shape the sound seemed completely foreign to me. I say that I have to remember that I’ve been doing this a lot longer than Finn and ‘You really do play that well, and I can see you’ve
practised it. (Finn nods) … That means a lot to me. Now your piece comes alive, instead of slowly dying at the end’. I mention that I do think that his right hand starts too softly and then do a critical comparison; Finn agrees. I say, ‘I love the rubato you put into it; you’ve really made the piece your own piece. It doesn’t sound like you’re just pushing the buttons anymore … it really does sound good … very very good’. Finn nods and says, ‘I like that piece’. I say, ‘I wondered if we’d get there, and we sort of have’. Finn says, ‘Yay!’ and bobs excitedly. I continue, ‘With you it just takes a little bit longer, and I think along the way we should do more sing and play, and a bit more theory, chords and scales’. Finn agrees. I continue, ‘I think that’s where your strength is (Finn – with chords). I do, it’s where my strength was, and I learnt all this stuff (gestural movement) when I had a bit more awareness of my body’. Finn asks if it’s time to go and seems disappointed when I say yes. He agrees when I ask him if he feels good about what he’s achieved this semester. I say that even though there’s been a few ups and downs, ‘… we’ve overcome a huge hurdle’; Finn nods. I outline what Finn’s doing well with Nocturne (tonal subtlety, balance between the hands, pedal, rubato, effective finger legato). I reiterate that the pedal won’t cover up non-legato. I ask Finn what such a touch sounds like to him. When he says, ‘disconnected’, I suggest that that is how the audience will feel about his playing and then do a critical comparison. I continue, ‘Suddenly, there’s this connection … the connection between you and the piano, the audience will feel that and they’ll see that, and they’ll be drawn into that. (Finn nods) … You’ll take them on a journey (I demonstrate) … You pull them into your playing; you don’t play the piano, you pull people towards your playing, and you do it by shape and colour and sound and gesture … The most important thing is – you have notes. If you’ve got no notes, you can’t do anything. So how do you get notes?’ Finn nods and says, ‘Learning it’. I agree and say, ‘You just have to do the boring hard work.’ I praise Finn for his improvement with fingering consistency, saying that that leads to improved ability to implement gestures, leading to improved sound’. Using a percussion analogy, I liken changing fingering to changing mallets, which leads to alterations in the overall sound… If you let it fit the hand, it will fit the hand, but if you fight against that, it won’t’. I go on to liken changing fingering weekly to changing dance steps (in a dance class) weekly, which causes uncertainty – ‘The only thing you end up working on is fingering, and you can’t work on anything else … All you work on is your feet … what about the costumes, make-up and where you are (on stage) in relation to other people. Fingering
is like your feet – there’s so much more to music than just what fingers to use, but if you don’t have that set, it’s very difficult to move beyond that’. We say that we’ll see you tomorrow (for the concert). Sarah talks briefly about performance anxiety. I say, ‘The key to combating performance anxiety is to know what you’re doing, and build confidence into the piece as you learn it. There’s no point getting up and going, ‘right, good luck!’ if it’s bad in (during) practice. That’s why people get performance anxiety, because they don’t know what they’re doing. If you know all your notes and you’ve practised it and you feel confident, there’s no need to be nervous. You just go, oh, this is a bit nerve wracking … here we go, instead of oh I wish I’d practised the third page more … I have no idea what I’m doing … You want to practise the piece not until you know it, but until you can’t forget it’.

Lesson 15: 14 June 2014

Reviewed 25 March 2016

We (Sarah) talk about Finn doing three items at the next concert as he only played Nocturne. Finn is saying that George talked about Hugh doing six songs and that’s what he wants Finn to achieve for the end-of-year concert, ‘I want six songs including Jinker Ride’. Sarah talks about what ‘The Intermediates’ do – two or three? I agree – it’s clearly an issue that Finn only ‘learnt’ one song this semester. While this is true, he did achieve a lot in other areas that can’t so easily be measured as a public performance. Areas such as keyboard harmony, scales, sing and play, arranging and pedal technique are more difficult to be publicly scrutinised, but form the essential skill toolkit and can be a source of enjoyment. I mention that Adrian is playing six ‘songs’ at the moment, but mainly to try to let Finn see that it is possible for a student to achieve that level of commitment, more so than to lay any sort of guilt for not achieving as many pieces. I say, ‘If you want to be a good musician you’ve got to get a bit more serious’. Sarah says, ‘I don’t know how many times I’ve said this’ and Finn gives a bleak smile. She laughs and says, ‘Maybe it’s a maturity thing … If that’s what you want to do (have a career in music)’ and Finn says, ‘I do … music’s all I plan to do in my life’. ‘If that’s what you want to do, you’ve got to work for it … nothing comes on a platter’. I say, ‘He’s a very laid back sort of boy’. There is more general talk about ‘It doesn’t just get given to you’ and ‘You’re already talented enough … it’s a skill, music’s not a talent’. Finn says, ‘You can be untalented and work your way up’. I say that in the real world, it’s not like the talent shows, it’s more
about sustained effort and skill development over the long term. I’m not sure how much of this Finn gets, but if history will show, his lessons did appear to be more productive in 2015 and 2016 following the end of data collection. I reiterate that piano is a motor activity, so you must be constantly refining your ‘motor skills’ and this is a good enough reason for practice commitment. I can see that Finn gets it, and I go on to say that Adrian works up to an hour and a half every day, and therefore will get further with his motor skill development, a bit like athletic training. I say that he has tried really hard and he’s had extra lessons. Finn says, ‘I thought that piece was pretty fast’. I say, ‘I gave him a deadline and he met it’. I say that if I set a deadline, I want it met, as preparing for a concert performance is multi-faceted and ‘you can’t get a two-week extension like you would a school assignment … it’s too late’. Finn nods as I say that you have to plan the performance and ‘not wake up two weeks before’. I suggest that he had a choice as to whether he stay at an easier (early intermediate) level, or he could develop the work habits and practice skills needed to go to the upper grades (e.g. AMEB Grades 5, 6, 7 and 8). I argue that in order to be ‘good at piano’ (i.e. reach the upper grades), you need to be given a challenge at some stage. I say, ‘I really want to encourage you with your sing and play and your pop songs’. Finn agrees. Sarah and I agree that it will be beneficial to learn the ‘classical technique’, but what we are talking about is developing the expressive gestural vocabulary as per this research project. I suggest that that technique that he learnt in Nocturne can be transferred (Finn – to the right, to the left and stuff) to the contemporary songs. Finn nods and smiles. I talk about Nicholas play the superman theme today and I play an excerpt going on to demonstrate how the movement of arms and consideration of expressive sound can be genre transferable. I go on to talk about the research into how one looks when they play, as much as how they sound. I demonstrate with Nocturne, first without and then with expressive movement – ‘people will register that as being more expressive’. I talk to Finn about what he would like to do the next semester. He starts to pick out a couple, All of Me, Say Something, and Finn asks if he should do a classical/solo piece. Finn says that he ‘thinks’ he can finish Jinker Ride and I jokingly chastise him for thinking, saying that he has to be more determined. I say, ‘You either do it or you don’t’; seems a bit harsh. Finn says, ‘I would like to …’ and I say, ‘No … I will do it’. Sarah agrees. I say that if he doesn’t like Jinker Ride I can find him something else, but the basic message is that he has to push himself more. He says, ‘No, I like it (Jinker Ride)’. We laugh as I
joke about someone having a gun to my head forcing me into it and Finn says, ‘I will do it and perform at the concert’. I ask Finn if he would like to sign a contract that he will practise 1 hour a day, regardless of how much other work at school he has on. I say, ‘If this is important, I will find the time and energy … You only brush the teeth you want to keep … you only practice the pieces you want to perform. I then say the opposite and Finn nods. I play a little of the Czerny *Study*, asking him if he likes it, ‘I will work on that … I will finish it’. I nod and smile and say, ‘OK, great’. I ask him if he heard any ideas or pieces that he liked at the concert. Finn said he liked *Clocks*, and I demonstrate, though I say that it’s a difficult choice but if he wants to do it I will help him, though he has to put in the effort too. I ask if he liked *Spanish Donkey Driver* and I play a little; Finn says he recognises it. I suggest that Finn would be good at it and that he and Jade are similar types of players in many ways. I say that he’s improving with the slower pieces now and I say that Jade sometimes has a bit of trouble playing faster pieces. I play a little of *Elfin Dance*, suggesting that Finn and Jade are on similar paths, as they are now doing studies, ‘to get your fingers working’ and I dramatise. I demonstrate *Nocturne* as a piece for ‘tone and gesture’ and in the end he really got it. I say that he needs a faster piece now to develop his fingers a little more, but that doesn’t mean that the faster pieces are devoid of expression or expressive gesture. I ask Finn try a C Major scale with the left hand. He plays and I say, ‘That’s a good start. Let’s start the scale requirements for Intermediate program six months early’. Finn nods – get your fingers curved, get your body straight, move back. He tries and then I encourage him to make a fist in the low register and then make open out a little more and more. He gets confused about the idea that I’m using the other hand to create a mirror image, not that I explain what I mean. Without saying much, I ask him to lift his wrist to be level with his forearm. He copies my C Major scale two octaves, but missing the fingering descending. I suggest that if he starts again, he has to start and finish with the same shape – he corrects himself. I suggest that he practice that for five minutes. He does so, we don’t say much but he’s doing OK, I ask him not to push on the wrist again and he corrects it, though it’s challenging for him. I ask him to swap hands. I ask him to play on the diagonal of the thumb and when he turns it under, to play on the nail part; I do this through critical comparison and demonstration and Finn copies. I’m encouraging him to play up on the nail but he’s got some tension in the right shoulder that perhaps I don’t notice. It’s interesting that I’m not sitting well at all here. Though he has the incorrect fingering,
he is doing better with his overall body awareness and adjustment of wrist, elbow and forearm here. I ask him to try again ‘from the top’. I ask Finn why we don’t ‘squash the wrist’. I demonstrate, asking him why we don’t play with a squashed wrist. He has the idea, saying, ‘Because it’s harder’, but I suggest that it’s to keep the thumb in a diagonal position. I show him how if we don’t have that, we have to ‘squeeze’ the thumb under instead of it passing easily. I suggest that squeezing will result in a rough sound. I go on to say, ‘If you want a squeezy sound, you do squeezy movements. If you want an elegant sound, you be elegant in your movements. If you want a clumsy sound, you use clumsy movements. Whatever movement you do, that’s what the piano will give back to you. I ask if it was Finn that I was talking about the pottery wheel. Sarah says that we were talking about play-dough, as Finn hasn’t seen a pottery wheel. I ask Finn to check it out on YouTube and go on to dramatise the action and then liken it to the piano – whatever (gentle) pressure put into it, that’s what comes out in tonal variation. Finn says, ‘It gives back’ and I agree, adding that if he can continue to improve his technique and his movement, his playing will become more sophisticated. Finn nods and he says he liked Khoa’s playing. I agree, and demonstrate the left hand of his prelude, doing a critical comparison of the left-hand B-flat Major prelude. I laugh when I make mistakes, saying that a coach doesn’t always have to get in and swim to be a good coach. For Finn’s general benefit, I continue to use the prelude as an example of how to choreograph the gestures to get an expressive and confident sound. I end up playing the right hand of Nocturne and the left hand of Khoa’s prelude and realising that they were almost identical. Finn says that he looked at me and I rolled faster to get louder. I agree and demonstrate while narrating the left/round/down/up/speed of the rolling. I go on to demonstrate the right hand of J. S. Bach’s Invention in C Major with expressive gesture. I ask him if he remembers that I gave him the music for that one. I suggest that he could always study that one, I say that it cost me $5. I say that it’s a new semester and he can turn over a new leaf. He might not have the opportunity in the future, so it’s important to do what he can today, and he seems to agree. I say that he is a lucky boy to have his parents pay for the lessons here at the Conservatorium. Sarah says that she pays $100 a lesson, plus parking, plus ice-cream. I say that Finn can honour the opportunity and come to the lessons well prepared and enthusiastic to show me how much he’s achieved – ‘Mark, listen to this! I worked out the next page, can you help me, not for the last three weeks …’ I go on to say that I find it frustrating to say the same things
weekly and errors not to be corrected. As an example, I talk about the fingering being easy to match up himself. I say that I’m not a lazy teacher, so I don’t want a lazy student and I don’t like it when students don’t try their best. There’s a long pause and I suggest that he get a bit more independent, and that time moves fast and students can feel like they worked harder when they were younger. I mention that I’ve seen students around Finn’s level accelerate a lot because they’ve put the effort into doing so. Another long pause and I ask Finn if he is on the computer. I suggest that he get off the computer and put that spare ½ hour into learning the next page (of whatever). We smile … or stay up another ½ later and practise, or get ready quickly in the morning and do it then, instead of dawdling. I ask him what’s so hard about getting for school ready more quickly. Finn smiles and Sarah laughs. I suggest that people can change (their habits). I suggest that people never really change, but they can improve themselves. To make an excuse for ‘just being slow in the morning’ isn’t good enough … ‘Well Do It!’ It’s an odd teaching technique, we’re I’m criticising someone else’s practice habits but really aiming it at Finn, and it seems to really work for him. I go on to talk about picking up and making the effort with the little things around the house too. Sarah and Finn are laughing, as it seems like Finn is pretty messy at home and she ends up picking up after him. I ask Finn what’s going to happen when he has his own house. I relay my experience with maggots in the kitchen, making me more responsible and independent. I suggest that no one else can learn page one of *Study* except Finn, and he has to make the effort to do so. I suggest that his Mum and I can support him, but ultimately he has to make the effort. I reiterate the fact that he has to grow up a bit, as he is five years away from being an adult. I mention that he will need to take on lots of responsibility then, so he needs to start now, and piano is a first step. I suggest that he does go to university to study music, he will still need to work hard and attend early lectures. We talk about how that might look and how he might get out of the house early enough, and what that might entail at university. I take him through the steps and how much time spent, plus 40 minutes of piano practice. I ask him about how to take transport. I ask him how he’s going to get money to do that … etc. The basic theme is that you have to work for what you want. We joke about lunch and a movie after a lecture and talk further about what life might be like when working hard. I ask Finn where he will get the money to buy a car. The conversation is light-hearted, but he hears the message. I say that childhood is not all about fun and games, but thereafter it’s about skill
development and thinking somewhat to the future, and how that might look. I ask Finn how he intends to get into music without Grade 8 – ‘You’ve only got five years left’. I ask him if he is going to study singing, and he says, ‘any type of music … piano, but music’. I suggest that he be a singer, though he would be more likely to get a position at a music university if he was able to play piano too. I talk about how his CV might look at what examinations he has completed, and how he might be compared to another applicant. ‘I want to be famous – get in line; so does everyone else’. I ask him about how he might get piano students, i.e. how can he prove that he has passed x exam. I ask him what parents might ask him as a prospective teacher (cost, qualifications). I talk to Finn about how he might earn more money if he was more qualified and had passed a higher-level examination. He seems to be enjoying the conversation. I ask him how much money he’d like to learn and if he’d like to teach annoying students. I ask him if it’s ok if he annoys me – he seems very surprised. I reiterate that the amount of work that he does is very important, and sometimes it hasn’t been sufficient. I also reiterate that I really like him; a long pause with lots of smiling, chuckling and looking. I mention that we’ve come to the end of term and that he can have an extra lesson if he practises. He says that it seems like it’s a big break. I say that he can come for a (free) lesson, but I’m not going to give my time for people who don’t work for it, as I’ve got my own stuff to do too. I mention again that there’s only one life and that we need to use our time wisely. I suggest he have a coffee or a caffeinated beverage and do another hour’s practice. I ask him to keep track of where he is each day, and if you can’t do that, keep a practice diary, get organised and ‘pick your towel up’. I say that if you’ve got good practice habits, you can easily keep yourself busy (and organised) for four weeks when we’ve in term break anyway. I emphasise the need to keep working hard by himself, and suggest that that’s what Khoa will be doing too. I say that just because it’s the holidays, Sarah will still be cooking as life keeps going, and that we still have to ‘do stuff’. I clap my hands and ask, ‘So next time I see you, what are you going to play for me’ – he lists his pieces. Finn suggests that All of Me would be a good choice for the next concert and I agree. I suggest that he push himself a bit; he nods and I nod. We sit in silence and smile. I say, ‘Go home and do ½ practice before dinner’, even though it’s the weekend – ‘We don’t just switch off … You can switch off, just after you’ve done your work’. I give an example of a typical day on the holidays. Sarah say, ‘You can fit it all in’. I ask Finn if he keeps a list of things that he wants to achieve in a day.
Finn says, ‘What, a list of goals?’ and I say, ‘Yeah, set yourself a goal, otherwise you’ll be a drifter’. Finn says, ‘A goal for the day’ and I agree, saying that even if ¾ of it’s achieved it’s still good, as the next day you can set a new goal. ‘If you don’t set anything, you want achieve anything’. I clap my hands and Sarah says, ‘Wake up’.

Lesson 16: 19 July 2014

Reviewed 25 March 2016

Finn’s voice seems deeper and I ask him how he is; what’s new. I ask him how his week was, ‘pretty normal’. He says that he’s going to ice-hockey with George tonight and friends are coming over tomorrow for lunch. He sounds excited. I ask him how his practice went over the holidays. He says, ‘Yeah, good’ and that he played Say Something. He asks me if I have lyrics. I exit to get a drink and he plays the start of Say Something; it’s very timid. I come back in and ask him to swap the chairs, as he was sitting too low. He plays again – it’s fine now. I walk around rearranging furniture. Finn plays well overall. He has the notes mostly fluent and the tone is good. He smiles and I sit at the second piano. I greet Sarah as she comes in and Finn finishes. I say that he’s sounding good. Finn is very excited and says, ‘I like it’. I ask him if it feels good to learn something quickly and he agrees. He plays again and I watch on while sitting. He does struggle with double notes, particularly with over-extension of his fingers when doing so. His performance is a little more fluent this time, though there are some minor incorrect rhythms in the chorus. He smiles proudly as he finishes, and I smile and say, ‘Good boy Finn … Well done’. Sarah asks if ‘there’s much to do on that one’. I think I’m caught a bit by surprise and say, ‘Not really …’ but then go on to talk about avoiding finger over-extension, and how it causes him to come away from the notes instead of towards them (which would make more sense). He asks me, ‘Through the whole song?’ and seems disappointed when I nod yes. I suggest that he needn’t worry and that as he learnt the notes so quickly, he can start ‘learning’ about the physical/expressive aspects sooner. I sit and demonstrate, suggesting he work on his tone colour. I stop playing and then show him, asking him not to over-extend his fingers when playing, especially with double notes within the same hand, ‘… as that will make everything lock (in the forearm)’. We swap places and Finn shows me the octave notes. I ask him to deactivate the fingers that he is not using. I start to manipulate him physically, before sitting down to demonstrate. I ask him to align his forearm and wrist; it’s very awkward for him. I ask
him to make a fist, and then open out while maintaining the ‘bridge’. When adjusting his fifth finger, I suggest that the muscles on that side of the hand need to be built up. I continue to adjust him, asking him to bring the knuckles, let go of the muscles that run along the wrist, but build the muscles up inside the hand, around the fifth finger. I get out the ladybug prop at Sarah’s suggestion and Finn smiles. I put it in his palm, and then ask him to let go of the tension in his wrist while turning on the upper arm muscles. He finds holding his elbow out difficult, at least at first. I continue to adjust him, asking him to let go of his shoulder muscle. I mention that his wrist is really stiff and that he could be locking the wrist in order to remain stable, but it’s really the upper arm that holds the hand stable. I say that a stiff wrist is the piano equivalent of holding your breath. We keep trying and I continue to adjust him – ‘Hold your arm up using the big muscles … don’t tense the small muscles (in the hand) … these are the muscles that help support your hand, not the ones inside your wrist’. I try to manipulate his hand, and his wrist is very stiff; it cracks. He tries again, and I come over push up his fifth finger and unlock his wrist; it’s getting easier. I ask him to copy me as I hold my hand the air. It’s interesting to watch, as it seems Finn becomes more and more aware that he is holding unnecessary tension within the hand. Finn takes his own left hand and attempts to adjust his own hand. It’s hard for him, but I give him some space to experiment before coming to adjust again. I seem to be moving his right elbow out so that his forearm pronates slightly, while encouraging him to unlock his wrist. I sit down, demonstrate and ask him to play C and G. I ask him to round out his knuckles – he keeps trying, and then adjusts it himself, using his other hand. I ask him to turn his forearm up and discourage him from making a claw. We move back to C-G at the keyboard, but he is still tense in the wrist. It seems like I’m getting a bit frustrated, and I ask him to be more aware of how his hand sits on the keys, i.e. the fifth finger in and the thumb out, but I don’t say that quite so succinctly. I ask him ‘not to lead with the thumbs’ and he seems to know what I mean, from previous lessons. He tries again, and I ask him not to tense his shoulder, round out his fifth finger, and check that the hand/wrist are ‘nice and balanced’. I ask him to play CDEFG and he does; I adjust his fifth finger so that the hand ‘tilts in’. He tries again, and I encourage him to ‘keep everything pronated; roll inwards rather than outwards’. I demonstrate what I mean using gesture while he plays again. I ask him to put his feet flat, and to play on the tip of his thumb. You can see him slowly improving! I ask him not to let everything collapse (around his hand, fifth finger in particular). I’m very
persistent about him ‘rolling in’ instead of ‘tilting over’, perhaps more so. I ask him not to let his upper arm sag, as this tends to ‘squash’ the fingers making subtle variations in touch difficult, particularly as he would have such a heavy arm. To his credit, he keeps trying even though I seem irritated because he then gets tense in the ‘shoulder … upper neck muscle’ instead of holding your upper arm muscle. He tries again and then I ask him to stand behind me and watch. I do a critical comparison (using the C pentascale right hand), regarding what muscles to use in the arm to help keep your fingers nimble over the keys. I say, ‘You’ve got a combination of the upper arm muscles not being switched on and you’re over-extending the fingers. Until you sort that out, it’s very difficult to improve, generally. You play that one fine, but to play the more technical pieces (I dramatise), you need a technique that can support that. You have to be more aware of your body. It’s sort of like a tennis player or a cricketer; everyone plays cricket or tennis, but the really good ones have a very good technique, and they’re very aware of how they hold their body to get the shot right (I dramatise). Long pause. There’s a difference between playing tennis casually on the weekends, and playing (for example) in the ‘Queensland Tennis Team’. It’s all to do with the technique (I hold my elbows out slightly). Having a good command of how your hands fall onto the keys … that’s how you get the sound, but if you’re always sagging on the keys, and over-flexing and tense, you’ll get an over-flexed, tense sound’. It’s hard to know what Finn might be thinking as our heads are cut from view.

He sits down, and I say, ‘Try your left hand’. He plays his left hand C Major pentascale, and I encourage him to roll/pronate inwards. I suggest that he is better with his left hand and I ask him if he’s left-handed (no). I ask him to copy me as I play the C pentascale descending. I jump in, showing and saying, ‘No, see as you play this finger here (5), you’re over-extending here (2), which is why this finger can’t speak (5), because you’re trapping … all the tendons and stuff that work the fingers; you’re trapping them. (Finn nods) … By doing that with the second finger …’ I ask him to feel my forearm as I use too much over-extension, reiterating the tendency to ‘trap’ the fingers. I ask him to try and again and he plays the left-hand C Major pentascale. I sit beside him as he continues to experiment with the shape and extension of individual fingers and the hand/forearm unit as a whole. I ask him to pronate inwards, showing him, but the view is obscured. Nonetheless, I say, ‘Like you’re looking at your watch … that’s it, that’s called pronation’. I suggest to Finn that he doesn’t have enough of ‘that (pronation)’ in his playing. It’s slow progress and
he keeps trying. I mention about seeing the fifth finger knuckle, and to avoid overlapping the notes. I ask him to deactivate his second finger, and he continues to try. I suggest that if it’s not working, he could try it slower as it would give him more time to think about the signals to his brain. I adjust him ask him to, ‘No, hold your arm up ... I can feel you dragging (the elbow) it down. Something’s getting tight in there and it’s dragging down, when it should be airy (I dramatise and gesticulate)’. He tries again, and I ask him to roll inwards; pronate. He finds it very difficult to ‘hold’ the pronated version of his forearm for longer than around one or two seconds only. I ask him to hold his arm up and to feel a bit more athletic (I wave my arms). He tries again – ‘That’s a bit better, good boy’. Suddenly I get a bit frustrated because he ‘let go’ of his arm. I say that he needs to try a keep the arms switched on for longer periods of time. He tries again, but descending is really hard for him. He copies me as I play ascending; he’s much better here, but still I ask him not to overlap the fingers. I do a very brief critical comparison and he tries up and down again – ‘That’s better’. He continues to improve more and more, though I point out his over-extension of the second finger at one point and warn him, ‘Don’t start getting all comfortable; sit up’. He tries a few times more and it’s amazing the difference in clarity. I ask him to avoid rolling outwards on the fifth finger, rolling inwards instead. This is classic Finn – I say, ‘And back up’ as in ascending a few times, but he doesn’t understand what I mean until I say, ‘as in ascending … back up’. Finn shakes his hand and I ask him if he feels tired. He points to the top of his arm where the deltoid muscles are, and I say that that are the correct muscles working. I say, ‘You can’t play piano with your brain. The only thing you have connecting you to the instrument is your arms’. Sarah says, ‘Some weights?’ and I say, ‘Just more practice and more awareness … more awareness … when you sit down to play, do these simple exercises (meaning the pentascales ascending and descending)’. He tries ascending several times and I suggest to roll gently inwards. It looks like his shoulder is tense and this is making the elbow high. He tries again, and I say that he is twisting too much into ulnar deviation. I ask him to maintain a straight line between the elbow and the fifth finger when he is using it. He tries again, and I adjust him, saying, ‘No, you’re lifting up 2 and 3 as you’re playing 4 and 5, and this thumb should be on the tip, like that’. I ask him not to overbalance and to drop his shoulder, but not his elbow so much. I seem a little irritated. He continues to experiment and I ask him not to tilt his head to the opposite direction of travel. I ask him to keep his head over the centre of his spine. I sit down
at the second piano and demonstrate GG FF EE DD C and he copies me. I move on to CDEFGFED CEGE C and he copies me successfully, though I sit down, demonstrate and say, ‘You’re doing too much (elbow) now. You’re either doing nothing or too much. Can you find somewhere in the middle? Like you’re riding a bike …’ I sit down and adjust my posture and repeat the previous exercise; he repeats it – it’s definitely the best one yet. I move on, saying, ‘OK, now listen to the sound that you make … What’s the sound like, because the way you touch the keys will make the difference in the sound’; Finn nods. I continue, ‘So that’s the whole point of doing these exercises … so that you can start to realise that the way you hold your arms … that’s what makes one piano player sound different from another one, is the way they touch the keys’. Finn nods. He plays the exercise again, ‘OK good, and now the left hand?’ Finn plays the left hand inverted (backwards) and I ask him if he can hear where the tone is shallow. He plays slowly descending first, but I say that he is overlapping the fingers. He clearly knows what I want him to do, it’s just challenging for him. I sit at the second piano and suggest that the thumb might come off the keyboard, rather than remaining stationary. He tries again, but it really is surprising how tricky he is finding it. I remind him that a fundamental technique is to be able to give clarity to the fingers. Finn nods. I liken it to speaking … but then move to tell Finn that he is dropping his arm. I demonstrate, asking him to keep his arm ‘switched on’. Using gesture, I encourage Finn to lift his arms from the elbows and he plays the descending three-note slurs that I just demonstrated. I say, ‘That’s a bit better’. Finn asks if we should go back up and I agree. I ask him to roll inwards, but then he over-exaggerates and that causes some over-extension of fingers 2 and 3. He keeps experimenting, but I say that he’s doing too much ‘rotation … turning’, but I recognise now that I should’ve been saying, ‘radial deviation’. I take his hand and show him what he’s doing and what I want. He tries again, and I say that it’s too much and ask him to ‘end in a straight line’. He finds controlling the smaller movements more difficult and finds it hard to maintain the activation of the upper arm muscles for any length of time. He tries again, and I adjust him, asking him not to press on the wrists, while staying on the fingertips. He keeps trying, and I come in and ask him to lift up the fourth finger as he plays the fifth; I ask him to put his feet down. The poor kid, he keeps trying, but it’s just so hard for him; he sounds frustrated. I ask him to slow down. He takes it as slow as he needs to in order to keep the fingers clear and I say, ‘That’s a little bit better’. I remind Finn to keep his distal joints facing
forwards instead of backwards. He keeps trying, and it seems to be getting better before he starts going into radial deviation again, which I call ‘over-aligning’, saying that that ‘makes everything tight’. Finn keeps trying, after a little while I say that his distal joints are ‘collapsing again’. I say, ‘Can you slow down? No, you’re over-aligning … Sit up.’ I do sound a bit frustrated, but then sound ok, asking, ‘Can you lift up three when you play four?’ Eventually he starts to get the idea, and I say, ‘Good boy, that’s better’. I suggest that he does these exercises with as much intensity during home practice. I say, ‘You’re getting the idea of gestures well, but the finger technique is still not well developed’. Finn nods and there’s a pause. I say that you can ‘hide’ a lack of finger clarity at first, but at about Grade 3, it starts to ‘show’. He agrees. We move back to Say Something, and I ask broadly, ‘See if you can apply what you just learnt, to the song’. Finn copies me playing the right-hand melody; I adjust him, and ask him if his thumb is on its tip. Using one hand at the elbow and one at the wrist, I guide his arm up and down as a unit. Despite me coaching him, he finds it difficult when I ask him to let go of his shoulder muscle, while simultaneously engaging the muscles in his upper arms in order to hold the elbow out a little. Finn tries with the right hand, and while it’s improved a little, I ask, ‘Now how do you want it to sound? Do you want it to sound bouncy?’ Finn says, ‘No … like smooth’. I suggest and demonstrate, saying, ‘You try to do everything smooth and connected’. I do a critical comparison of me using too much movement, against leaning on the keys too much’. I demonstrate again, saying, ‘The way I touch the keys, that’s how it will sound’. Finn nods. I say, ‘That’s why technique is so important’. Finn tries again. I ask him if he’s going to do the repeated notes at the same volume. I sing with a steady crescendo and then say, ‘Try to find a movement (pattern) that will make it get louder and softer’. Finn tries a few more times and I say, ‘Good’. I stop him, saying, ‘That’s better … When you’ve got repeated notes, don’t take your finger off, otherwise it will sound short’. I demonstrate what it sounds like jerky when sung and then he tries for a more smooth result. I demonstrate not lifting the finger off the key surface again with my right hand. He does better so I ask him to copy EEF#, which he does. I demonstrate a slight crescendo but he does pick it, ‘No you’re not getting louder’. He tries a couple more times and gets it. When he plays again, I say that he played EEF# all the same volume (not quite true). He plays again with better tonal shape, so I ask him, ‘How did you get that? How did you do that?’ He struggles to say, ‘I put more …’ and as he moves his arms and head a little. I say, ‘You use movement’, but then
make him take note that his arms had ‘turned off’. He plays again – ‘That’s a little better, but are you going to play all the E’s the same volume, or are you going to use different weights to make different sounds’. Finn agrees that would sound better. He keeps trying with the crescendo, and he starts to get there, especially when I coach him vocally. I ask him to revise some basics – ‘How do I make a sound? How do I hold my fingers and body?’ I say that he’s done a good job, but to make it sound really polished … I sit down and play Say Something, saying, ‘That’s not talent. That’s purely (the result of) the way that I’m touching the keys’. Finn nods. I say, ‘You need to become more aware of how your body sits in space, and how you touch the keys’. He agrees when I suggest that it would make a massive difference to his playing. Tellingly, Finn asks, ‘How would you practice to find your body in space?’ I say, ‘Exactly how I do it with you in the lesson’. He seems confused and it would have been good to have an exact answer, but I say that he needs to be more critical of his what he is doing. I suggest that he remove himself a little and think of ways that his piano playing could improve. Using a C Major pentascale, right hand I reiterate that clumsy movements will equal a clumsy sound. Finn says, ‘Whatever you give to the piano, it will give back’. I say that it’s a simple concept but not easy to implement at first. I go on to suggest that (good) technique isn’t about how curved your fingers are. It’s about how your body sits in space and allows you to (I demonstrate) … make those minute timbral adjustments, just like a voice’. I critically contrast two vocal versions of Say Something. I suggest that we don’t do it with our vocal chords, but ‘… we do it with weight. It’s the only thing we can do it with’. I demonstrate again, critically comparing and suggesting that the difference between an amateur musician and a professional is the professional (usually) has more colour in their playing, and you get that by the way that you sit at the piano – ‘The way you touch the instrument’. I use gesture as I speak, and demonstrate how to sit. I mention that professionals are critical with themselves, but he need not take it to the extreme. I suggest that how well he learns these skills from today’s lesson really is up to him and whether he chooses to improve his sound. I dramatise what he might do and say when he comes to the next lesson – ‘Hey, Mark check this out’. I suggested that he might have needed this kind of lesson. Sarah says, ‘Did you do All of Me?’ and I suggest that he work on his technique (pentascales) this week (along with Say Something and All of Me). I ask him to try to become more aware of how his body sits in space. Sarah says, ‘Play his old songs and try and improve the quality?’ and I ask Finn how he’s going with Jinker
Ride. He says he hasn’t been playing it, and Sarah says he’s been playing *The Entertainer, Prelude, Nocturne* and ‘all the oldies’. I suggest that the next phase will be concentration on improving his fine motor skills (along with gesture), particularly of the left hand. I say that that can be a problem, where the gestures are working well, but the fingers have become a bit ‘sleepy’. As we finish, I say that piano isn’t easy to learn. Sarah agrees, ‘Yeah, there’s a lot more than I thought’. I verbally list the skills involved, learn the keys, the rhythms, how to read the music, how to partial practice difficult spots, how to do different articulations in each hand, how does your hand sit on the keys, how does your hand press the key to get a subtle sound. Then you’ve got the pedal; it’s quite difficult. I say that it’s taken me about 35 years. ‘You’re already good at the piano, but to make the Queensland Team, you need to review the foundations, and that comes with time. I say that it takes different people different periods of time to understand ‘the tools of the trade’. I praise him for getting more organised and independent, and now we review technique.

*Lesson 17: 26 July 2014*

Reviewed 26 March 2016

- I talk about shifting to the other piano as the one closest to the camera has a broken key. George asks if the student before Finn was Italian (yes) and if they came to Australia for employment. George talks about engineers moving from China and I say that Silvia is a children’s author (primary school). He talks about the only time he speaks Italian is with his parents. Finn’s sister is learning Italian; Finn is not learning Italian, but learning French. I ask Finn how his ‘exercises’ are going (C Major pentascales). Finn says that George showed him a ‘trick’ and he holds his arms up as if playing. George says, ‘Well, it wasn’t a trick …’ Finn says that George got Finn to hold some bananas and keep the position for the count of 100; we all laugh. I ask Finn to hold his arms up to play while dropping his shoulders and loosening his wrists. Finn asks, ‘Am I tight?’ After readjusting him, I (jokingly) suggest he hold the position for 100 minutes. I say, ‘That’s good’ after he plays the right hand twice. Interesting, after I ask him to put his other arm up ready to play, his right hand is no longer as clear. George says, ‘His posture looks so much better when he’s doing that’. At first I’m confused and George clarifies. ‘Everything just flows’. I say that it’s a lot better and Finn smiles. George says that he had been doing these exercises and overall revision for the week and Finn had complained that his (deltoid) muscles were hurting.
a little bit. George said that he ‘stepped in’ and helped him with some strengthening exercises. We carry on and I coach Finn to round out his fifth finger. I ask him to play the left hand and then help him with his fifth finger. I ask him to play in contrary motion and then to re-check his posture as he plays the fifth fingers. As he gets to the fifth fingers, I adjust the height of his knuckles and then he comes back in. I ask him to repeat the process a few times before I get the iPad out and film him do the hands together in contrary motion; we watch it. I ask if he can see the fifth finger flattening out. I say, ‘You did try to come up (on the fifth finger), but you need to come up a bit more’. I ask him to play again and I record again. I say, ‘Wow! Check that out!’ and I ask Finn what he did different – Finn say, ‘I don’t know, I tried to push up my fifth’ George adds, ‘and put your elbows out’. I praise Finn and he smiles. I ask him to play again and I record it from the left. I say, ‘Oh, very good … You’re really getting the idea now’. As we watch I ask Finn if he can see where his left hand ‘fell into place’; we watch it again and laugh. I ask Finn why we might need rounded tips and good alignment. He answers regarding comfort and so he doesn’t ‘over-flex’. He means over-extend and I go on to show him where his extensors are and where his flexors are. I explain that as you play a key, the flexors are going down (shortening) and if the other fingers are going up, you’re shortening the extensors at the same time, which is not ideal. Finn explains to me that that’s why he shouldn’t lift up some of his fingers as a reaction to playing with his others. I get him to feel my arm and he describes what it feels like when I’m playing with the fourth finger, but lifting with the second finger. He said it feels tight and I say that it’s inefficient muscle use, and will affect the sound. As I demonstrate the right hand D’s for *Say Something*, I suggest that he needs to have a much range of sound (colour) as possible. I go on to say that appropriate tension and appropriate relaxation, though no muscle could ever be completely relaxed, as there is always some tension in the muscles, but it’s going beyond that, where we need to be aware of instances where muscles work against each other. I reiterate that Finn has done a good job and George asks me some questions. I sit down nearby and he says, ‘When he’s got to do this … (obscured) what are you, what position are you trying to achieve here?’ I sit down and explain that while the piano keys are straight, aim for a ‘diagonal shape’, meaning the direction the front of points to. I say and gesture with the other hand, ‘You want it so that the arm comes to the corner of the room, rather than straight on’. I go on to suggest, ‘Like when you ride a bike’, doing a critical comparison and then suggesting
that you ‘drape yourself over the keys’. George is obscured, but he asks me about the muscle activation in the arm. I suggest to ‘deactivate the muscles below the elbow as much as possible and activate them in the upper arm where the muscles are nice and big’. I reiterate there to be no unnecessary tension in the shoulder and George talks with me. George says, ‘Yep, we can work on that Finn’ and Finn agrees. George and I talk further about prioritising using bigger muscles over smaller ones. Playing a little of Fantaisie-Impromptu, I suggest that position of the arms will help the fingers roll through the notes with greater ease. I go on to show George how to align the right-hand fingers with the forearm, compared to what Finn was doing earlier. George correctly notes, ‘And when you’re like that (squashed fifth finger) … it’s almost like a point of no return’. I mention that I can feel tension in my forearm – ‘When you push down on the wrist, you’re (unnecessarily) activating the muscles in the top part of your forearm’. George agrees ‘absolutely’ when I ask him to try with his own forearm. I suggest that pushing on the wrist like that ‘strangles the fingers’. George agrees with the concept saying, ‘Oh, I’ve played a lot of sports’. I agree, ‘It is a sport’ and George says that he has been trying to think of it that way. When I suggest that music is not about music, it’s purely a motor activity, he laughs and says, ‘Don’t say that, you’ll crush my dream’. I say that Finn already has the talent, and now he’s working on ‘the physique’ for playing. Finn doesn’t seem too impressed when George says he’s doing rowing in fourth term. I warn them about having to get up early and George mentions they are very aware of that. George says that Finn really needs strengthening and I agree that it’s a good thing. George says that he has been watching him do the exercises are has noticed his arms get very sore very quickly. George seems to feel like he’s intruded, but I say that he isn’t interrupting and what we’re talking about is very important. I suggest that ‘going on about a bird floating’ (using an expressive metaphor) isn’t what to focus on in this instance where basic technique needs development. I refer to it as a ‘basic set-up’. George says, ‘The thing this week that I noticed was he was starting to understand his body, and parts because he was getting the soreness in it’. Finn sits quietly though he slouches. I say, ‘Right, well that’s good’. George continues, ‘… and so that’s an awareness that he didn’t have … and it’s interesting just watching the rest sort of then flow’. I agree and say that Finn ‘draping’ himself over the keys with the support of the upper arms may encourage him not to lean on the keys, as that makes physically achieving subtle nuance more difficult, and it makes it more challenging to coordinate the hands.
George asks me if he should keep practising and I say that it’s a good idea. He agrees, saying, ‘So it’s all positive’. I mention to George that he had learnt *Say Something* quickly, another area that is improving (learning notes). I suggest now we can turn to the ‘physical’ as well. George agrees and I pull up a chair. George reminds Finn to tell me about him winning in House Choir. Finn loves singing. George said that they sang the Proclaimers. Finn said, ‘I was pretty happy’. We talk about his long day starting at 9am. We both encourage him to play with his elbows wider, i.e. to turn on the upper arm muscles a little more. Finn plays *Say Something*, hands together with pedal. The tone is unforced and pedal is good. I adjust him to move his left elbow more, but that induces errors. The same thing happens when I adjust his right shoulder to drop. I nudge him forward as the music peaks, but then he has a big hesitation with the notes. I help him to readjust the notation, leaving out the low D and changing fingering; I sit down to coach him with the D E F# gesture. We then review double rotation to induce a louder F# without pushing, but the view of Finn is partially obscured here because of my right forearm. I encourage him (by using critical comparison) to not ‘freeze’ the muscles on impact. ‘When you push, that activates all the muscles and you get this sort of squeezy sound … instead of a ringing sound’. Finn agrees. I ask him to try again, and then say ‘Excellent Finn … now send it out into the world. That’s it, do you feel the sound comes up and around and fills the room’. I gesture a lot here. I play a little and Finn plays a little. I say, ‘Now interestingly …’ and go on to notice how when he plays both hands together, he is unable to keep the right-hand legato. I ask him to ‘preserve that kinaesthetic feeling (right-hand gestures) while we do this (left hand plays)’. He tries again and I ask him not to use the pedal. We keep passing the fragment and then I ask him to ‘put more energy behind the right hand’. Finn tries, but I ask him not to be so loud on the first note. I ask Finn to ‘come up’ as he plays the D with his thumb. After he passes this, I ask him to put the pedal back in last, but ‘… don’t change anything though’. Finn tries but I pull him up for playing non-legato in the right hand. He eventually gets it though and I indicate to George that, ‘he has trouble with that’. By what I say next, it sounds like I am assuming that Finn will *always* play non-legato; George is very polite though. I agree though that that will be an area to keep working on. I come over and suggest again that Finn leave out the octaves and play the top notes in the chorus. As he plays the right hand, I ask him to make the top notes less detached. I say, ‘Instead of xxx go xxx’. Finn tries himself a few times and says, ‘Oh, that’s hard’. He tries again as I adjust the fingering in the
score. After that, I sit down at the piano and ask Finn to drop into F#, and then go on to play the melody F#EEEEF#EDD which he copies. I ask him to try and ‘hug’ the bottom of the keys, but Finn does find it challenging to stay close to the keys. The view of the action is better here than earlier. ‘Don’t let any air inside the notes’. After he tries again, ‘Much better; now see if you can …’ and I start to demonstrate just flopping onto the keys with nuance. He does copy me exactly, but plays again with better tonal width. I play and he copies again. I then go through each note in turn, ‘Loud soft and build back up then back down. He keeps trying as I intervene a couple of times, asking him to grow a bit more subtlety. I ask him to play the second finger, encouraging him to notice that my whole arm is loose. I can’t see Finn’s arm here, but he plays again and I say, ‘That’s better Finn’. He nods and then I play again. He copies, and I ask him to check that he’s not squeezing with the forearm. He tries a couple of times, one good one, but then we agree that with his next attempt, the notes sound too squeezy. He continues to try and I ask him to lift his upper arm up and turn off the muscles in his hand (… that’s it). He does do better. I say, ‘That’s it. When I say don’t squeeze, what I mean is don’t lock the wrist … try to activate the upper arm, but let everything else be soft underneath the elbow’. I demonstrate throughout and then again. I come over and encourage Finn to adjust his arm and shoulder. He smiles as I move his lower arm from the upper arm. I suggest that he ‘hug the keys, but activate from the upper arm’. He tries again (a really good one!) and I say, ‘Yeah, that’s definitely improving, good boy’. We both say, ‘Yay’ and I ask him if he’s getting used to the new sensation. He asks me, ‘What do you mean by that?’ I clarify, asking him if he can get used to the sensation of being switched on from the elbow up. Finn indicates his elbow and says, ‘I felt very loose here, and I felt like the muscle up here …’ I interrupt and ask him to play the phrase faster, thereafter saying, ‘Good boy … See that’s got so much more colour in it now … So much more sound’ Finn smiles. I sit down and briefly play the fragment hands together before coaching Finn with ‘elbow, upper arm, loose from the elbow down’. It’s amazing how much better he sounds and I ask George – he agrees and Finn is nodding. I say that instead of sounding like a 12-year-old boy, he sounds like … (I don’t finish). George says, ‘I can see it … I can see the difference, it’s very, it’s fluid’ and I add, ‘It sounds different to me too; it doesn’t sound squeezy’. Finn agrees. George continues, ‘Organic, is the best word I can use and I say, ‘Organic, that’s a really good word. So it sounds like it’s coming from him, that’s because it’s coming from his body. The only thing he has
is his body. You can’t play it with your vocal chords, you can’t play it with your eyes, you can’t play it with your brain’, though Finn clarifies that he needs his brain. I continue, ‘The only thing that contacts the keys is your body. So if you can learn to … (Finn – remember to be nice and loose) be aware of how your body contacts the keys, and roll through the notes instead of pushing them and squeezing them’. I gesture and describe to Finn the butter/buttons analogy. I pretend to spread butter with my ‘knife’ and I ask Finn to feel my upper arms, as the upper arm muscles have activated even with this simple manual task. I do a critical comparison do demonstrate how it would look if I didn’t use my upper arm muscles in the task; the point being that manual tasks with the hands don’t necessarily exclude involvement of the entire arm unit. I suggest that he ‘delicately spread the notes across the keys’. George says, ‘The other thing too Finn …’ and goes on to point out that when I involved the arm upper, there was a lot more room for freedom of movement compared to the other where my upper arm was still. I equate that extra movement, to more colour in the sound’.

Finn is attentive and I describe what I mean by ‘more tonal nuance’ (extra range of dynamics). I add, ‘From the very soft, (Finn – to the very loud)’. I suggest to Finn that playing without moving the upper arms limits the range of sounds he could produce and he agrees. George recognises that this song in particular (Say Something) that could certainly make use of subtle nuances (being a rock ballad); I agree enthusiastically, saying that because it’s a vocal piece, that is even more applicable. I say, ‘What you’re trying to do is imitate a singer’s inflections’, demonstrating and giving a detailed vocal analysis. I then transfer these micro nuances found in the voice across to the piano. George says, ‘That’s a very good explanation’. I go on to suggest that even though what I just talked about was a little ‘mechanical’ (cold), if you then add movement to ‘cushion’ it … through gesture. I sit down and to a complete run down of the volume of each note on a sliding scale and then suggest he ‘blend it all in’ with his arm. I do a critical comparison of expressive and deadpan variations. I ask him to close his eyes and then I play the ‘blended one’ and then ‘just mechanical one’. I hear Finn mumble ‘Yeah’. I also ask Finn to consider how someone might look when playing expressively, saying that for example, a flowing song would need a flowing movement for it to sound flowing. I talk to Finn about the ‘McGurk effect’, and how we see something can influence the way we hear it. I tell Finn about and encourage him to look up the YouTube example, going into detail how it works. He asks me how it might be spelt (McGurk). ‘The way that you play the piano influences
the way it sounds’. I sit down and demonstrate, showing an over-exaggerated example of *Say Something*, accompanied by a bangy sound. I make the point that no about of enlightened body movement can distract from a poor sound – ‘It’s not pleasant to listen to’. I go on to demonstrate how in general, body movement facilitates sound production and production of sound influences which gestural movement to use. I demonstrate *Say Something*, saying, ‘If you choose movements that support the sound, it’s going to sound even more flowing’. Finn agrees. I outline why we might use gestural movement: It’s for a visual effect, it feels comfortable, and it influences the way it sounds, because, ‘… you’re not twisting and pulling and … squeezing. You’re just rolling through the notes, and once you start to understand that, your playing will take off. It will always sound good, and you can apply this (these ideas) to other pop songs’. I sit down and play *Never Let You Go*. I draw Finn’s attention to the way that I am using gesture to shape the expressive sound of the melodic line. Finn says, ‘Mmm’. I show him a critical comparison with a flat melodic line with mainly finger action. I show Finn a ‘musical’ example, and then suggest a ‘true’ example. I say that he can apply that to *Jinker Ride*, and I play a short example; ‘I’m just dropping into the keys’. I mention that we’re coming up to finishing. I ask him what the main things he’s been practising. He tells me (*All of Me*, *Say Something*, pentascale exercises). I ask him whether he wants to move on from *Jinker Ride* (maybe) and I say that I’ll find ‘something else’. I ask him if he’d like to do another Pop Song. Finn agrees. I say that they’re excellent for learning to play the piano well and mention rhythm, sound, pedal, movement, gesture, keyboard harmony, and arranging as benefits. George agrees, saying, ‘… Whatever it takes for him to step up to the next level’. I mention that some students in the Intermediate level play a mixture of Classical and Pop. I ask him if he’s still playing the Czerny *Study*. I sit down and play it and he remembers. I ask him to play the study and another pop song. I caution Finn that he needs to learn what he is assigned. I ask him to prepare both hands separately for the Czerny *Study*. George asks Finn to check he has it, because he doesn’t want to have to check later. It’s there and George summaries for us – Czerny, those other two pop songs, and his exercises. I ask him to throw in a few scales – George replies, ‘So five things’. I mention that I’ll find something else to do, and say that it really sounds like he had considered what I had told him at the last lesson, referring for the need for increased body awareness as the grades climb higher. I mention that it’s important that the fundamentals are in place for a good sound to
reveal itself. I also say that he needs to remember not to be slack and to aim for short-term goals that then morph into a long-term goal. I remind him that practising seriously in the last three or four weeks won’t necessarily do it, mainly because of piano playing’s motoric nature. I argue that in that way, it’s like a sport and that regular training is needed to achieve an elite level. I say, ‘You need to be training, every week’. Finn says, ‘Practising every day’. I remind him that you can add ‘expression’ into the piece bit by bit, but what really happens is that the notes become automated to a degree to allow the motoric aspects to be analysed. In other words, the spatial and musical confidence needed to play expressively, are developed over the long-term, at least in Finn’s case anyway. George scrambles to write a couple of things down as we finish. I help him with the spelling of Czerny.

Lesson 18: 2 August 2014

Reviewed 27 March 2016

Sarah is here with Finn tonight. Finn sees that the key has been fixed. Sarah says that he’s done a huge amount of practice this week. I say, ‘Good, that’s what we like to hear’. Finn smiles. I ask, ‘So what have you got to show me, besides your awesomeness’. Finn says that he got down to ‘here’, meaning that he’s half way. I ask him to do the rest this week. He starts to play with hands together and after a few bars, I interrupt to draw his attention to the semiquaver rests. I sit down and demonstrate how to play it. I prompt him back and forth a couple of times, and then he plays it while I stand. He asks me, ‘How fast is that bit?’ meaning the semiquavers that he just powered through. I say, ‘Just, hang on’ and I write on his score, and I remind him about the semiquaver rest on the beat of the left hand. Finn plays the D minor part and I complement him on his fingering. He continues to play while I point to the score and coach him through. He comes unstuck with the left-hand fingering, but I put him back on track; it’s very slow but he’s doing it. He comes to a spot where I ask him to write the fingering in, and while he’s doing so, we talk about Czerny being a student of Beethoven, Czerny teaching Liszt. Finn says that he could be like Czerny and I would be Beethoven and we laugh. I talk about the Liszt, Theodor Leschetitzky, Artur Schnabel, Nancy Weir connection and the piano teaching family tree. I mention that studies were popular in the Romantic period. Finn tells me what the dates were and I talk about pianists travelling by horse and carriage to give concerts. I say that the study is a ‘teaching’ piece. Finn finishes hands together until the middle section. He
checks the notes with me and I correct his fingering. We talk about the augmented fourth (the Devil’s interval) after Finn notices it sounds strange, asking me if it’s correct. I demonstrate using a diminished seventh and tell him that by the Romantic period, everyone was using it. Finn recognises it sounds scary and I review the intervals augmented and diminished. I demonstrate the augmented fourth using The Simpsons Theme. Finn continues with the piece and I correct a couple of fingerings; I ask him to write it in himself. He does so cheerfully and I question him about the fingering choices. I sit down and show him how those bars sound with the fingering that we were just learning and how it might otherwise sound. I suggest that he ‘use fingering that can allow you to use … use gesture’ and I continue playing. I give the music back to Finn and play again, saying that even though it’s ‘just’ a study, it still needs to sound ‘musical’ and not ‘bangy’ and that’s the reason for the fingering. He carries on and I help him with the F semibreve. Finn says, ‘Oh, good point’. I help him with the fingering choices, and he says, ‘I guess that makes more sense’. I demonstrate what I’m asking again and that call it ‘finger substitution’. Finn laughs and then tries himself, but lifts up the fourth finger. I continue to coach him to play with double notes, and ask him to use a ‘downward motion’ and then and ‘upward’ at the cadence. When Finn successfully says, ‘So that’s the end of the phrase’, I smile and say, ‘Excellent! It’s like the end of a sentence’. I continue to coach him with the double notes, but it’s challenging for him. I suggest that instead of playing the notes with precise rhythm like ‘in the piece’, he just make it a three-note exercise. This seems to help and I ask him to let go of the thumb as he drops his hand. He continues to improve, and I ask if I can ‘fix you up’, meaning make slight adjustments; Finn laughs. I ask him to deactivate the left half of his right hand (thumb) while holding down/playing the other fingers; I ask him to stop while I manually deactivate his right thumb. We continue to take turns as he copies me; we don’t say much. I do a free fall and ask him to copy me; he does well but when it comes to playing a single note, he decelerates. I ask him to try again – he does; it’s a nice moment when he ‘gets’ a three-note slur that includes a held note. I slap my thigh and say, ‘You’re getting better at it aren’t you?’ Finn’s face is beaming. I remind Finn that what will help him improve his skills more than anything is practice. I ask him to keep going with the next half of the Czerny Study. I ask him if he can do it on his own, and he says, ‘I’m all right’. I ask him if it makes him feel ‘a bit proud’ if he is able to complete his own assignments. Sarah mentions Finn’s composition, and Finn tells me about his 12 bar
blues song that he did for a music assignment. I ask him if he could bring it along and show me. He tells me about Finale. Going back to the Study, I remind him about the semiquaver rests and he asks, ‘Not having the piece (sound) too technical?’ and I refer to the importance of ‘having notes in order to be able to do something with the piece’. I then start playing the Czerny Study using somewhat exaggerated dynamic shape. I play a C Major scale with my left hand and he copies, we then go into drills to round out the fifth finger; it all seems quite positive. I can’t really see, but I say, ‘you’re getting better at that shape now aren’t you?’ and Finn agrees. I play the ascending pentascale then a one-octave scale; Finn copies. I then start adding notes. I pause to ask him to pronate his arm inwards when turning the 3 over. I tell him that it’s better, but to be more aware of his elbow – ‘Don’t let it drop after you’ve rolled. I keep the upper arm muscles switched on so you don’t drop’. Finn looks carefully and plays one octave. I ask him how his arm exercises going, referring to the weights for his deltoids. We laugh and I ask him to make sure that below the elbow is ‘soft’. Finn talks about how he can feel the muscles. I say that he looks ‘a bit boxy’, but it will soften as he gets more used to it. I say, ‘Good on you’, and we move to two octaves. While the tone is a little thin, it is obvious that he isn’t leaning on the keys anywhere near as much as before. I say, ‘Yeah, that’s a massive improvement’. I say that Finn is not alone, as ‘everyone’ goes through this process; he seems a bit surprised. I say, ‘If you can learn to hold your arms well, you don’t lean on the keys … because that’s when the notes get all squishy and clumsy’. We do an exercise and I remind Finn that the piano is ‘very touch-oriented’. I keep demonstrating and Finn seems pleased to listen, and reminds himself of the need to ‘not be tight’. I play a little more and say, ‘When I play, I feel the bottom of the keys, and I go to that … we call it the point of sound … (Finn nods and I play) … you don’t press past the point of sound and you don’t play too softly either’. I stand/play, and use the analogy of the fingers being like legs walking and ‘how fast’ the feet go down affects the sound, particularly if you ‘trip’ and make a clumsy sound because of poor form (technique). I say, ‘It’s really important and I’m so pleased for you’. Finn says, ‘Thank you’. ‘That’s what makes the piano the piano; it’s a touch-oriented instrument (Finn – yeah it is). The only thing that you can do to get a good sound is (use) yourself’. Finn says, ‘But you can help me’ and I say agree, but qualify, ‘It’s your sound, not mine’. Finn says, ‘And because it’s different for everyone who plays it in different ways’. I say, ‘It is, totally … and to learn about that you need notes … you need, the building blocks (Finn nods) … so
that’s why practice is important, so you’ve got something to, fiddle around with’. Finn agrees. I sit down and suggest that he play the right hand sixth C-E from the Czerny Study. He does so, and then I ask him to free-fall onto the keys, ‘You know, like a free fall, like gravity?’ Finn says, ‘Yeah’ and then falls onto the keys. We continue to take turns, though the view of me is obscured. I ask him to move to the left and we continue, eventually ‘adding’ the sixth into the free fall. I suggest that he ‘switch the muscles back on’ as he continues the movement trajectory, indicating that his elbows slowly widen after impact; ‘So you let go of them … and switch them back on, excellent’. After he plays the initial sixth, I say, ‘and that switching on becomes the preparatory up movement for the next down’ as I fall into the next bar of the right hand. Then I ask him to play the right hand as written, saying, ‘That’s good; make sure you’re not going … (I wave wrist) … don’t do anything extra, just go …’ and I demonstrate again. He continues, stopping once to say, ‘… That was a bit …’ and tries again. After a couple of attempts, I say, ‘That’s better… Yay, good boy!’ He certainly does get there here. I demonstrate the hands together saying, ‘It’s so simple; you’ve just got to be aware of what to do’. Finn seems to agree. We to the free fall again and again, ‘Off, on … off, on’. Eventually I get there with the idea, and start singing ‘Off-on’ when dropping and then lifting playing the right-hand sixths. He does well and I say, ‘Good boy’. He is nodding. I continue with the next bar saying, ‘that on (long note) becomes … (I play the following right-hand semiquavers) the impetus for the next one’. I ask him to ‘find the 3’, meaning play the free fall and then prepare the fingering. He does well and I say, ‘Oh you’ve just massively improved in the last two weeks, it’s incredible, really good, yeah …’ and Finn says, ‘Yay’. We continue and he copies the gestural fragments (with add-a-note technique) and I say, ‘It’s like I’m looking at a different person honestly’. He says, ‘Really?’ – ‘Yeah, it’s incredible’. We continue to fragment the semiquavers using ‘add-a-note technique’, adding notes in the direction of travel, and building the overall gesture sequentially, both physically and expressively. I correct his thumb position, saying, ‘No, you turned your elbow off … If you turn your elbow off you’ll go down on the thumb instead of … like an up movement. Now play on the corner of the (thumb) nail … good, now hold it (the thumb) there and just roll over’. Finn continues to follow my lead, building the gesture up sequentially with principles of effective movement. I ask Finn not to move his head, just his arm. We start laughing a little later and begin building up the speed up of the fingers. I say, ‘See how you’ve got more facility now, because
you’re not leaning on them (his fingers)’ and he agrees. Finn seems surprised that he can play so fast. I say that the facility is there but don’t stop the keys from working and I compliment on his recent ability to ‘realign his muscles’. The good thing is, Finn is feeling his forearm with his other arm and is certainly more aware of his body than in previous weeks. I do a critical comparison of how forearm tension can affect the facility of the fingers. I suggest that what we are doing is really acquiring skills, and that ‘there’s nothing musical about that’, though that could be argued. I compliment him again on his good work. We do some more work with the pentascales, building on from where we were previously (both hands in contrary going in quickly). I ask him to ‘dangle’ his hands in, ‘like you’re about to ride a motorbike’. We add notes again, starting with the fifth fingers, and he does well with overall facility and speed with one, two or three notes, but has more difficulty with 4 or 5 consecutives notes. The improvement though is quite noticeable here. We start again from strong 5’s and then all five notes. I point out, ‘See how fast your fingers are?’ He chuckles and tries again, after which I coach him with his overall arm position – ‘Would you ride a motorbike like that?’ I suggest that starting from the thumbs and going out is harder, but then when he does really well, I say, ‘Not that hard for you’ and Finn laughs. I ask him to play again, this time demonstrating going in and then out in each hand; it’s good overall – ‘good!’ He gets more and more excited by his progress. This time I ask him to play going in quickly, pause, before going out. He’s doing much better than I expected to see here. I ask him to start from the thumbs and play two notes going out, reiterating, ‘See how you’re turning them (the upper arm muscles) on?’ We do ‘add-a-note technique’ activity going in, before I caution him about avoid ‘squishing’ the wrists down, ‘Keep them (the fingers) on their tips. Gosh, even my arms are getting tired’. I refer to my deltoid muscles being activated so much here. Finn laughs and says, ‘Really?’ and I say, ‘Yeah’. Then I ask him to move on to three notes (123) and then another three notes (345) going out. He tries and does well, though I advise him to have ‘no claws’ but the view is obscured. I ask him to play again, slowing down on the last few notes to give more time to adjust to good physical form. I praise Finn for ‘going up’ and improving so much; he says, ‘Yay’. I ask him what else he is playing. Finn suggests, Say Something. I tell Sarah about George’s ‘organic’ comment, which I suggest is a really good way to describe the movements we are looking for. I say, ‘It sounds like … the playing belongs to Finn’. I say that Finn looks and sounds so much better, and it ‘sounds more real to
me’. I say that he doesn’t have a clumsy look, and Sarah suggests, ‘more rounded’. I agree, noting that, ‘it might look a bit boxy for a while’. As I demonstrate, I remind Finn that the hands are not always going to be in that pentatonic position, and it’s important to remember that each hand has its own independent movement trajectory.

Using *The Entertainer*, I show him how from the boxy position, each are then implements its own detail. I suggest that the next step for Finn is to improve his ability to play different gestures simultaneously. Sarah says that Finn now plays *Nocturne* ‘better than at the concert’ and I ask if I could hear it. He plays the hands together; there is definitely more subtlety in his touch. I interrupt and say, ‘Good boy’ before asking him to connect the notes legato in the part he was just playing (Marimba or piano?). I ask him to keep going (show me piano) and it’s good, though he has some fluency problems. Interestingly, as soon as his confidence drops, his right-hand touch becomes non-legato and I say, ‘Marimba or piano there?’ (Piano). Using the minor third (E flat – C) as an example, I talk to Finn about the need to have contact with the E flat in order to ‘roll’ and thereby judge the volume of the C. (‘If you feel the bottom of the E flat, you can then roll towards C … and therefore you can get softer’). He plays the right hand for the next phrase, a wide one and I ask him, ‘Any marimba playing in that bit?’ and he answers, ‘No’. I don’t think he understood the question, because I ask him and he doesn’t seem to notice the non-legato between A flat and C. He plays it again, and I suggest, ‘there you go, that’s got more shape now, because you can roll onto the note’. Finn smiles proudly. I ask him to repeat the phrase, adding notes each time, cautioning him to use total legato. I ask him to ‘turn the muscles off’ in order for him to implement a free fall onto the high D. I continue, ‘Now, slightly turn the muscles off, but then turn them slightly back on as you play the D … good! That way you don’t get this massively loud sound; you just get a semi-loud sound. A free fall can be tempered by an immediate deceleration on impact by turning your muscles on, sooner. I go on to describe that the quality of the free fall seems to be assisted by a slight activation of the upper arm on impact – ‘The more upper arm you’ve got, the softer it’ll be. Now do the free-fall with some upper arm, but don’t let go of the note (with the finger)’; it’s challenging for him. I then suggest the use double rotation when moving from fingers 5 to 4, in order to give C more body. I suggest that rotary movement will allow for a bigger sound. He plays the right hand again with the pedal, and I suggest, ‘And now, put your imagination back in, so like think, sweet puppies in the daffodils’. Finn laughs and plays again. I ask him
‘what’s with the marimba playing?’ and ‘roll faster through the notes’. He is doing better, so I ask him to play without thinking too much (just roll). He tries twice more – ‘That’s lovely, now drop into your D’. He tries again, but typically misses a note or two because he seems to stop moving mid-phrase. Finn nods as I say that his hand ‘sort of froze’. I continue, ‘As you play A flat you start rolling to C’. I ask him to play the top note louder. He is able to do ‘everything’ but it takes a lot of review. What follows is trying to blend the first free fall D with the following C. I then ask him to soften the left hand when playing the treble C. He keeps trying, but he does improve more with each repetition; it’s obvious he is trying his best. When I ask him to play B flat in the left hand soft and the right-hand C louder, he has real difficulty. I remind him to keep his ‘free fall’, and Sarah says, ‘It makes such a difference, that free fall’. I agree, dramatising someone crying out and Sarah says, ‘Yeah, a lot of emotion’. Finn continues to experiment. I say, ‘But if you have too much of it … did you hear that sound? (Yeah) You’ll get that wooden sound (yes) … It’s tempered by a slight upward movement of the upper arm, on impact. I encourage Finn to keep trying and keep practising that piece, as he has notes prepared, making it possible to keep refining his skills. I suggest that anyone can learn notes, but to go beyond that and ‘learning how to use the notes to propel your arms in different directions, that’s what will give you a very unique sound’; Finn nods. I suggest that people with think that he’s talented, when really it’s like learning more skills, briefly narrating a possible scenario what my thought patterns might be, regarding what movements I might choose to ‘fit’ the piece when playing. Finn seems to understand and is smiling. I suggest that it is analytical in nature. I ask him to stand and I play, attempting to explain that once all of that is prepared, it may be possible to ‘switch off’ a little and ‘go with the flow’. I show Finn how I have ‘found’ a double rotary movement from the high C to the B flat. I do a critical comparison between pressing and then using gesture, asking him to take note of the sound. I move on to play Say Something and suggest that he ‘do it here as well’. I stand and Finn plays the start of Say Something. As he plays, I move his left arm a bit more, as it’s a little still. The tone is lovely though and I encourage him to remember his elbow movements (which help colour the sound). As he moves the right hand up an octave, I take his forearm and move in a way as to suggest a preparatory up movement. I take his hand next and ‘play’ the notes, asking him if he can feel ‘all that (movement) variation’. I move his upper arm next and ask him to use to move the forearm and hands to a degree. I get very excited
with his next try. I use gesture and say, ‘You vary the amount of on and off (in the upper arm and elbow) to get a different tone (at the fingers).’ He smiles and nods, and I say, ‘You get that?’ He agrees. I sit and do a critical comparison to show how increased movement of the upper arm can affect the tone quality. I say, ‘That’s how you get the variety of sound … by manipulating your body’, not necessarily by imagination. I suggest that to play expressively, a good technique is necessary; ‘Technique is not about fast fingers (yeah), it means understanding how your body relates to the instrument’. He starts playing again, and I coach him with joining the last soft D with a free fall to the higher register. He tries again (good boy) and then again (very nice there). I come over and demonstrate, suggesting that he avoid any ‘fake’ looking movements and he agrees. He still ‘flicks’ his fingers up when changing registers, but at least he is aware that he’s doing it. After he tries again, I say that the louder notes are too similar, and ask him to use less upper arm there. He tries again and the decrescendo is considerably more noticeable. I ask Finn if he heard the ‘wooden’ note that had too much upper arm. He plays again, and I say, ‘Very nice’. I ask Sarah if she heard. I say that Finn’s playing is much more colourful now; he nods. I suggest that Finn might be really surprised at how far he’s come since late last year, ‘… when you look back’. Sarah asks if Finn’s finished Say Something and when he can add the vocals. I ask him to stand, and I play, demonstrating the piano accompaniment might look if he sang too. I probably should have said he could stick with what he was doing too. I ask him to learn some ‘keyboard harmony’ with me in the next five minutes after demonstrating sing and play. I suggest that he creates another version of the song. I start to experiment with the chords and Finn watches on. I ask him to play D chord in second inversion and then proceed to review chord positions. Finn tries and is very good. I suggest to Finn that he play the left hand as written, but right-hand chords. I continue to coach Finn with the right-hand chords, moving to F# minor, first inversion. I ask him about the fingering as I write it in, we move to G first inversion. I as him to write in the score and say, ‘Oh, very studious, that’s so good to see’ as he writes in the fingering too. He is very happy and plays again. When he wants to add, I suggest we play block chords for now, learning the chord positions. I remind him not to let his body ‘collapse’. We move to D, second inversion and he writes it in along with A root. He’s very enthusiastic as asks me how long to hold the chord, but I answer with another question, so that he finds the answer himself. I give a quick summary of how his arrangement might ‘look’. It sit down and
demonstrate, singing the melody; the second time I improvise and accompaniment from the block chords. Finn is very happy. I suggest that his Classical technique will help him achieve a good sound, but the rest he is achieving well. I sit down, play again and show him how I filled the bar out when I improvised. After a while, I stop and say that to get too fancy will take away from the prominence of the voice. I suggest that to create your own accompaniment, he needs to start with the block chords. We look at Finn playing Haydn’s *Serenade in F Major*, though the view is obscured. We all laugh and Sarah says, ‘stiff’. I say that it was a good piece as we reviewed some physical basics there. I point out that Finn’s upper arm is quite still in this video and you can hear me talking about off/on as Finn plays the right hand. We continue to watch and I make a few comments here and there, mainly to do with Finn using little upper arm in the video compared to now. We watch Wendy playing some of the Bach/Siloti *Prelude in B minor* and I ask Finn to notice how much she is using her upper arms in the playing. We watch Lydia play and I point out that she has ‘timid’ upper arms, though she still is good. We watch a little more, including Neil and Adrian playing Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 as a piano duet. I ask Finn to watch Andrew play Nocturne, and I point out how much his upper body is involved, ‘and that’s how he’s able to generate that sound’. I point out that as we continue to work on his arms, we can learn to utilise the hips and upper body more, in order to add another dimension to his playing. I caution against going too analytical however. Finn says that he will finish off his Czerny *Study* and I agree, asking him to ‘get your notes learnt so that we can do something with it’ and Finn agrees (just like he did today). I remind him about the keyboard harmony for *Say Something*. There is a bit of discussion regarding *All of Me*, and where he’s at with the song.

*Lesson 19: 9 August 2014*

Reviewed 27 March 2015

- Sarah tells me about Liam playing really well, especially on the xylophone. Apparently everyone was very impressed. Finn says that he is learning *Beyond the Sea* in vocals, and asks me about the piano part, which I sit down and sight-read. Sarah says, ‘Mark’s got a good jazz to him!’ Finn says he likes it. I continue to play a walking bass and right-hand chords. Finn seems very excited. I say that studying the piano part would be a good idea if he is interested; Finn says he really wants to do it. I ask him what key – E-flat Major. I ask him how he knew (3 flats). I comment that he
has a great feel for overall key structure, and Sarah agrees. She says that lately, he has
been harmonising when songs come on the radio and ‘blends really well’. I mention
that that is not easy to do, and say that a friend is really good at it (Ryan). I say that I
have to leave early (long lesson last week). Apparently Sarah already told Finn. I ask
them if they can come next Wednesday on Ekka Day at 2.45pm. I ask him how he
went with this practice. I remind him that he’s been doing really well with his body
awareness the last few weeks. Apparently on the way home from the lesson, Franco
was saying on/off, on/off and asking Sarah to feel his muscle doing so. We all laugh.
Sarah takes off Finn’s jacket. I ask Finn to do the C Major pentascale with each hand,
but he’s gone back a little in terms of technique. We continue with the left hand, and I
adjust him, and remind him not to over-extend the other fingers when playing 4 or 5.
As he plays, he seems to be pushing on the wrists, and I suggest that his left arm is a
bit sleepy. I coach him with avoiding any unnecessary lift of the second finger when
he plays the left hand thumb. I compliment him on his improvement; and give him the
thumbs up. I suggest that we learn some of the left hand walking bass, and I draw his
attention to the fact that the bass is a descending major scale. Finn has a try, and I ask
him about fingering. I ask him if he has E-flat Major Scale handy, and he plays left-
hand ascending and descending. I suggest that he could play all his scales once a
week. He moves to the right hand. I explain that we are reviewing the scales for
‘technique’ as well as keyboard harmony knowledge. We move back to the left hand
of Under the Sea; he plays and then writes in the fingering himself. He tries, asks me,
I try, he tries and I watch on. Despite this focus on fingering, I mention that it will
probably be detached (anyway), and I ask Finn why it might be played detached. He
mentions playing the right hand short too, and I talk about the plucking of the string
bass. Sarah clarifies that I’m talking about the double bass and I agree. Finn plays it
detached and I praise him, and say that it’s still good to decide on an appropriate
fingering early on. I sit down and do a critical comparison of fingering that is
troublesome and one that is easy. Finn laughs when I say that, ‘scale fingering can
help you with playing scales’. He continues to read the bass clef with the left hand, I
intervene and ask him to write in fingering for ‘those two bars’. We talk about the
weather. I summarise the lesson as we finish – Under the Sea, scale knowledge and
chords. ‘A short lesson, but productive’. I suggest that he run through the Major
Scales ‘out of interest’, and to build his knowledge. I give a short introduction to scale
technique and ‘how to hold your body in a certain way’. I point out that my upper
arms are activated here and mention pronation for passing the thumb. I ask him how his study is going and then demonstrate a little. I ask him to write some more fingering in for Under the Sea, to try and encourage his learning. ‘Just push yourself a bit …’ and Finn says, ‘Find my own way’. He is clearly very happy and says, ‘Thank you’.

Lesson 20: 13 August 2014

Reviewed 27 March 2016

- I ask Finn how he’s been going since Saturday and we talk about the Gold Coast Eisteddfod. I say that it’s one thing to be involved with competitions, but in some ways it can mean that opportunities to learn more about keyboard harmony and musicianship are more limited. Sarah says that he’s fallen in love with Under the Sea and never stops singing it. We talk about the little chair, how the song sounds a bit like Nina Simone and concert band. Finn fiddles with the left hand and Sarah shows me a recording and asks me what the instrument is (muted trumpet). I talk about the big band style and Holly comes in. Sarah talks about the solos of the different instruments. I ask Finn is he knows Michael Bublé. Finn says he likes Jazz. Finn plays a little of the right hand as I add the left hand walking bass. He shows me where he’s up to with the right hand, and I help him a little with fingering and the voicing of the c min7 chord. I ask him to memorise the chord and which is the ‘foreign’ note (the seventh). I mention that seventh chords are very important in jazz. He mentions some other chords he’s noticed. I tell him about B-flat9 chord, and then ask him to divide the notes between the hands. I explain that we always need the seventh, as that’s what gives it the colour. Finn is smiling a lot as I talk about the harmonies and the ‘pull’ of seventh chords and I give him a few examples. After a while, we start going around the circle of dominant seventh chords. He’s doing really well. I ask him and then tell how to find the seventh (2 semitones below the root note). By now, Finn is well and truly in the upper register, so he shifts down and completes the sequence of keys, finishing with C Major. I refer to the circle of fifths (the wheel) and scales. I review the construction of a dominant seventh, Major seventh, minor seventh I ask him if he’s taking it all in and he agrees. Finn asks me about the very first right-hand chord and I say that it’s E-flat sixth. Finn seems very interested to know. I suggest that the piece wouldn’t sound jazzy without the sixth and seventh chords, and I sit down and sight-reading hands together without sixth and seventh chords and then with sixth and
seventh chords added. Finn is beaming, so I ask him if it’s exciting; he agrees. I say that I found learning about these chords exciting too. He asks me if I’d learnt this song, *Under the Sea*, but I clarify that I’d learnt other jazz standards/chords. I ask Finn if we’d done chord progressions together. He says no, so I say we’ll get him to do them too, as it’s a good idea. Finn talks to Sarah and Holly and I photocopy. I happily say, ‘There’s so much to learn isn’t there?’ and Finn replies, ‘Yeah, almost like another language’. We talk about the idea of ‘light’ jazz and doing jazz piano at the Conservatorium. Sarah says that Belinda loves jazz and she wants to take Finn to New Orleans for the music. I give Finn a long-term plan for chord progressions, but we start with the primary chords only. I ask him to refer to his circle of fifths sheet and we talk about the 12 Major keys (up to 7 sharps or 7 flats). He is very smiley and I mention that not enough students study this, referring briefly for the lack of time when preparing for exams. I mention that it would be good for Finn to get some sort of qualification at some point and he suggests that he could do it ‘for enjoyment’. I say that for university entry, he’d need a qualification. We talk about inversions needed for the chord progression I-IV-V7-I and I ask him to write any fingering in the score. I talk about needing to drop out the fifth of the seventh chord, also demonstrating the full chord. Finn nods and seems to understand. I tell him about the ‘three variations’ of this particular chord progression. He understands that we need to start with C in different positions. I ask that he does all variations in each key, and I go through and demonstrate in Major keys. I suggest that he then go backwards through the wheel – ‘do a U-turn’; we laugh. Finn says, ‘This is fun’. I suggest that doing the chord progressions will allow him to learn more about key signatures. I talk to him about increasing sharps or flats depending on which way we go around the circle of fifths. I ask him to practise really well between lessons to gain maximum value for money, especially now that he is older. Sarah agrees – ‘Absolutely, it’s good to get some outside perspective’. I tell him about my Mum paying for my lessons and waiting around in the car when I was a kid, and how I valued that much more now. I ask him where he might get up to for homework. I suggest that he go up to four sharps and he agrees. I help him with his workbook to be able to display his materials. He suggests that we move on to the Czerny. I help him plan how long he wants to be ‘on’ the piece (*Under the Sea*) for and how he might plan to learn the notes in a timely manner. Sarah says that he can’t come next weekend to the lesson because of a Catholic Colleges event. I suggest that he do two pages over the next two weeks.
Sarah says he has a lot of competitions on both Saturday and Sunday. He also does choir, concert band and Drum Line. I talk about a possible alternative. I ask him to push himself and give it a go, and write in some fingering too. He starts playing the Czerny study, but is missing the semiquaver rests that we worked on in the previous lesson. I mention that he should write a note on the music so he wouldn’t forget again. ‘You don’t want to be coming back with the same mistakes, as that takes time, and time is … money’. He tries again, but I say, ‘OK, so your scale fingering’s not right is it? So if you’re going to be putting the hands together, you have to be doing the same (fingering) as what you did separately, so is it ready to be put together or do you need more practice? (I think I might need a little bit more). I say, ‘Or you could just do it slowly and write in the fingering?’ I ask him to get a pencil and write in the fingering. I ask him where we stopped (bar 3) and he takes the lead. We both clear our throats and Holly shakes. I say that it’s good that he’s ‘a big picture person’, and he asks me to clarify. I say that he’s good at chords and harmony, but he needs to improve with details, especially fingering and rhythm. I coach him with the correct octave, and then say that I coached him with the same 3 things that we went through on Saturday, but he’d forgotten. I say, ‘So this is like a replay, and I’m starting to get annoyed, because it’s a waste of time. I get a piece of paper and ask him to write down rests, then question him until he says fingering, keyboard geography/which octave? He continues to write and I watch. I say that it may seem like I’m being picky, but unless those basics are fixed up, it’s difficult to move on. I suggest that he may even run out of time, saying that we only have a finite period of time to prepare the work, so there’s no time to waste. I ask if we have an understanding. I explain to him it would have been good to hear how the second half of the Czerny was, but we’ve run out of time, time that could have been better spent if we didn’t have to review (reteach) what was covered in the previous lesson. I say that he didn’t get value for money (Finn – in the last bit of the lesson), so he needs to pay me or his Mum $20. I suggest he give it to me. He smiles. I ask him to play the left hand; he plays slowly and then I turn the metronome on 50, four notes per beat; I coach him with the rhythm and how to count the semiquaver subdivision. I ask him to write down ‘MM = 50 left hand perfect’. I say that I’m no harder with him than with the other kids, maybe a bit softer.

Lesson 21: 23 August 2014

Reviewed 27 and 28 March 2016
I set up the camera and George says, ‘Deep breaths, deep breaths’. I ask him how he went with his practice. He says that he thinks he’s better with the rests. I ask him if I can hear how it sounds. Finn plays and he plays well up to the middle section. I watch on and then help him with the geography of the second half; he continues, but then stops. I ask if he’s a bit stuck there (yes) and I ask if he’s checked the clef. I help him to identify the treble clef and then ask if he’s going to ‘wait for me or work it out (himself)’. He starts writing, and George says that he feels helpless not knowing ‘music’. I ask him if he really should do hands together (no). We work through the right hand, as I ask him questions that give him the answers he needs. I ask him to write in the # sign (are you going to be able to see that?) George laughs and I ask Finn to practise for five minutes. I take out a piece of paper and ask him to write down one. Practice one or two bars slowly with attention to fingering, accuracy and body awareness 2. Repeat step 1 with attention to expressive sound 3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 (Finn smiles) except with other hand 4. Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3 (we laugh) except with hands together. I ask him what bar we are up to, and ask him to write that in (bar 13); I ask him to play bar 13 using step 1 above. I come over and say that I will help move his arm (nice jacket), saying to keep the upper arm muscles switched on and sit up tall on the fifth finger rather than ‘squishing’ or leaning on it. He tries a couple of times and I reposition his hand and fingers. I ask him to add ‘avoid pressing wrists, avoid over-extending fingers, avoid over-balancing fifth finger’. I ask him to show me each of these characteristics. He tries but doesn’t seem to notice, so I ask to swap places and I sit. I do a critical comparison, and George comes over and points out the alignment of the hand and forearm, without a bend in the wrist. George points to the upper arm and says, ‘This is the part that’s weak’. I suggest that the fingers don’t end at the knuckles, and that ‘they go all the way up your arm’. Finn nods and we swap places again. I ask him to show me what I mean by ‘not over-balancing on the fifth finger’. He tries many times and then achieves it; I praise him for a job well done. I say that he is being more and more aware and George says that the structure and the literal instruction help. I say, ‘I know’ as I record him with the iPad. I suggest we analyse it – have you got good balance on the fifth finger? He suggests that he pushed on the wrist, but I pull him back to balance. He agrees that it was the greatest. I ask him to tick that off. I ask if he pushed on his wrists and we watch again. He says that he thinks he did, so I suggest we watch again. ‘Is there a nice straight line from the elbow to the knuckles?’ Using the pen I guide his response (no), and then ask him to
try again, seeing if he can become more aware of the need for that. He tries again, and I ask, ‘Do you know why you’re doing it?’ (No) I say that it’s more that he is playing on the first knuckle of the thumb instead of on the tip; Finn seems to understand. He is much better this time and I record again. I say, ‘Good boy’ as he finishes, and suggest that we look to see if he is maintaining his thumb position (yes). After which we check to see if this means the wrist is pressing too much (no). Finn sees the connection between wrist and thumb height, and I check his alignment between the elbow, forearm and hand. I remind him about using the tip of his thumb and engaging the upper arm muscle. He tries again (great) and then we move to avoiding finger over-extension, according to the list we made earlier in the lesson. I show and explain to Finn what I mean and then we watch the recording. Finn says, ‘a little bit’ and I agree, but not as ‘bad’ as he used to be. Finn nods and I ask him to watch the second example. Again he says, ‘a little bit’ and I agree, though saying better than the first example. I make the connection that if he plays on the thumb tip, it’s likely he will avoid finger over-extension and a pressed wrist. Finn likes the ‘two for one’ aspect. George and I both ask him to write down information about the thumb. I say to George that that is why he is learning the piece (technique). I say that it’s not the kind of piece he might play at the pub, but George says that it doesn’t matter (he’s learning). George reiterates he is doing his arm exercises, and I say that he really is going well. I ask him to read out step 2 and then clarify for him (everything in step 1, but listen for the sound too). He plays again and I say, ‘good’, before asking about the thumb tip. He maintains he was on the tip, but I say, ‘Are you sure’ and he tries again. I say that it’s, ‘not as bad as it was’, and Finn says, ‘I noticed I slid back a couple of times’. He clearly is on the right track here. I ask him to try again without coming down on the thumb – ‘Try to feel up’. Finn plays again and I coach him to maintain the poise in this upper arms. When he plays again, I say, ‘excellent’. I ask him to read out step 3 and then he starts with this process. I remind him about the clefs and he asks me about the fingering for the left hand. I say, ‘You tell me’. I use questions to guide him to the answer and then ask him to write in the fingering. As he writes I say, ‘Do what the hand likes, don’t make it overwork’. George ask, ‘Can there be interpretations with fingering?’ I talk to him about who writes in the fingering and how often it is quite ineffective. He seems surprised. I refer back to the choice of fingering, as it avoids unnecessary opening of the hand, but I also explain a situation where it might be a good choice of fingering. I say, ‘Choose fingering that’s best for
the sound, and for the hand position’. He moves on to the D minor scale, and we articulate the fingering. I ask him to tell me about what he is looking for, based on step 1. George says, ‘OK do those 4 things’. I seem to have exited the room, but come in again soon after. I take the iPad and record from his left side; we watch it. I mention that teaching this way is slow, but it will be worth it over the long term. I explain to Finn that he follow these steps until the piece is finished, without ‘waiting’ for me to remind him next week of what we covered in the previous lesson; we talk about shredding money. Finn looks at George. I ask Finn to make some comments about his left hand and wrist. I suggest we record again, aiming for small improvements. Even while recording, he is making the necessary adjustments of position. He watches with interest. I ask him to move to step 2 of the D minor and I take a ‘metaphorical’ video. I ask him to pretend someone is video recording, and encourage him to be (Finn – perfect). He reads through steps 3 and 4 – repeat steps 1, 2 and 3 except with hands together, and then does so. It’s slow and I ask him what he forgot and, ‘Can I suggest that you look at your hands?’ He does and tries another couple of times and is accurate mostly. When he appears worried that it’s still not right, I say, ‘No, you don’t have to get it perfect the first time, you sit here for 10 minutes and do this’ (Yep). I add that it has to be done, no matter how long it takes. He does it twice more, accurately and I say, ‘That’s good mate, (yep) now, are you doing any pressing, are you on the tips of the thumbs, are you over-balancing, are you over-flexing (over-extending)’. I encourage him to try to ‘feel and listen’ as he is looking at the notes or his hands. Finn says that that is similar to step 1 and I suggest that he repeat step 1, going on to say that we are repeating all steps but with hands together. I ask him if we should use the iPad and he smiles and I say, ‘Just see how you go’. Finn plays hands together, and I ask if it’s too fast for him… are you playing on the tips of your thumb (no, you’re dropping there … no still not on the tip … good … do you really need to go that quickly … good, if you reduce the speed, you’ll have more time to think of other things besides notes and fingers (yep, like the pressing of the wrists, and the tips of the thumbs) … good, the tips of the thumbs, helps the wrists, helps the over-extending (Yeah, it did) and it all comes back to the upper arms. If you’re upper arms are right, everything else will fall into place. So, check your upper arms and go down from there, down through the arms, wrists’. Finn indicates his forearm and wrist, saying, ‘… and all this has to be all loose and off”. I add that the feet have to be flat. I comment on his left-hand third, asking for a more expressive
sound, sounding like a cat. He tries again and I come over and say that as he plays his thumb, he appears to be turning his upper arm muscle off a little, which could be causing him to drop his forearm. He tries again and I act to support the height of his elbow and upper arm. He tries again, and I encourage him to be higher in the wrist and more spacious under his elbow and upper arm. I say, ‘No’ and I ask him to go slowly. I ask him to not drop down on my hand (as he turns the thumb), as I suspend it just under his right elbow. I say, ‘Good … excellent’ and I ask George if he could do that with him too. George agrees and we joke about the umbrella. I ask him not to drop onto the fifth finger and we all laugh as I poke him with the umbrella. I give George back the umbrella and ask Finn to play hands together. Surprisingly, George says, ‘He’s behind all the other kids in physical development … but there’s signs it’s starting to come’ and I say, ‘I know … oh yeah, I can see that’. I have the umbrella ready if he’s not up to scratch as he tries again; he laughs. I say, ‘You’re still dropping and you missed the sharp … do you need to go that fast?’ (No). He does well, but either my feedback or his train of thought drops away and he stumbles with the notes. He tries many times, some with success, some without, but doesn’t necessarily know (or feel) when. I ask him to keep his feet flat and tilt forward; George says, ‘That gives you the stability and base for this’. I suggest that not having a good base makes turning your arms ‘on’ more difficult. He keeps trying and I say, ‘OK, good, look, we’ve spent the whole lesson on one bar, but within that, you’ve done some really good work for me, you’ve written some directions down, you’ve written in your own fingering, we videoed it, you told me what you need to do. Now, you go forth and prosper and do that for … how many more bars have you got for the song?’ He says eight, and I encourage him to take the time to study them and ‘do the steps’. I ask him not to take any shortcuts, and to do what’s required, ‘If you want to be a musician, do what’s required (to be a musician)’. He nods. ‘If you don’t want to be a musician, take some shortcuts (But I want to be a musician) Well, you’ll have to do it now or sometime; you might as well do it now while you’ve got heaps of time. I say that he has more time now to practise than he will when he’s an adult. We all laugh. I say that he has right-hand fingering problems and we get a sticky note and I ask Finn to write ‘right-hand fingering’. George says that he is going to get me some more sticky notes. He writes and I play the hands together slowly; the view is obstructed for the first half of the song. I talk about the fingering and where Finn needs to practise as I play. Finn smiles and George says that it sounds fantastic. I play again, but faster this time.
George walks over and asks if he can film. I say maybe next week, as I would like him to have a week where he learns sequentially rather than by watching and copying by ear. I remind Finn that I don’t live with him, nor can I force him to, and that the practice is up to him – ‘You’ve got to take responsibility for yourself’. George summarises what is required, and we talk about how many weeks practice it might take to finish the piece. I suggest that he aim for value for money and quick progress when learning notes and he smiles. I remind him that physical aspects of playing can be slower to improve in the short term. I remind him of how important it is to follow up the lesson with consistent revision for maximum progress. I ask him to ‘go and start practising’. I ask him to remind me what else he’s doing (Under the Sea and chord progression) and I say, ‘Well, there’s an hour’s practice there, maybe more, two hours?’ I ask him which sing and play he will do for the end of semester concert and encourage him to complete all his tasks, and ultimately the effort required is up to him.

Lesson 22: 30 August 2014

Reviewed 28 March 2016

- The lesson starts and we talk about Finn being a bass or baritone when he is older. I ask him how high he can sing and he swaps pianos, as there is still a broken string. We talk about the piano lid being open so that ‘it’s basically a big music box’. I say, ‘The way you touch the keys, that’s what sound you’ll get’. Finn experiments and smiles, ‘That’s so cool’. I ask him if he’s been practising, and he says he knows all of the Czerny study. I praise him and ask him if the previous lesson was helpful and he agrees, pulling out his ‘list’. I laugh and I ask him if I could have a copy, as it’s a research document. I ask him to say on camera, ‘It’s helped me’ and we both laugh. I say that he can tell the truth and say that it’s useless, but Finn is adamant that it has helped him. Finn starts playing hands together, and it’s a little unsteady but fluent for the most part. As he comes towards the end I remind him about the left hand rests. In the last two lines, he says, ‘I need to work on the fingering’ and I say, ‘Well, work on it then’, suggesting that he play slower with one hand alone (left hand ending). He tries a couple of times as I come to sit down too. We play the left hand, and I prompt him to verbalise his mistakes if he makes them; it’s slow for him. When he makes another mistake, I ask him if he lost his place on the music. I ask him to point to the notes with this spare hand and to play slowly. Both of us play and I encourage him to
keep following. Sarah comes in with ‘hamburgers’, an easy dinner apparently. Finn and I carry on, playing slowly until the end. I don’t interrupt until the end when I give him fingering feedback for the left-hand chord. I ask him to write in the fingering on his copy, which he does. I ask to practise the last two bars of the left hand. I put the metronome on and suggest we practice again. We talk about the time signature; his copy has common time and mine has cut common time, and I demonstrate the difference by playing the first half of the study. I put the metronome back on a crotchet pulse, Finn counts and plays the left hand, and I suggest that I play the right hand. Finn smiles when we finish; we play it again. I ask him how long he might sit and practice those two bars (5–10 minutes). I suggest that he write down some goals in his notebook. Sarah asks him to write in today’s date. Elissarita is also there and we talk about birthdays. I help him write MM crotchet = 60. Sarah and Finn tell me that he has a Grade 3 percussion exam this week and Grade 4 in Speech & Drama, and I feel a tinge of guilt and a sense that the reason for his comparably slower progress on the piano is somehow my fault. Nonetheless, I say, ‘That’s awesome’ and Finn smiles. Finn tells me about the Australian Percussion Eisteddfod and how Liam was very successful. Sarah asks me about ‘The Diploma’ and asks me if people can teach after they’ve done their Diploma. I say that it’s a performance diploma rather than a teaching one. I talk about the studio teaching business being rather unregulated in terms of actual qualifications and experience. I say to Sarah, ‘A good teacher should have a sound knowledge of learning theory, they should understand how people learn (Sarah – as opposed to the practical side)’. I suggest that it’s better to have some idea of teaching when you start out, but you can always charge according to your teaching experience. We talk a little more about Liam. Finn asks me what else he should write (what else did we do in the lesson?) I help him arrive at, ‘Practise left-hand last two bars with the metronome’. Sarah and I chuckle (He’ll get it one day … it will just click’). I take him back through the lesson asking questions until, ‘Practise left hand slowly and correct fingering’. Sarah asks if he has the fingering written in and I say, ‘Yeah, he knows, he just looks at his lap instead of the page’. We laugh and Sarah says that it’s good he is writing it down for himself. I say that when I was young, I did a lot of what was covered in the lesson, but if you don’t have a good memory, writing it down is the best way. He asks, ‘Should I say, practise left hand slowly with attention to fingering?’ and I say, ‘Wow, that’s awesome’. Sarah laughs and I ask him which bars (last half of the piece). He writes it in and I switch off the metronome. I
talk to him about the fact that I usually go through with him in the lesson what to practise, so therefore, he should practise whatever was covered within the lesson. I reiterate the need to build a bigger piece up bit by bit, without taking any weeks off (no weeks off, no weeks off). He asks me if he should play just the right hand, and I say yes, and that we need to be realistic. He plays the right hand and I whistle when he has a problem. I help him through his questions by asking more questions. I whistle several more times; it’s a funny segment. I ask him to write in C first inversion, and ask him if he would like a highlighter to highlight the 8va indication. We laugh about missing ‘the orange’ and continue with the right hand final bars. I ask him whether his percussion teacher would say if he was playing rhythmically (no), so I get the metronome out and give it to him to adjust; he suggests 60. He plays and I coach him with inversions, fingering and geography. It’s challenging for him, but he gets there. I say, ‘If it’s too fast, slow it down’, which he does (55). I keep encouraging him and he does get there with his right hand. I ask him to keep practising and over the next few repetitions, I help him organise the fingering and the beat placement. I ask him to write in anything (fingering especially) he is not sure of or can’t think of straight away. I encourage him to be aware of his body and any tightness of the shoulder while he is practising the notes. He counts and plays pretty well now, so I ask him to be sure of the intervals within the chords, demonstrating some ideas: ‘After you’ve learnt the notes, start practising’. I turn the metronome off, and remind him that we’ve finished learning the notes, and now we will practice the intervals within the chords while maintaining alignment of the fingers and forearm. I suggest that he will get more confident with the spacing of the notes, but he mustn’t change his fingering or over-extend the fingers while doing so. I suggest that he could think of these as ‘push-ups’. I say, ‘Your fingers are too flat’ and he adjusts, and then plays again, but he does find it hard to maintain poise in the upper arm. I say that the chord sounds clear now and he agrees, ‘Yeah, I can’. I say, ‘So sometimes you have to like, actually practise, don’t just learn notes, that’s just the first bit … then you’ve got to practise’. Finn nods as I say, rhythm, fingering, technique and Sarah asks him to get out his homework book. I suggest that he could apply ‘chord push-ups’ to all chords within each hand. Finn writes, and I suggest he could write ‘intervallic practice’, briefly explaining the idea. I suggest that if he was to do another 5 hours practice on the piece during the week, he will ‘lift it up again’. I remind him to keep working hard, and to keep it up when he gets busy at school too. Finn says that he
feels a bit more ahead with his schoolwork than usual. I remind him that piano playing is a (fine) motor activity and that it can’t be rushed. Finn makes the fitness analogy. Sarah says that Finn’s group, Drum Line, will be at the Conservatorium tomorrow from 11.00am. I ask him if he has any more questions with the Czerny Study. I say that I think he has improved his overall technique and posture during the week. I remind Finn that the study is for technical development, but that isn’t possible until he has a good grasp of the notes and fingering confident. I point out that he’s not really there ‘with that’ in terms of the last two lines of the left hand yet, and suggest that he avoid hands together for at least a couple of days. I remind him that all students are different, and they seem to learn the notes differently too, and notice different things along the way. I mention that I think Finn is good at the bigger picture, but needs to look at the detail too (‘a top down learner’). He asks me if that’s a good thing – sometimes. I remind him to make time and mental space for detail and practice. I ask him to take note that I go through it with him, so it’s not totally new, and remind him to ‘get his money’s worth’. I tell him that in my mind, I have a list of weekly tasks for Finn to learn his pieces in a timely manner, ‘… but if Finn doesn’t do 1, 2 and 3, that means we can’t get to 4, 5 and 6’. I suggest that there might be a list of 50 things to ‘fix’ and that we need to get on with the job, one thing at a time. I say that he’s up to about number 20 (this week do 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26). Finn points to what he wrote in his notebook and says, ‘Which is all that stuff’. I agree and then say that when that is done, I will go through the next lot of tasks with him. I explain, ‘That’s how you’ll get the piece ready in time (yep), otherwise it will be a big rush and a big stress (and that’s not good) … and plus you won’t really learn anything (if you rush)’. I suggest that he can apply this sense of greater responsibility to all of his pieces – ‘You’ve got to learn to learn’. I describe a possible scenario where someone needs a wedding pianist (pay $1,000), and you don’t want to decline just because you can’t learn something quickly. We laugh when I say, ‘If you don’t know how to learn, who’s going to teach you? You’ve got to learn yourself, you’ve got to learn now, you’ve got to learn to learn’. I say that learning singing and percussion might be different, but I know that learning piano usually involves dealing with a lot of detail. Finn nods and we smile. I say that when I was his age, I needed to take my time to learn well, though I’m faster now and I give an example. ‘You’ll get there’. I say that if I need to learn quickly, I could worry for two hours, or work for two hours doing smaller tasks. I talk about Hannah’s duet concert and how I prepared quickly (through
experience). I give him a ‘heads up’ for next week. I ask him about the pink sticky note from last week (right-hand fingering). When I ask him if he studied it – ‘A little bit’. I show him and then ask him to make a note of it in his notebook. Sarah says it’s great that he’s writing in his own words; Finn smiles. I say, ‘You’re a good person Finn (Yay) … Now don’t get slack on me (Yes). You follow my direction and I will help you. I cannot do it without you, but hopefully you’ll be able to do it without me’. Finn nods. I say that the ultimate goal is not to need a lesson, but rather be able to teach yourself. Finn says, ‘That would be pretty good, to teach myself’. I say, ‘It’s really simple: ‘you just learn the notes, the fingering, put the metronome on, get the timing, put the hands together bit by bit, check your posture, do the gestures, done … next piece’. We laugh and I repeat myself, adding, ‘… check everything, put pedal in, enjoy yourself, feel confident – done!’ I say that it’s a process that needs to be worked through for quick progress. Finn seems surprised when I say that I had a similar struggle (becoming overwhelmed) with anything above Grade 7 standard. I suggest that the more difficult pieces, I require more repetition for things to ‘stick’. I suggest that reading music at the higher levels is difficult so it needs to be taken step by step. I suggest that I can sight-read around Grade 5, but for anything higher, I would find Finn’s ‘list’ very helpful too. I suggest that I can comprehend pieces like the study very fast now, but when I was Finn’s age, I wasn’t even learning the piano. I suggest, ‘You get better at what you do a lot of’. He’s disappointed when I say, ‘If you would like to leave now … we’ve run out of time’; he laughs.

Lesson 23: 6 September 2014

Reviewed 28 March 2016

- The lesson starts with Finn mentioning all his assignments are in and his percussion exam is done; he feels a bit less pressure. I ask him how his Czerny Study is going and he gets his music ready; Sarah is in shot. I mention that there is a ‘big concert’ here at the Conservatorium – the Australian Piano Duo Concert, and Khoa and Mya are doing a duet. I suggest that they come. Sarah says she ‘has a 50th’ so they can’t come. I ask him to play, I ask him how Liam is and I ask him to say hello from me. Finn plays Study, it’s mostly there, but he does stop a few times; the tempo is slow and he finds it hard to control his left hand a little. The speed and fluency are still not there yet. Before he finishes, I interrupt and ask him what the ‘orange thing’ for, and remind him about the rhythm that was worked on last week – ‘the orange thing was supposed
to be the musical equivalent to tying a ribbon on your thumb in order not to forget’. I suggest that he write something on the score so that he doesn’t ‘forget again’. I ask him what he could write and I suggest an arrow pointing to the rhythmic problem that needs review. He asks me what ‘words’ to write, and suggest symbols are better otherwise, ‘you’ll just end up writing everything’. I suggest he draw a pair of glasses, meaning to look ahead and he laughs. He plays again and after a while I say, ‘How’s your fingering going?’ and suggest that he aim for correct left-hand fingering and a fluent right hand at the same time. He suggests starting from bar 19 (17) and I agree. He does a half bar and asks if it was right and I nod. He plays again and continues this time. I ask if we should do bar 19 a few times first and he agrees. I count the bars (17) and I get him to write practice bar 17, 17 times per day (suggested by Sarah). We laugh and I ask him about how his practice journal has been going, but I hadn’t mentioned it before. They were open to it and Sarah suggested he could start this week. I say that a few kids were using them, and say, ‘You write down what you practised, for how long and for what reason’. Finn agrees and I give an example of another student, ‘10 minutes I practised the blues chords for fun; 10 minutes Variation 5 bars 1 and 7 because I had some wrong fingering’. I say it’s cute, but after a while you don’t need to keep a journal necessarily, but it’s a good thing to do, even if it’s messy. Finn says he has an idea – he could write it in his book along with his weekly goals of what to practise. It’s a genuine moment of independence, because both Sarah and I both ‘have an idea’, but we let Finn lead because we knew it was important. I suggest he not spend a lot of time doing it, just get into practice generally. I show Harry’s practice sheet and even though he didn’t do much practice, it’s still a good effort at being transparent. Finn asks, ‘So I just write what I’ve done for the week?’ and I agree. I give a few more examples and Sarah also suggests adding comments. I ask him to play bar 17 and I sit. Finn plays and I stand and get the iPad. I record from the left and ask him to look and ‘comment on the sound and the posture, the two are related’. He watches, says, ‘yep’ and I ask if any improvements are necessary. I say, ‘Good posture there, your fifth finger’s too flat (yep) … the sound is non-legato, you need to do it much smoother’. Finn mentions something about looking at his thumb and I ask him to listen again. He tries again and I ask him to roll the forearms inward by turning on the upper arms. I work with him to try to activate his fifth finger and keep his elbow in a little and then ask him what it ‘feels’ like to play with that level of body awareness, so that he might replicate it at another time. I ask him what it feels
like within the fifth finger (a bit stronger than before). He plays again and I record. We look ‘to see if it’s improved’. We watch a couple of times before I point out the tip of his finger not being curved enough, but praise him for playing notes and fingering correctly. I suggest he might do this for 20 minutes. He plays again and I record. We watch and I say that he was a little distracted by one of the hands and he tries again; ‘sit up, turn in’. He plays again and I caution him not to put his elbow so far out that his wrist ends up ‘squishing down’. I stand up and adjust him, emphasising alignment and using his finger from the knuckle. He plays again and I suggest that, ‘… it sounds like you don’t really know the right hand’. He plays a couple of times and I ask him if he ‘needs’ to write any fingering in to help him remember; he agrees. I suggest that he needs revision of the right hand then hands together after that; he agrees. He is playing the right-hand chords and I say, ‘Those chord shapes are nice … are you doing the notes together though?’ He plays again and I praise him. Using gesture, I ask him to combine the different techniques, saying that the left hand is using scales and the right hand is using chords. He plays again and I ask him to bring his left elbow in a bit so as not to push on the wrist, and I ask him to play his left fifth finger using the finger rather than tilting the hand. He keeps trying, but twice I ask him to bring his elbow in and ask him to fix the right-hand fingering, and to write it into his score. I ask him the inversion (first) and I remind of the fingering for all first/second inversion right-hand chords. I ask him to ‘learn it’ and Finn tells me the fingering for root position. Sarah suggests he write in his homework book and we look on in silence as he does so. I suggest he practice again and then I record him the second time. When he’s finished, I say, ‘Great! Have a look at that, that’s the best one so far’. We watch it and then I say, ‘Now, make it sound musical’ and I dramatise the roles of the two hands. I say, ‘Now you’ve got the technique and the notes right, let’s get the sound happening … they all go together, like the ingredients in a meal’; Finn agrees. He plays again and I record, giving plenty of encouragement; he’s really happy and so am I. I say, ‘I can definitely see improvement, not just with this piece but also with you. You’re starting to get a bit more aware of where your body is in space. Your fingers are starting to get a bit more like fingers, rather than sausages on the ends that don’t really do much. OK, that’s good (Finn nods) … and you’re learning more and more about practice’ and I ask him what he’s going to do next with the Czerny study. I remind him that he just practised bar 17 and 18 … he says the last two bars and I say that could be one option. He also
suggests playing from the second half, but I ask him if he should go from practising two bars to 15. He says, ‘17 to the end’ and I say, ‘Good, or another option could be?’ He thinks for a while and then says that he’s not sure. I suggest 15, 16, 17 and 18 and ask him to write it in his homework book, (also 17, 18, 19, 20/19, 20/13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, etc.) I suggest that we finish now but have a longer lesson next week – ‘Make it a good hour (next week), don’t make me go through all that again, or I’ll be cross with you … it’s a waste of money’ and he agrees. I ask him to ‘do that and show me how you can improve the second half’. I sit down and say, ‘Ideally, it should sound of sound … (I play the coda) that’s how I want the whole thing’. I play again from the start, ‘I’m very happy to help you, but if you haven’t got notes for me, I can’t do anything for you (Finn nods)’. I say that I have given him the tools to do the work and now ‘I want to see some action, and some journaling’. When finish and I ask him to choose two things for the concert to focus on (Czerny/Say Something). I say, ‘There’s no point having five things and then it gets to the end and then you’ve only got everything half done’. I speak of the Czerny Study and say, ‘Finish it (clap) come on’ 4 times. I dramatise what ‘could’ be possible if Finn did more practice. Sarah mentions he’s been playing Under the Sea, and I say that if he does lots of work on what we covered today, we can make time for it next lesson; Finn agrees.

Lesson 24: 22 September 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

- We talk about everyone being sick. We laugh about Ned Flanders and talk about the Simpsons mini-figures. I give Finn one and wish him a happy 13th birthday. He gets ‘Itchy’ and everyone is excited. Sarah talks about the Simpsons coming on television about the time when Belinda was born. Holly looks on. We talk (and laugh) more about other series of Lego mini-figures and Finn has been collecting since series 3 (16 series). Finn gets his music out and I ask how he’s been going, as I know he’s been unwell. He said he’s been really sick, but he’s been writing down what he’s been practising in his notebook. I ask him if it’s been helpful and he gets excited telling me about how ‘handy’ his writing in the journal has been. I ask him to play – it’s smoother than I have heard it before. There’s just one mistake with the left-hand fingering and some coordination/rhythm problems in the coda. I say, ‘Oh, that’s heaps better, well done … that’s awesome’. Finn smiles and says ‘Yay’. Sarah asks, ‘Is that last chord right?’ and I say, ‘No’. I show Finn root position rather than second
inversion and adjust his forearm to point inwards. I ask him to play on the tips of his fingers. I say that it’s awesome to try to encourage him and let him know he has a few mistakes, but it has improved; the mood is positive. I coach him with the metronome, counting the beats. He keeps trying, but his left hand is a little uncooperative, so I sit and demonstrate how he might practice the chord ‘50 times’. I exit to get a drink and Finn continues, putting his hands in his lap and up again. I ask him if we did ‘chord push-ups last week (yes) so I ask him to do 545454 and tell him we’re changing it from 53 to 54. I say, ‘And so that it moves from your short-term memory to your long-term body memory, that’s why you (need to) practise’. Finn agrees and I continue, ‘That’s what practice is for, to move things, to move the notation from the short-term to the long-term body memory’. Finn seems a bit surprised, but he quickly realises what I mean and mentions about the hands knowing what to do. I suggest that performance anxiety will be dramatically reduced if you know the notation well, and that takes practice. Sarah says, ‘Muscle memory’ and I agree, adding, ‘Efficient muscle memory … when you’re tense, things tend to go wrong. Guess what else (what?) Usually if you’ve got mental tension, because you’re not sure of the notes, that becomes physical tension (Oh), and physical tension is where you trip up, and play wrong notes (Oh), plus it will sound clumsy’. Finn nods and I continue, ‘So what you want to practise is getting the notation from your short-term mind to your long-term memory (Yeah), getting the muscles really efficient and relaxed, and confident, and getting your brain really confident (Mmm), so that everything works together. Mind and body become very in tune with each other (Yeah). That’s what playing an instrument is about, it doesn’t matter what style it is … and then you’ll have the added benefit of it sounding better (Yeah). That’s why we do the gestures, it’s not to show off, it’s to make it sound better (Yeah)’. I go on to say that the ‘finger push-ups’ wasn’t really about gesture though, it was more ‘technique’, but perhaps I could have said we were refining the actual point of contact of an overall, gestural approach to playing. I ask him to try again, which he does twice more, but there is significant over-extension. I come back and ask him to scratch his nose with his fifth finger. I ask him if he can ‘scratch’ the notes with the same tactile sensation. He says, ‘Ah’, we laugh and I say, ‘Play the piano like you would touch your own body. You’ve got to develop more of a sense of touch in your extremities’. I ask him to touch his own neck and ask if he can feel ‘the nerve receptors’. He seems a little unsure, but I ask him to touch the piano in the same way. He plays again and I praise him, mentioning that we
can write in his notebook a little later in the lesson. We return to the full C Major chord, and I ask him to take note of his effective finger position, mentioning a better sound and he won’t be in a position where a flat fourth finger results in no sound. I mention that it’s easier to move something straight than something curved and demonstrate with my legs. His is smiling a lot and says, ‘So it’s like trying to walk without bending your knees’ and I say, ‘Yeah, it’s just not efficient’. Finn says, ‘You can still do it, but it’s just more energy’, and I agree, saying that that is energy that you could put into something else like ‘legato, or the sound’. I ask him to touch his nose with each left-hand finger, and then ask him to play the left hand of the study, then hands together. When I ask him if he is starting to feel ‘the touch in the tips of the fingers’. I joke about holding his carriage/apparatus up. He continues to practise and I ask him to aim for a more definite sound, then I ask him to touch his nose with 5 and 4 again. He starts again and it does make a difference to his sense of posture when I say, ‘nose’ at the beginning of each left-hand ascending scale. I ask him to do the same for the right-hand descending and it does seem to help him gain a better understanding of touch. I ask him to check how he is touching the piano this week and to make adjustments as necessary; he takes out his notebook. We joke about natural/unnatural ways of washing our hair (touching our head) and I relate that back to touching the keys in the same ‘natural’ way. He writes in his notebook and checks the time. I come back in and tell him that he’s really improved and it has meant the opportunity in the lesson to do ‘something else’. I say, ‘Every good practice you do, you get further along the road (Yeah). At the moment, we’re working on technique, and technique will give you a wider range of colours. It will make your playing sound much more bright’. He smiles and starts to write, ‘Play the piano like you would …’ (Scratch your nose). I explain to Finn that that is why I gave him this piece to learn (Study in C). I talk about the Intermediate program he needs to learn a study ‘with the big kids’. I talk about the renaming of Young Beginner to Developing Musician soon and the YB class. We talk about Senior division briefly. We talk about the need for a broad education, concert pianists, realistic goals and future employment. I ask Finn to write a note regarding the rhythm of the last two bars. I demonstrate for Finn and he asks me what he was doing, and I show him, asking him to fix up ‘the antique’ that the piece is. I sit down and demonstrate rhythmic drills (LSLS/SLSL) and how that might apply to other pieces he will do (I play Fur Elise). I say that I would like him to develop greater facility with curvature of the fingers now and into the future.
Lesson 25: 5 October 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

We talk about their recent holiday out on the farm, and email drain. George mentions he got the audition advice and he asks what he should do (2 pieces). I ask Finn to play *All of Me*, but he’s left the music at home. George asks how to say Czerny. I ask him to play from memory, it sounds good and he sings too. He has the piano part fluent and sings until the chorus and then on the return. I sit beside him, singing a little of the chorus. I say, ‘That’s good, that’s really good’. He says he needs to work on the chorus. George and I laugh and I ask him if he wants a Simpsons figures, but he says he already got one last week. I mention one of the students got Bart. I say that the piano part is ‘lovely but too loud’. He tries and then I ask him to put the soft pedal on and play loud-soft-soft. I explain how the soft pedal works and Finn seems to know (mostly). George agrees that it’s interesting and I demonstrate playing with the soft pedal. Finn and I play together, but I ask him to sing louder and play softer; he finds it very difficult to play softer. I interrupt and I mention ‘a little murmur’ for the B-flat minor bars, and I ask him to play. I tell him that ‘an artist’ needs to interpret the song, referring first to the need to play softer and sing louder. I encourage him to ‘scratch his nose’ and play with greater tactile sensitivity in his fingertips. I draw Finn’s awareness to his elbow and how it makes a counter-clockwise circle; I ask him to try. He finds it quite tricky and George and I laugh. I come over and help him find the direction by moving his elbow, as verbal direction isn’t helping. He continues to practise and we laugh a little about stinky feet and funny movies. We go back to the fragment and I ask him to think of his whole arm as a unit, imagining a steel rod. I move his arm first and then ask him to ‘put your notes into that’. He tries himself and then I assist. I draw circles in the air to illustrate the gestural fragment and ask if he can ‘see’ them (big one, big one, little one). He becomes quite good at it and I clap, saying, ‘Yay!’ and he smiles proudly. I mention that he was drawing circles with his elbow before asking him to add the pedal and the left hand. He asks me about the ‘silent’ pedal and we laugh. It’s mention that the point of doing gestures is not to show off, but to make the tone ‘silky and soft’. I gesture playing in the air, suggest that otherwise, ‘it sounds too fingery’. After a critical comparison, he says yes when I ask if he can hear the difference. I sit down and play, asking him to sing and play hands together. ‘Good boy, lovely sound’. Therefore,
there is some brief coaching of the breath. It’s a real ‘boy’s lesson as we are all laughing a lot. There’s some more work on the vocal line and clarity of the words. We then move on to the facial expression and position of the jaw, then some more singing with the piano; more work on diction. I suggest that Finn study ‘Music Theatre’ and he asks me if it involves piano. He says he does want to do music after school. I suggest that he try singing the chorus while playing this time; he does slowly. I remind him to use lots of breath when he’s singing and that he has a nice voice, though his diction could improve; he also lisps slightly. He asks what diction means and we work on the lyrics a little longer. I ask him to work on the chorus, and remind him of the gestures. I talk about being to a speech therapist and using ‘twang’ to make my voice louder. George talks about speech and drama and ‘People who are successful focus on their weaknesses so that everything is strong’. I suggest that he take some lessons from an opera singer and George talks about projecting when he does his work presentations. We talk about sitting in a way that helps singing. I ask him to play his Czerny Study. Finn plays as I watch from the second piano. It’s again a little more fluent than the previous week, though the coda is still not controlled; the rhythm in the final bar is still not right. When he finishes, I pause and then say that ‘It’s OK – probably give you 70%’ I go on to say that his finger work isn’t even (can’t you hear it?) I ask him if he records himself (yesterday). I say that he’s going well with it, but I ask him when he will improve his ability to play with the fingers (especially fifth) on their tips. I ask him to fix it up and make it ‘sound like this’ as I demonstrate. I encourage him to sit more upright with his elbows wide. By using critical comparison, I coach him with not pressing on the left wrist, nor squashing the thumb. We follow with half/one bar fragments paying attention to even fingers and overall posture. I challenge him and ask that he do the whole piece ‘like that’. He smiles and we carry on; I’m very exacting on him in terms of rhythmic (finger) precision, but it’s good-natured. We talk about developing better upper arm awareness and overall spatial awareness. There’s a short experiment, but it’s hard to tell if it’s good or if there is a (literal) language perception problem, as he has been known to take instructions literally. I reiterate the importance of becoming more aware of the physical aspects of playing. I suggest that if he wants to get 9/10, he needs to be better at the physical movements of playing. He starts again and I coach him on finger (rhythmic) uniformity. He doesn’t make as many errors this time, though I’m quick to point them out. He continues to play and I coach him with rhythm, upper arms,
shoulders, and thumbs. I comment that his left hand isn’t very good. I ask him to not be so heavy and ‘be a bit posh’. I ask him if he lives in a posh house and we laugh. George and I laugh and Finn plays the left hand. We talk about how important Sarah is to the family. I talk about forced and unforced errors in tennis and liken his errors to unforced errors. I ask him to play again. He looks a little tired, but is playing better. I talk about a new computer. George says he was starting ‘Can’t Fight this Feeling’ and I suggest that he try, giving a demonstration of right-hand chords, then hands together. I start to suggest some chords and their positions and write them in at the piano. I ask him to practise this page and then the next page, showing him how they are similar. I do some more playing and then we finish. George checks the repertoire.

Lesson 26: 11 October 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

- I say, ‘You’ve been doing nicely lately’ (Yeah). I ask him how he’s going and I remind him that Czerny was a piano teacher (I’d be Czerny, you’d be Beethoven). I ask him how his week went and Sarah comes in with a drink. Finn plays Study in C with a lot of mistakes, more than usual, though his overall body awareness does seem a bit better. I say, ‘Yeah, Well Done’. Sarah says that he played better at home (he stumbled a bit there). Finn looks embarrassed and I say that his overall technique is much better and is more ‘touch sensitive’. I say that he ‘isn’t mumbling’ and then I go on to coach him with the rhythm of the last bar. He tells me what chord he fixed up and I coach him with the dynamics, the length of the last chord, the inward angle of the arm and the unity of beat in the last two bars. I ask him to show me the left hand last chord and I manipulate his hand, asking him to then practice with and without the E, to give him the feeling of greater primary stability in the second knuckle. He keeps trying and I adjust his fingers slightly. We laugh and I say, ‘That’s good Finn’. I then coach him with the right-hand gesture and sense of direction towards the second bar, leading to its resolution. He finds it challenging, especially if I end up distracting him; he smiles at the camera. Towards the coda, he starts to tire and his posture suffers. I encourage him and say ‘Yay! That sounds great’ when he finishes. I say that a good technique will give him so many more ‘options’ and he is really excited. I sit down and tell him that when he was playing, I thought I could see when he became aware that he needed to adjust his position slightly. I start playing a little and suggest that the right hand has the main part. I ask him if he likes the right hand swell (yes) and we
work on the shape of the fifth finger within the melodic gesture itself. I emphasise that the ‘right’ technique will allow him more expressive options. He tries the right hand a bit faster and I coach him with add-a-note technique in the direction of travel, overall movement of the elbow and copying gesture. I tell him that he’s getting better with copying gesture now, ‘Mmm, makes such a huge difference’. I coach him with the first four right-hand chords, without notes, and as random gestures on the keyboard. He finds it hard to copy the varying speed of descent, so I go back to the chords (sixths). I remind him not to over-extend his second finger, briefly explaining extensor/flexor functions and avoiding tension. We review the random keyboard drops and he is much better this time, so I ask him to feel for the very tips of his fingers, which he does before adding back the other hand. We play together a couple of times and then he plays solo. It’s good, though a little messy in the 10ths section. He continues to the end, and his rhythm has certainly improved 9/10. He asks me what to work on. I say that as the concert draws closer, it will start to ‘loose’ if it isn’t practised regularly, especially slowly. I go on to say that slow practice might help him to have more time to scan his body for awareness of each hand and the sound he is creating. I say that as soon as he turns his upper arms off, his fingers tend to get stuck in the bottom of the notes. I ask him that when he plays it slowly, I ask him to watch out for his fifth finger, reminding him to ‘scratch his nose’. I mention that the last few bars of the left hand still need a bit more work, but I say, ‘It’s really good, you’re really good at it. What have you been doing practising wise?’ Sarah and he say just Czerny and All of Me and nothing else, Czerny, Czerny, Czerny – I say that it’s really good because piano playing is a motor activity and practice will refine those skills. So above everything, the amount of playing is paramount, and I remind him that talent is not the same as building motor skills. I say that because he made a real effort with this piece, it leads to more doors opening. ‘I’ve realised that if you haven’t got a good technique, it just limits your expressive options … If you play clumsy (with poor body awareness) you’ll have a clumsy sound’. I say, and demonstrate that technique used to be thought of ‘striking the keys and lifting the fingers high’. I mention that people ‘used’ to get pain up their arm. I suggest (using gesture) that technique is about being ‘fleet footed so that you have a lot more colours available’. I play a short improvisation with lots of ‘colours’ and I caution him not to be an octopus. I give him a clap and I ask to hear All of Me from ‘Finn’s Greatest Hits’. I ask if he saw the videos I sent (lines and spaces) and we laugh. Finn tells me he’s going to a birthday
with his friend who plays guitar. Finn asks if he should use the soft pedal (yes). He’s
been having two singing lessons a week. Finn sings and plays, and I close the piano
lid; it does make a difference to the volume. He sings and plays and I ask him to
adjust his shoulder a couple of times. We applaud him. He says that had played it for
his singing teacher. I demonstrate and talk to him about keeping his shoulders down
and ‘rolling out of the notes; don’t hold them into your body’. I ask him to play me
the chorus – when he plays the minor chord, I ask him to copy my gestures. He tries
and then I ask him to watch again and ‘roll into the notes; between F and G/C just roll
(with one gesture)’. I think I’m asking him for legato, because I say that his playing
sounds ‘a bit choppy … but it’s quite good; you’re good at it. I’m just trying to help
you get a bit more melodious in the piano part’; Finn agrees. He plays again and it’s
better. I suggest that even though that was a little thing, all the little things do add up,
and I use the restaurant analogy. Finn experiments and can see the similarity between
parts of the piano arrangement (‘like how I move my arm’). I ask him to play the three
middle C’s, encouraging him to take the sound out by moving his elbow joint first
exaggerated, and then with greater subtlety. I ask him to use more upper arm, and then
we stop to do some arm circles in the air, counter-clockwise. Then I start singing the
gestures to match them arms, then we transfer it to the piano. He doesn’t seem to
notice that I asked him to play clockwise, but he gets there after a couple tries. In
order to reiterate finger legato I ask him to play C, D flat and F and hold them down
with the fingers while executing the overall gestural fragments. He then moves to
‘adding’ the notes into that, before making the overall gestures smaller. Finn tries, and
then he adds the sustain pedal. I ask him to ‘be more touch sensitive’. We stop and
then I give him A-flat first inversion to copy. I ask him to touch his nose with his right
hand fifth finger before going back to the notes. This time he does well. I say, ‘The
very tips of your fingers are alert, but everything else just follows through’. I pull him
up for using a flat fifth finger, because ‘all the muscles turn on’, and ‘you don’t
scratch your nose like this’. I also demonstrate picking up a pen with flat fingers. I
suggest that without curved fingers, ‘there’s no tactility’. We laugh and I suggest that
using flat fingers makes his playing sound a little bit clumsy. I ask him to try again
and he copies me. He does well and I remind him not to lift his shoulder up. I praise
him for having his notes ready for the lesson. I suggest that he should feel pretty
proud. Sarah asks if she can video and I agree. Finn performs for the camera. We
applaud him and he says that he didn’t think that one was as good as the first one. I
say that I liked the first half of that one better. We agree that it’s hard to combine the
two, but I say that the gestures really helped to free up the sound, though when he was
concentrating on the notes, he did seem to become a bit tighter. I say that it was very
good, but can be even better. ‘You’ve improved so much this last half year. You’re
really starting to understand that piano playing is not just about your brain, and how
you approach the keys, (Yeah) and if you’ve got no notes, if you’re not confident with
the notes, you’ll never get there. That has to be sort of automatic (Yep), and I ask him
not to get slack (no) and keep trying – ‘Keep on going’. Sarah confirms what
repertoire he will play at the auditions and at the concert. I ask him if he feels good
that he still has three or four weeks to ‘have the space’ and not to have the stress of
the last-minute rush to finish in time. I suggest that learning notes is something we
have to do over time, and not all at the last minute. Finn agrees, and I remind him that
it’s much more positive way to learn. As we finish, I ask him what ‘new things’ he
might do next. He says he’s been working on the chords for Can’t Fight This Feeling.
Sarah mentions that he had a question. He says he’s been reading the chord chart and
asks me about E minor chord. I suggest that he needs to be in this position before a
concert, where he knows what he’s doing and has the mental space to move on too.

Lesson 27: 18 October 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

- Sarah talks about her day and all the kids’ activities. We eat lollies. Sarah says that
if I would like any Simpsons Character, Finn can get it (find it) for me. I ask him if
he’s excited about piano lessons, and Sarah says, ‘Look at him’ and I say, ‘You’re on
a roll at the moment’. Finn says ‘Yay’. Sarah says he can’t sing with a chewy in your
mouth so with start with ‘Chewy Czerny’. Finn plays the Czerny Study, and certainly
sounds good. His overall technique has clearly developed through this process; the
notation is fine. I say, ‘That’s good. Gee, this has been a really good piece for you
hasn’t it’, and Finn agrees, ‘Yeah, I like it’. He says that it sounds good. We play the
left hand coda together, and then I ask him about using the sustain pedal with the final
chords. I ask him to do a double-armed free fall with the pedal, before adding notes. I
asked him to ‘switch the muscles off on the top of your forearm straight away. I ask
him to do a cluster a few times, before adding notes in. I then coach him to thrust
forwards with the final chord while adding pedal. I discourage him from adding an
unnecessary ‘flick’ of the hand. We play a few more times, together and Finn on his
own. You can tell he is trying his best and is enjoying himself. I ask him to touch the
tip of his nose with the tip of his fifth finger and then play the left hand scale again.
We repeat this process with the left hand, and then I suggest that perhaps the five is
falling a bit flat because of 4 and 3. He tries again and I say a bit better. I keep
encouraging him to find the keys with his fingertips, and suggest he use the feeling
that he was going to scratch himself (don’t pull). He keeps trying and we take turns
(don’t drag the fingers, just stay on the tip, that’s it, good). I suggest an unusual
exercise, and he tries that. This seems to activate his extensors somewhat, to the point
where his 5-finger pentascale sounds more improved after doing so. I encourage him
to open out slowly until he is on his fingertips, while still playing. I ask him to repeat
the left hand coda while ‘playing on his nails’. He plays again after I prompt him to
tilt sideways in the lower register in order to maintain alignment. I suggest that Finn
could practise on his ‘nails’ as well as normally this week (a little unusual but seems
to work for him). Sarah asks me about concert and audition dates. I find the time for
her (3pm) and I ask Finn what he’s playing at the concert. We find the opus number
for the Czerny Study and the composer for All of Me. Sarah tells me about the song
that he wrote for his teacher. We are having chocolate now (mini Maltesers). Finn
says the song is a bit silly, but I say play it anyway. We laugh about the coffee song. I
suggest that he do more song writing. I give him some chords to read C, C6, etc.,
dreamy C Major seventh, C7 (dominant seventh) – F second inversion, resolving the
seventh, C minor (blues bass that he joins in with while I improvise using the blues
scale). I teach him C Blues Scale and he copies quickly. He jumps up quickly and gets
his book. Sarah says that he gets very excited after the lesson. Sarah says that she
hasn’t heard of the blues scale, but I’m sure we must have done this before. We do a
question and answer improvisation activity with the right hand in C blues, and Finn
seems to really enjoy himself. I start playing a 12 bar blues and Finn joins with the
sixth chords in the walking bass. There follows another duet and solo improvisation
based on Short & Sweet by Christopher Norton. Finn says he’d like to do that and
Sarah says she admires the piano and its versatility. We move to C minor sixth, C
minor 7. I say that we are playing basic chords in all keys. C7flat5 (C half diminished
seventh), C minor Major seventh (I play a little of the Dracula Theme) and C+ follow.
Also we explore C7#5, C diminished seventh (sounds like someone laughing – it’s a
funny moment, and C7flat5 (a question?). We have a brief look at some more chords,
including ninth chords (D as well); he is very interested. I ask him to play All of Me.
Sarah checks if he has no lollies and then he starts singing and playing. He does well overall, though the key appears to become a bit much for him. I say, ‘shoulders down’ but that clearly startles him. I sit down and he plays the second verse. I say that I like the ending the way it is. I come over and ask him to play an E-flat 2 chord. He tries a few different endings, ‘I like it, all right time to go’ – he jumps higher the second time.

Lesson 28: 24 October 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

- The lesson starts and I talk about lazy people and that ‘money can’t buy everything’. George talks about the creative side of his job, which he sees as, ‘problems with solutions waiting to happen’. He tells me that he’s known as ‘The Fixer’ and doesn’t like accounting though. We laugh about ‘that’s enough about me, let’s talk about you, what do you think of me?’ from some movie or another. Over and over – ‘It’s pretty funny’. George asks me if I’m going to send him to the office for interrupting. We talk (and laugh) about sight-reading … He said he hasn’t done any so I tease him about 10c per page and that ‘paper doesn’t grow on trees’. There is a definite sense of unique camaraderie between Finn, George and I, here, which I really enjoy. We start with some of the sight-reading, which I package as ‘a good chance to work on your tone as well as your reading skills without having to (repetitively) practice. I ask him to count himself if and he does the right hand. I ask him to use it as an opportunity (to be expressive) … though I don’t say it directly by I gesture that way. I ask him about his (oversized) watch (from Vegas). He seems to be enjoying himself, and I suggest he do three examples a day. I suggest he apply what he’s learnt about expressive tone and gesture ‘in a more simple context’, but at the same time he is practising his reading skills. He asks me if it’s first grade (yes) and then I show him two hands and higher. He shows me his music and he comes across a random study (second grade). I suggest he move on to something else. I say that he’s done really well with the study. George talks about trying to get him into rowing. George says he has got some weights, and Finn tells me the story while showing me gesturally. I suggest he aim for the bottom of the hand to be loose. I demonstrate, showing George and Finn that you don’t actually have to sit in a ‘box shape’ with your arms, as they music is constantly changing and therefore the extremes of motions will be in constant flux too. George says that he had noticed that Finn’s left arm starts to collapse towards the end of the
piece. He said that he thinks Finn has less strength in his left arm when compared with this right. Both Finn and George refer to the hole/divot at the top of his left arm – ‘completely under-developed on the left compared with the right’, so George suggests he keep going with the weights. George gets up and shows me the two arms, and where the muscle needs to be developed. I say, ‘That explains a lot’. George mentions that he is ‘already suffering’ from a lack of kinetic, spatial awareness and this lack of strength too; so he does have insight into Finn’s strengths and weaknesses. While he sounds panicky that he is interrupting, but I say that his concern is valid and that what he is contributing is ‘wonderful’. I go on to say, ‘Those bigger ideas are sometimes missed’ and that to be aware of a sole focus on fingers and hands. George says that he was home on holidays and he watching him practise and he was wondering why Finn couldn’t keep his hand ‘up’. George talks about how he can see that when the upper arm muscles are not switched on, he tends to lean on the hand, and I join in saying that this locks the fingers somewhat. I lead as we experiment with forearm muscle activation, and how overuse of those muscles that might result from pushing down on the wrist. I incorrectly say that there were no muscles in the fingers. I mention a story about another (younger) student who can’t unlock her wrists. I briefly demonstrate playing with some involvement of the upper arm and no involvement of the upper arm. I also play a little of the Study for Scales and Staccato that Finn found in his folder. As I play, and refer to my upper arms as extensions of the forearm/hand unit, I say, ‘You get a lot of power, for not a lot of effort’. I continue to play to the end of the first section; George records as I start again and play to the end this time, as the music’s in front of me. As I finish, Finn says, ‘Yay, that’s really good’, I say, ‘It’s a good little study’ and George says, ‘It’s wonderful’. I say that it’s Fifth Grade standard, and that I had played it when I was a student. I also mention that Santiago, Khoa and Wendy also played it too – ‘it’s a rite of passage’. We start with the chords – ‘What do you think the chords are?’ We work on naming the chords and their positions. I ask him to feel the top of his arm and turn the muscle on – I say, ‘Feels like a lamb-chop’. We all laugh. George mentions rowing again. We cover D7 – G, posture, rounded fingers and slightly wider elbow for seventh chords. We move on and I correct his fifth finger, we talk about G Mixolydian scale and I refer to the right hand of his previous Czerny Study. I tell him about Major scale without the raised seventh, do a little blues bass and right hand G blues scale (he copies me by rote) and then I do a little more improvisation before moving on. George laughs. I talk about
the previous student rolling his eyes at me. George wasn’t too impressed. We move on and Finn plays the G Mixolydian scale a couple of times and then he moves to the next section. I say that it’s nice to have George’s eyes and George tells me about his progress through the week, and how and why he noticed the slight weakness in Finn’s left arm. I ask him to play the right hand opening, and then ask him to pronate inwards so that you end up on the top of your thumb. He tries and I ask him not to get tight in his jaw. I mention how sometimes people lift up their foot when trying to play the hands; we laugh. I ask him not to get stiff when he plays staccato, and he does his own critical comparison with my help (‘that sounds more playful than annoyed’). I go on to play Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy with stiff forearm staccato, saying, ‘Now that fairy is very uptight’. We all laugh and Finn asks what grade the piece is (Grade 2). George mentions the movie ‘The Tooth Fairy’ movie with the Rock. I ask how Emilio is going (excuse me; grandma with the golf ball next door). We all laugh as we retell the story. We start again, and I ask him not to let go of his upper arm muscle as he passes the thumb under. Finn tries again, ‘that’s good, feet down, tilt forwards from the hips … oh, that’s really good, it was so neat’. I show him what he did well and then he experiment with avoiding, ‘uptight staccato’. Through demonstration, I show him how he was ‘freezing’ his forearm on the third staccato note, thereby creating a frozen sound. We go from fingers to fists, and then fingers. I say, ‘When you put the fingers (back) in, just think of the overall movement. I coach him with open hand and then fingers again; it’s better this time. I ask him not to do anything fancy and sing, ‘It’s nat-ural’ as he plays the right-hand staccato. We talk about exaggeration and I dramatise a little. George says that he has another question – when is the next lesson after Sunday’s concert. I say that he has another two Saturday lessons. George asks if he should start practising the study now and I agree, reminding him to keep practising his other study and All of Me for his audition this Sunday. George asks the room (2.15). Finn sits down and plays the Czerny Study fluently and confidently overall. The next step would be a faster tempo, though the last part of the left hand is still tricky for him. ‘Good boy, that was great. It’s a bit untidy, but you’ve improved so much with that piece … it’s a miracle’. George says that he can’t hear notes, but he can hear tone, and he can see when he’s struggling with the movement (making it harder to generate a good sound). I suggest, ‘a fluent technique will facilitate an expressive sound’ and George ‘but it needs hard work to build it up’. I agree and say, ‘build it up, buttercup’. I say to George that he knows his notes – ‘He’s
learnt some good practice techniques, that then facilitates comfort, which facilitates working on the technique, which facilitates tonal production which facilitates expressive sound’. Finn starts playing from the scales in 10ths to the end, though it seems a bit guarded as he finishes. I point out the scales in 10ths are ‘not together’, and ask him how his fifth finger is sitting. I coach him with some drills that he needs to remember and do at home. I demonstrate mainly doing two-note slurs emphasising synchronisation of the hands. I say that these kinds of things happen when ‘you’re ready early’ and that your piece can peak early before skills start to fade. I say that he still has to find ways to practise so as to avoid this happening. I ask him not to ‘just’ run through it once, as ‘that’s not practice’. We finish and we remind each other about the audition tomorrow. George offers to get me dinner, but I’m sorted.

Lesson 29: 1 November 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

- The lesson begins with Finn telling me who’s who of the Simpsons. He says he’s got most of them. We talk about Itchy/Scratchy and Tom/Jerry. I tell Sarah that Finn did a very good audition. I ask Finn what we should do ‘now’. Finn talks about Study for Scales & Staccato by Miriam Hyde that he somehow ended up with. I mention that I did this piece for my Grade 5 AMEB exam. I talk a bit about Miriam Hyde and the pieces she has written. Sarah asks him if he has his notebook. I ask him how his concert pieces are going. Sarah checks the time (3pm). I say to Finn that it must feel good to be ready with his concert pieces earlier than usual, and that in life, you ‘work towards a deadline, not against it’. I say that there will be times when random things come up, but if you want to be organised in life, be generally well prepared and prepare your music early. I mention the Intermediate Concerts tomorrow and ask Finn if he’s coming. I say that I feel confident that they’ll all do a good job. I play a little bit of Khoa’s Forest Stream, and I suggest that he should play it for Finn when he arrives. I ask Finn what he’d like to do, and we look at the Miriam Hyde study. He plays some of the right hand and mentions he fixed up his fingering, though it still seems a bit untidy. I tell him to play G Major Scale, but then start him on F#, and that seems to help him. We talk about broken chord/arpeggios. He mentions he knows them from percussion. I talk about the technique exam for the Intermediate exam, with new challenges. Sarah talks about doing a lot of percussion exams next year. Finn talks about it fluently and seems confident. He asks about the technique exam,
and I nominate scales, chord progressions (I talk about chords I-IV-V7-I and he plays them). I talk about G and G7 chords and he plays the above primary chord progression and then the root notes in the left hand in C Major. We talk about 12 Major keys and I demonstrate all scales, 12 minors, 24 keys in total. I suggest that he needs to acquire this theoretical knowledge and he says that he’s excited about 2015. I say that lately he’s started to improve a lot. I ask him why and Finn talks about how he learnt all the notes for the Czerny, and then followed what we were working on regarding technique – ‘I don’t know, I just like started doing the technique and then it all just fell into place’. I nod and say that I think he is much more responsible in terms of finding time to practise. We laugh about the magazine spoof about practice. I play a diminished chord and Finn takes the time to find the notes while I continue to talk. Sarah talks about his former teacher Judy who suggested he come to the Conservatorium. I say that he has matured and that I’m really pleased, and I want it to continue next year. We talk about the feedback that Angela and I gave him at the audition (a stage presence happening) – ‘I liked the feedback. It was supportive, and constructive. It was helpful.’ I smile and say, ‘Oh, that’s good’. I ask him how he found it helpful. He says he really liked Angela’s feedback and the way that she suggested to improve. He says that he remembers her saying she liked his singing. We laugh and then play the right hand opening of the Miriam Hyde study. When I ask him to add the next note after the thumb without switching off the upper arm, I praise him for improving ‘so much’. We continue to refine the right-hand scales (stay high and then roll over the thumb). I ask him to match the volume of the fourth note (‘This is what I heard’). He keeps trying, though he does starting playing louder. I talk about many aspects about piano (like scales) being a skill rather than a talent. I draw his attention to my upper arm, doing a critical comparison to encourage him not to drop the height of his arm as he plays the thumb. He finds it tricky, but gets there. I ask Finn how the weights are going. Sarah says that she has some kettle bells for Finn in the car boot. We smile (4 and 6kg each). Sarah and I talk about Popeye, but Finn doesn’t know who that is. We joke that Popeye would have been a good piano player and then continue with the left hand G mixolydian scales. ‘It just makes me so pleased to see you play like that’. Finn is clearly pleased and we continue to pass the scales to each other. I remind and coach him many times not to freeze the arm when ‘following through’ during staccato. I ask him not to get tight in the shoulder and to ‘Keep loose in all joints … don’t hold the joints still, keep them nice and fluid’. Finn takes the
time to feel his own arm and shoulder and I suggest that it’s really important to feel
free in the joints in order to make a ‘golden’ sound. I do a critical comparison
showing him both versions, the second where I’m ‘squeezing’ the notes. The
difference in the tone is quite noticeable. I say that I brought some putty in to show
Finn, which I get. I ask him to feel a ‘give’ in the keys, just like the putty. I mention
again about his joints not freezing. I can tell that Finn feels good when he plays, it’s
like watching someone when they realise they can ride a bike or drive a car for the
first time. I ask him to tilt his trunk forwards from the hips, and to round his right
hand fifth finger more so as to support the rest of the hand – ‘Good, very good’. As he
plays I ask him to let go of his trapezius muscle; I manually move his elbows in a
circular movement, and I remind him many times to let go of his shoulders. He sings
and plays and I close the piano lid. I sit down. He is really struggling with the key this
week, even though the whole performance is better as a whole. I say, ‘drop’ a lot and
also, ‘breathe … relax’ at one point. Finn has done a good job, especially with the
piano playing. As he finishes, I say that I hope that his voice doesn’t get any lower
during the week, and try not to get sick or stressed. Sarah and Finn talk about
simultaneous Drum Line and choir commitments. I say not to march in the rain. Finn
says that they need him in the Drum Line more than in the choir. I sit down and play
the chords in A-flat Major (F minor – D flat – A flat – E flat) and then try to play a
semitone lower and I play the chords in G Major and then F# Major). I guide Finn to
sing the first line in each key – F#, G and then A-flat Major. I start to do the same for
the chorus. I suggest that in the future, he’ll need to choose a lower key.

Lesson 30: 8 November 2014

Reviewed 29 March 2016

- Sarah talks about missing choir to come to the piano lesson. Finn looked up a song
on Google – it’s Sam Smith’s I Know I’m Not the Only One. I ask him if he likes Stay
with Me (yes) and I give him a copy. Finn plays again and Sarah plays it on her
phone. We eat mixed lollies and I ask Finn to sight-read some of the left hand of Stay
with Me. After a while I join in at the second piano playing the other hand. It sounds
good and we smile. Sarah’s phone goes and we talk about Liam being finished school
next week. Finn talks at length how smart Liam is and what a good percussionist he
is. He’s clearly a mentor and Sarah tells me how he managed the Drum Line rehearsal
in place of the teacher. Sarah says, ‘He’s very responsible … he’s a good guy’. We all
have a nice talk and a laugh. I mention that Liam was a bit naughty when he was younger. I talk about giving Liam a certificate for ‘The Most Enthusiastic in Lessons’ award a few years back and we laugh; also ‘homework on the couch’. We resume playing together, Finn plays the left hand, but his hand shape isn’t ideal. Finn says he likes it. I suggest and demonstrate that he could sing the melody while playing the left hand. I say that doing easy arrangements of pop songs is great for the development of sight-reading, and also harmonic understanding. Sarah mentions he picked up the other Sam Smith song quickly. We talk about Firework by Katy Perry and I play a little of the easy arrangement; also Never Let You Go, Am I Wrong. Finn and Sarah recognise both of them. I mention hand written and iPad copies, and that I’m working out of my theory/keyboard harmony/pop song folder. I also play a little of Human by Christina, I See Fire from The Hobbit. Finn says that he hasn’t seen The Hobbit. I also play a little of Roar. He picks which he likes (spare copy) of Am I Wrong and sits down, adjusting the chair. We play through the chord progression – C minor - A flat - F minor - B flat, and then move to open octaves and fifths with the left hand. I watch on and encourage him to add pedal, which we work with. I ask him to ‘keep that going while I play the other hand’ and then organise the music. He jumps in at a quick tempo and I pull him back and we play together for several minutes. I follow with a chord improvisation and Finn plays the bass. I ask him if he enjoyed it (yes). I ask him if he’d like to improvise the right hand while I play the bass. I talk about the key of E flat, but it’s C minor, as I coach him to play c natural minor scale. I play a little bit of his Czerny Study in C Minor for fun. He tries and bobs when he’s excited; we laugh. Sarah talks about skipping down the corridor after lessons. We play C natural minor, and then chords C minor-A flat-F minor-B flat. Finn improvises a free melody while I play the chords on the second piano; then I suggest the hands together. It’s tricky but he keeps trying while I play the left hand, then back to the melody of the piece while he improvises with both hands. We laugh about Finn bobbing when he’s excited and the rattles he had when he was a baby. Sarah says, ‘He was musical right from the beginning’. She also mentions that Finn’s voice has changed a little bit during the week. I mention to Finn not to clear his throat, as it’s bad for his voice, and he seems surprised. We talk about drinking water instead. Sarah asks him to start again, as she wants to record. I can hear Beethoven’s Appassionata next door. Finn sings and plays, and his voice is quite low and really needs a lower key to match’. I say that the bottom notes are sounding very nice now and we talk about not singing
too much between now and tomorrow. Sarah records the Czerny Study – you can see it’s challenging for him, but his control and overall sound are good, despite a few imperfections. I ask him to play the first chord while dropping his shoulder, I ask him to ‘create that sensation’ in the other hand and then keep the sensation going into the hands together. The tone is focused this time, but sounds a little bangy. The overall confidence and forward drive are much better though. I coach him with the pedal and the last few chords and he is really happy. Sarah says, ‘You’re showing the piano who’s the boss then’ and we laugh. I say that it’s excellent and that he’s last in the concert. He says he hates being in the first three players. It’s a happy end to the lesson and I say, ‘you’re doing great’.

A3.4 Case Study 4: Adrian

Lesson 1: 16 February 2014

Reviewed 6 August 2015

- He’s very boisterous! He warmed up with Can Can; excited about the new technique book $55; 4 octaves E Major right hand, discussion regarding distal joints for tonal control and speed and overall upper arm/elbow position; WATCH! He asks about the difference between Major and diminished, also augmented; let’s do one thing at a time; B Major right hand; did you bring your listening ears today; reviewed left-hand descending upper arm; he keeps trying to play the scales in octaves (?); thanks for inviting me to your house; Chromatic Scale – what’s that (he’s very inquisitive and constantly asks questions); B-flat Major coached overall head and trunk position; B chromatic coached fingering; Neil keeps getting up to see what is happening; lead with your head and align your elbow behind the notes; athletics analogy for head tilt; momentum and forehand/backhand in tennis including follow-through movement; sport of the small muscles combined with the bigger muscles; Contrary Motion E Major – DO IT, coached one and then two octaves in each hand; ‘thank you Adrian Chan’; that’s the idea/that’s not the idea (laughs); B Contrary nice wide elbows, head up, Adrian ‘celebrates’; what’s a harmonic/what’s a melodic; I summarise what we have covered so far; Neil – can I try; B-flat Major Contrary proves a bit tricky; what’s a dominant seventh; set a verbal goal to ‘complete the task’ – I showed him what is expected by next lesson (I’ve got 7 days!)
- *Jinker Ride*: ‘I have to have a drink from shouting at you guys’; plays it fluently from beginning to end; discussed wrong notes final bars and a theatrical ending; ‘he’s good at it’; plays it again all through – geography of final bars; suggested he play it at school of Thursday – Jane said he put in lots of good effort; ‘he (Neil) didn’t practice this morning but I did’; train horn and traveling into the distance analogy; praised his phrasing and sense of arrival; suggested better balance in the middle section (right hand is getting drowned out), reduce activity in the left hand a bit, ‘it’s too busy’; Jane – respect your teacher; coached tonal levels middle to the end; ‘see you later – we’re off!’; coached from second piano a ‘flashier’ ending – ‘hello, I’m the train driver/Adrian – ‘is it a tornado or something?’; take a bow – when you walk try not to walk with your head down it looks weird; ‘Listen, I’m very excited for you – very good boy!’; ‘I practised today/I can tell’; coached rolling through the notes without over-emphasising each one/also coached gestural movement towards top note/don’t squeeze the notes to make them get louder; singing demonstration and analogy for tonal shape – ‘it’s too shouty and will make you tired’; Adrian – ‘like an old car horn that’s not been used for 10 years/if it’s shouty it might be like an old car horn that’s been in the museum for a whole century’; aim for the first beats of the bar not all the others/demonstrate at piano and gesturally with ‘conducting’; Adrian – ‘why do some people move their head like this?’; you get an overall shape of the music getting louder without each note getting louder; he does it again and ‘that’s beautiful – you’re good at it – you really are doing well – that’s the reason I love teaching you because you play so well’; try not to waste too much time in the lesson on technical work – ask me questions that are relevant; he is a bit distracted by the camera; they know all the modern technology!

- *Invention in A Minor*: talked about MTAQ concert in June and other eisteddfod opportunities/Jane said that it’s up to Adrian and that Ipswich (eisteddfod) is too far to travel; he gets half way through *Invention* but it gets faster and faster – ‘can you play it so that we can hear it?’ Metronome comes on – what speed? – 80? When you come off the ties, you’re gathering speed there; left hand sounds like it’s a bit asleep; you’re making me feel anxious by getting faster and faster; I start clapping with him as he plays; left hand – ‘I want my turn Adrian!’ The hands have a conversation (I played the relevant sequence of semiquavers and also demonstrated vocally and with gesture); Adrian – ‘their speaking at the same time and that’s interrupting (cow)’; set
a verbal goal to improve voicing and work with the metronome 70 – ‘you’re concentrating on speed instead of sound’; reviewed movement for opening left hand; ‘When you do the hands together, can you roll through the notes with that much movement?/If you don’t use that much movement you won’t have the right sound’; Adrian tries it again and the voicing improves, but he is still having troubles maintaining an even pulse. I demonstrate vocally and with gesture the phrase shape – ‘expand’. ‘I could teach you all afternoon – I just really enjoy teaching you – do you know why – because you’ve done your work’. Adrian says, ‘Yes I have!’

Lesson 2: 23 February 2014

Reviewed 7 and 17 August 2015

- B Contrary Motion; left hand distal joints; coached forward tilt (with demonstration and explanation) and head on top of spine. He wants to show me chromatics – coached descending fingering, elbow alignment, hip tilt and distal joints – Adrian summaries requirements; he asks lots of relevant and irrelevant questions. Coached and demonstrated E-flat chromatic with metronome and whole body technique (firm feet, elbow, hip tilt, spine straight, core strength and balance); very distractible (!) Aiming for fluency and whole body technique whether one note per beat or two notes per beat. He finds it easier to look at the metronome instead of listening to it, even though he has a good ear, but this distracts him from what the fingers are doing; ‘can you round out the ends of your fingers too? Good boy – keep rounding them out’; head up to towards ceiling/shrink down exercise; asking questions of the student about what his goals are for the week and when doing the scales, what he will be looking and listening for and reminding him that his progress will be quicker if he is able to implement those things that were suggested; was told off by the mother for not respecting the teacher and being a bit silly/annoying/wasting time/flipping pages; I think I might be talking too much and perhaps I should just demonstrate and direct him instead; he was told that he hasn’t followed the instructions for completing contrary motion and was given a stern warning to do so, lest the progress becomes very slow and the lessons tedious; coached him how to flip pages quickly (!); reminded him and Neil that all work needs to be completed whether I remind them directly or not – ‘you’re not 4 years old anymore’. Staccato thirds right hand coached geography, fingering, elbow alignment, hip tilt and firm feet. Reminded (and demonstrated at the second piano) the essential elements that are to be applied to
every scale – arm is behind the notes, upper body moves across the piano, distal joints stay firm. I say, ‘instead of spending the lesson trying to be smart and silly you should be spending the lesson trying to absorb what I tell you – I’m the expert here – if you knew more than me than I would be sitting where you are and you would be the teacher’, he did seem genuinely surprised! While his inquisitiveness is to be encouraged, he needs to be reminded to use his race car brain effectively, stay on task, leave distractions behind, avoid asking irrelevant questions and value the time we have together; ‘I really admire you and your brother, but sometimes I think that you forget who is in charge’; he doesn’t take subtlety well and needs firm direction – ‘whatever I’ve ticked, you do’; he takes the feedback well when it’s cloaked in good humour and respect; Elfin Dance – asked him to play but reminded him to do his best and then focus on the feedback and not become distracted; ‘this is why I love teaching you and your brother – Congratulations – there’s no way I could play it as well as you, but I do know a lot more than you and so when we work together, you’re going to benefit – again he seemed surprised by this revelation (!) I proceed to help him fix wrong notes in the left hand and reminded him to apply that to similar sections (apply what you know to what you ‘don’t’ know) … use your lesson to gain as much knowledge as you can instead of using it as an opportunity to get endlessly distracted … earn my praise and respect by showing me how you can improve your skills quickly both in the lesson and at home. I ask him to draw an asterisk in the closing bars where he will fix up wrong notes this week – ‘we get a little bit higher up the ladder each week’ – layering progress on progress takes cooperation and effort from everyone – ‘don’t hold yourself back’. ‘What did I just say… oops that just took 3 seconds out of your lesson’; Mozart Sonatina in A Major – focused on rhythm correction and asked him to write in the ‘ands’ between beats. I set a learning goal to fix the rhythm asap, and we reviewed again with the metronome and counting beats – visualise and imagine the sound before we play it … partial practice the bar that you’re having trouble with. We did an interesting activity of ‘catching’ the last quaver pulse ‘like a fly’, first clapping then playing; encourage listening to the piece during the learning process; started semiquaver subdivision; asked him to verbalise what his learning goals for the week will be; he wanted me to hear In the Wind but as we had run out of time, I suggested that he make some changes so that we don’t waste any more time in the lesson going through things that were covered previously, unless absolutely necessary; ‘I believe in you’.
Lesson 3: 1 March 2014

Reviewed 19 August 2015

- Without any prompting, Adrian shows me his staccato thirds and seems pleased with his improvement. I adjust his elbow alignment (elbow meets the hand and hips tilt), straighten his back, align his head on his spine and remind him to keep his feet flat and firm; also no over-extension of fingers and hand faces corner of the room. He asks me how his distal joints are going and is very pleased with my positive feedback – it was clearly on his mind during practice this week. He plays again and I adjust him; thoracic spine and head alignment; descending octave by octave; suggest some stretches for his upper back. He mentions that he swims and plays soccer.

- B Major Contrary Motion: he has clearly prepared and is tilting forwards at the extremes of register, but perhaps too much now, as his head is leaning over the keys; I adjust his upper back and head, and spoke about a slight pelvic tilt forwards helping to get the spine and head aligned. We did pelvic tilt exercises together helping to align the head and neck and ‘switching on the muscles in your back’. Adrian commented that he can feel his muscles and is excited when I tell him he has learnt how to pivot on his hips – ‘you’re getting to know your body’.

- Chromatics: really has made good progress, and I comment that he is getting through the material very fast this lesson – ‘a very big change in attitude’

- Arpeggios: E Major right hand – good coaching of forearm pronation, thumb passing, elbow and forearm alignment. There is a good segue into chord inversions and chord progressions; gave circle of fifths sheet, discussed and demonstrated with right-hand one-octave scales all through sharp and flats (Jane came over and watched too); wants to know what enharmonic/common chord means and difference between E Major and E minor. We try E minor and asked him to tick off E minor and set a learning goal: ‘we get through them all one by one and you practice them all’. He wants to know what a diminished seventh chord is and I explain and demonstrate – he is very happy!

- In the Wind: helped him to get started on the left-hand fingering, demonstrating hand position, geography and rhythm/he does it; I play and give a story; wants to know what 12/16 means; demonstrate for him ways to practise in block chords; asks questions regarding flats and naturals; Jane asks about what happens with metronome
when time signature changes (explain and demonstrate with gesture); Adrian asks what a dotted quaver means; what does fleeting means; says he knows what tenuto means because it’s from *Jinker Ride*; play the mp3 on the computer; discuss weather pieces; asks about competition and exam pieces, extra lists, etc …

- Mozart *Sonatina*: rhythm has improved since last week; helped him a little more; wants to know why dynamics are in brackets; I help him with notation, rhythm and articulation; has many tries but rhythm is not easy for him, so I write in beat subdivisions, conduct and counting; wants to know if previous section was correct; Jane asks about repeats; Adrian wants to know about the fingering on the next page; introduced concept of finger substitution; demonstrate previous section again with right hand while counting and then hands together; mention that ‘everyone’ is doing Mozart this year; we learn ‘together’ but let’s not forget who has more experience; talking about the composition dates of his pieces. He sets *himself* a learning goal for first section both hands

- *Elfin Dance*: ‘I had notes to fix up, huh?’ – he plays it through and the improvement is noticeable though there are some stray left-hand notes still; spoke about pedalling and no pedalling in the closing bars; demonstrate and then Adrian has a go; triple lilt and rhythm/clapping while Adrian plays; ‘I love how you play’; helped him fix a few wrong notes in the left hand; triple lilt and conducting. He says, ‘Yeah, good lesson – I tried really hard!’

*Lesson 4: 9 March 2014*

Reviewed 20 August 2015

- Arpeggios: E Major discussed and implemented 4 octaves with elbow meeting the note, feet flat and firm and head extending upwards towards the ceiling, reminded him of firm distal joints; says (excitedly) that he learnt B Major during the week; taught him how to move the chair back efficiently (and sit) so that the pelvis doesn’t fall backwards (demonstration); B Major right hand and left hand reminded of extended head, taught him how to come up on one hip while bracing with the legs and trunk; discussed position of feet and how the nose comes over the note, taught where thigh, ‘glutes’ and abdomen muscles are and their function; turn upper arm muscles and let go of the muscles around your wrist and gently pronate inwards; demonstration of ‘rolling on my hips’ with hands together.
- Staccato thirds: Right hand is good, he gets very excited when I tell him ‘it’s nice’; left hand: he asks me where should he start – I tell him it depends on where he is sitting, I adjust his head and thoracic spine; ‘let go of wrist’ exercises – hanging on with the fingertips but everything else is loose inside, he is very tight laterally with the wrist; Adrian asks me how many marks is posture and I tell him that posture is everything because it affects the sound. I manually manipulate his left hand to encourage elbow alignment, loose wrist and inward facing hand (I commented that he has improved the inward direction since last week), keep body upright, head on top of spine, rounded fingers and avoid tightening wrist laterally. Thankfully I move on to another activity before I become frustrated (I can hear it in my voice).

- Chromatic: B flat – he does three octaves and I ask for four octaves; I scold Neil for distracting the lesson; feet down and hands together, left-hand fingering is a bit muddled; Neil distracts me; Adrian wants to know what staccato sixths are; set a learning goal hands together for Majors and chromatics; wants to know if arpeggios are to be done hands together; wants to know how do I spell posture; we set a general learning goal for scales and arpeggios to be a whole body activity, a concept which Adrian finds surprising; scales are where you learn about posture which then transfers into your pieces.

- Mozart *Sonatina*: Adrian comments that Wolfgang is a funny name. He plays the first section hands together fluently with good rhythm this week, he smiles when he finishes. He immediately asks me a question regarding the next section. I ask him if he really wants to know or if he wants to get feedback on what he just played. I show him two-note slurs but he doesn’t need much coaching here. He asks if he got the section that was worked on during the last week’s lesson right and is excited when I say that he has really improved there. I ask him if he understands the slur concept as I demonstrate the ‘hand-over-hand technique’ (it sort of feels like this) to differentiate rates of vertical velocity for staccato versus second note of two-note slur – he seems to really understand (I mention that the movement gives the tonal quality); down-up-down for next sequence, and a mixture of demonstration and fingering review; the staccatos need to be an up movement – down-up-down---up-down-up; do have any questions there? It will feel like this (hand over hand). Adrian asks me to clarify if the up movement is a slow movement: a slow movement gives you a softer sound and a fast movement gives you a brighter sound. I say, ‘To play Mozart well you have to
have a very good awareness of gesture and I demonstrate various segments of Mozart pieces; you apply what you already know from other pieces. We review the section that was worked on last week in terms of speed of slurs; take that third finger off early or move in so that you are not twisting. Adrian asks me about dotted rests and seems to scan the music for other questions that he might ask me. He plays the left hand for the opening bars – do you hear that little melody? Bring out that melody there – he plays the left hand again – I demonstrate – he picks it up. I ask him to put the two hands back together – he does very well, and I get very excited and gestural. Adrian smiles and pats his chest and I say, ‘I knew that you would be good at this piece’. Adrian moves on from the praise quickly and starts asking further questions (!) I mention to Jane that to play Mozart well, everything has to be detailed, architecturally pleasant and resolved (I also gesture here regarding an arc). Adrian asks me how the metronome speed affects the speed of the rolled chords in the opening (!), which I demonstrate and he verbally understands. I ask him what his learning goals for this week are he tells me. I mark up the slurs with orange highlighter. We revise the up/down movements for new left-hand part and direct him not to put hands together until choreography of hands separately is implemented. Adrian asks me why there is a bass clef sign. I tell him that he has really improved – I mention that it makes me very happy when he implements what I ask him – it makes me feel important and valued, and guess what – it makes you sound good too – yay! He asks me how many pages and what ‘ossia’ means. We revise the gestural component of the opening motive and mention that the C# needn’t be too pale – ‘roll onto it with the flesh of your finger, otherwise you get a dull sound – it’s very subtle … if you can play Mozart well, it reveals an excellent understanding of piano playing’. He asks me about \textit{mf} and Jane asks me if Mozart was influenced by Bach. I demonstrate the extremes of loud and soft in the next section. I read in a book that it’s one of the most popular sonatinas. Jane agrees that it’s very sweet sounding. I say that it’s a very famous children’s piece. I ask him if he would like to do a Mozart Piano Concerto. I play a bit of K467 second and he says he’s heard it in the car. I play K466 in D minor and he tells me what the key signature is! I tell both boys that they both have amazing potential as piano players.

- \textit{In the Wind}: Adrian plays the opening – I give him visual praise with my face – I ask him to do it again with the head and neck aligned. I get the mop out and ask him
to put his head against it as he tilts his trunk forwards and to the left; what would it sound like if you put the pedal down and left it down – it is a bit blurry isn’t it; I think you need to change the pedal more quickly (Adrian suggests every half bar). I ask him to watch my feet as I play first the left hand and then hands together in block chords. Adrian sits down and plays with pedal – I instruct him not to let go of the bottom F as it’s the note that grounds each bar; I give him encouragement to try it faster now, which he does; what would it sound like if you kept the pedal down during the repeat (Adrian asks if I mean every two bars); Adrian plays again with pedal every two bars and I say that’s the one; I ask him to play much quieter as I gesture and make wind noises. I demonstrate the overarching dynamic structure with block chords and verbalisation. Adrian plays again and I say, ‘go for it!’ – I just got a shiver up my spine like a cold wind. Adrian verbalises his interpretation of a ‘little wind and then bigger and more wild’. ‘It’s like a wind going over a graveyard’ – I scare Neil and Adrian smiles as he plays. I ask Adrian how he feels – ‘do you feel good?’ Adrian asks me about the decrescendo marking in the score and then he tries it (repeated F’s). I show Adrian my favourite part and I mention the sensuous marking in the score – it’s like it liquidy, like the wind is washing through your hair. I ask him if he likes it and mention to Jane that I think the piece really suits him – I am realising that Adrian is constantly looking at the score and finding things that he doesn’t know so that he can ask me. I help him learn a little more and we find common ideas repeated in different octaves. Spooky – I try to scare him, he’s unfazed but smiles. I show him the interchange to the low B’s, he tries, I demonstrate this and the next part; I try to move on to Aural Tests but Adrian continues to try to improve what we were just doing

- Aural: clapping/duple time/Neil is stronger than Adrian here – I say that this one can be for Adrian only. I help him by clapping with the melodic contour. Intervals – he has trouble matching the pitch and misses sixth; gets major third; misses perfect fifth; has trouble pitching the higher part of H/L, is trying and laughing, but seems a bit embarrassed; has initial trouble pitching descending chord.

Lesson 5: 16 March 2014

Reviewed 20 August 2015

- General ‘chit-chat’ and giving Adrian responsibility for adjusting the chair height.
- Jane asks question regarding sight-reading: do the boys go back to the beginning or keep going if they make a mistake; don’t suddenly get faster if you make a mistake and keep it at MM crotchet = 60

- Adrian is very happy as I tell him I’ve been very excited to see how he’s been going. Mozart: Adrian has learnt the new B minor section. I mention that he really is good at playing this sort of thing (this style). He wants to know how to say his middle name; I mention there was a movie called Amadeus; Adrian mentions that there is no one on YouTube who plays the piece (nor Jinker Ride) and wants to be the first person in the world who plays it. He plays the Sonatina (fluently with lovely shape and interesting left hand) from the beginning to the end of the B minor part at my request. Adrian asks me if he has done well with the expression, which I tell him ‘very very nice’. I show him how to choreograph the start of the B section, adjusting left-hand fingering for greater clarity and ease of gesture. We work on gesture for right-hand minimis (‘let that be the focus now’) and fingering plus in/out movement of the right hand – Adrian really wants to know what fingering is best here – we try multiple variations to find the best solution before the focus turns back to Neil (and Jane) mumbling and interrupting the flow of the lesson. Using a combination of pronation, in/out movement and add-a-note, we achieve an expressive result and I ask Adrian ‘what do you notice?’ and he responds, ‘it’s more legato’ – I point out (with gesture and demonstration) that it’s ineffective to fix your hand in one spot – ‘be loose and slide through the notes … it’s a lot easier’. He wants to know what his list pieces are and what his extra lists are. He asks me what ‘Viennese’ means; he mentioned that he did a talk on Mozart at school which he got an ‘A’ for so he knew about Vienna. He mentioned that he knew that Beethoven died aged 47; he wants to know why E# and not F natural; we change some left-hand fingering and he says, ‘but it says 5’; I explain that the new fingering will fit his hand better and encourage a clear touch. He wants to use the white out to put in the new fingering. He starts saying ‘my goal is …’ but I interrupted him saying that this piece is the same style as Beethoven Sonatina in F. I ask him (enthusiastically) if he will enter the QPC this year; he asks me (twice) if there are any sonatinas by Bach. I ask him if he thinks he can get first two years in a row, but Jane insists that he just try his best to which I concur. I talk about J. S. Bach having ‘a stack of famous sons/daughters’. I ask him to review the left-hand three-note slurs with gesture and the right-hand in/out fingering before adding the two
gestural patterns back together – he asks me if he should put a reminder sticker on that spot which we do. I comment that I really like how responsible he is being and not wasting time – ‘it makes my afternoon so much fun, and it helps you too’. Jane comments that she can’t find any YouTube recordings of the Sonatina but can find Neil’s Minuet. I play the mp3 of the Viennese Sonatina and ask Jane if she has it – she says yes and that she has played it for Adrian. We discuss how pretty the piece is and how ‘I can just hear you doing it Adrian’. Jane’s agrees that it sounds beautiful. We listen to the whole piece with repeats – I sing and comment about the dark/light harmonies, the orchestral nature and sing ‘Adrian Chan you’re doing well’ in time with the music. Jane asks Adrian if he has any more questions before we move on. Adrian sets himself a learning goal for the next three staves this week. We discuss naturals/sharps and fingering while I play the new section that Adrian will learn this week – he mentions that it’s the same type of pattern that we have been covering in this lesson. Adrian writes in some fingering before we move on.

- In the Wind: I ask him how it’s been going and he mentions he has questions regarding the middle section. I help him with the notes and three alternative fingerings for the left hand. I help him find better alignment where the left hand faces diagonally inwards. I ask Adrian which version he likes and why – ‘four makes it squishy’ and I emphasise the collaboration that we are enjoying. Adrian asks me what sensuous means – I talk about the 5 senses and demonstrate a sensuous, forward-flowing tone. Adrian is excited to show me that he has finished learning the piece. He is excited when I say that I knew that he would be good at the piece and seems pleased with his progress. There is conversation regarding Neil finding 10c in the vending machine. He tries some fingering and I praise him for good thinking and ask him to write it in. We analyse the dynamic indications while I play, Adrian plays and I use imagery, vocalisation and gesture (the wind grabs you and throws you around like a tornado) – ‘the wild wind comes to town’. I ask him to play the piece from the beginning to the middle very well (I really enjoy listening to that). He asks me what the ‘rhythmic’ indication means. I give him some feedback regarding the pedalling during the opening bars. I give him instruction regarding decrescendo for the transitory bars – he tries several times and achieves very well (‘that’s brilliant; that sounds fantastic’). He moves on quickly to another question – is this an accent or a decrescendo marking? Jane says that during the week, Adrian has been less inclined to repeat the piece from
the beginning and more inclined to push himself to learn new material; I praise Adrian for his maturity and comment that he has been having some very good lessons lately, because of his open mindset. He asks me why the natural is in brackets.

- Mozart *Sonatina*: he asks me why there is a line between fingers 1 and 2 (finger substitution) – I demonstrate (45/21) and his copies albeit without combining both top and bottom lines; I say that I’m just so excited and I think that I need to bring you in a new piece, which Jane sounds pleased about too, but Adrian is busy commenting that D is number 42; Jane prompts Adrian to ask for feedback on the Bach *Invention*. Adrian wants to show me chord progressions in all the Major keys (up to C#) and is very happy with his efforts. I ask him to try A-flat Major and we do so, emphasising elbow alignment and space between the shoulders and head (neck long). He asks me about the circle of fifths and why we get less flats as we go around (in the middle is where most of the black notes are). I go through all keys using right-hand octave scales; he asks me if he can put another key in between the two white notes; he refers to the number of the keys as he looks inside. I comment that he has come such a long way since *Til Ludwig* and *Song without Words* (which I play). We take a trip down repertoire memory lane. He seems to recognise *Run*, which he then plays. I ask him why he has come so far – he responds knowingly – ‘trying’. I emphasise that he is already talented enough and that the practice that he puts in makes all the difference. He comments that his leg is very itchy and his Mum puts some cream on. He tells me that he went to his friend Kevin’s house. He asks me why it says ‘invention’ and give him some background as to the number of pieces, the keys and their general purpose for study.

- *Invention*: he plays but he is still getting faster and faster as he goes along (‘I can’t hear what’s happening’). He asks me if the expression is good – I say that it will be but it’s too fast for you to ‘speak’ the notes – I coach him regarding projecting the tonal shape without increasing the tempo while doing so; he plays some of the left hand and then hands together while I clap/demonstrate correct versus incorrect in the C Major bars; I ask him if he practices with metronome, but he says he doesn’t – he asks me what speed – I suggest 110 (as opposed to crotchet = 70 the previous week) – he asks me crotchet or quaver. He proceeds to play the right hand with the metronome. Neil comes in after eating biscuits; I ask him to play the right hand from memory while I play the left hand at the second piano (with metronome) – it’s a bit of
a mess but we get there; we then repeat the exercise on the same piano (Adrian sits and I stand). It’s much more successful and fruitful this time, he really knows the right hand for page one very well. We then swap over, this time he does the left hand, but there is a weakness there; he plays hands together again but is having difficulty staying in time but he seems to be listening more intently. He plays the right hand more in time but it sounds quite mechanical, which I suggest (and demonstrate verbally) can be a ‘danger’ lest the piece sacrifices expressive tonal shape for rhythmic accuracy. I show him the ‘scales’ – most people are very rhythmic but not very expressive, whereas he (Adrian) is the opposite – he hears me and does the ‘scales’ exercise, setting himself a goal to ‘meet in the middle’; I set Adrian to continue with technical work (we did chords in the lesson instead) but told him I was pleased with his progress this week.

Lesson 6: 23 March 2014

Reviewed 26 August 2015

- Adrian dawdles, but as usual Jane is top of it.

- In the Wind: he plays the whole piece with excellent flow and attention to all details that were covered in the previous lesson – ‘oh my goodness, you are so good at that!’ I tell Adrian that I have a new piece for him which he seems very excited about; he picks up an easy piece (Little Piper), asks if this is it (no) which he then sight-reads the treble. I give him background information on Grieg and Little Bird. I play the mp3 for him and say, ‘It’s going to be a little challenging’. Adrian recognises that it’s the same composer of the piece Elfin Dance that he is playing. Jane says, ‘the romantic period’. He immediately starts looking at the score and notices poco ritardando which Jane advises ‘gradually becoming slower, like in the last part of In the Wind’. Adrian says that the change of clefs ‘don’t make sense’. Neil comes back in and wants to know what new piece he has. Adrian says, ‘it’s a hard one!’ Adrian plays In the Wind again but not as fluently this time. Jane gives me a chocolate, which I eat (after Adrian ends the piece he immediately wants to know what I’m eating). I show him some geographical anomalies that he fixes immediately. I show him how to play the right-hand thirds legato that he does with hands together. I demonstrate and ask him to play this part hands together but ‘with more left hand’. He tries but the hands don’t coordinate quite as well as previously. I demonstrate moving from one beat to the
next with an upward gesture of the arms, which he tries but is doing the right hand non-legato again. I move to the second piano and demonstrate again – he copies successfully this time, without seeming to look directly at me (perhaps he sees out of the corner of his eye?) When I add two beats together and arrive on the third, he seems confused – ‘what are we doing?’ – I show him again, he copies, I point to the score and say, ‘we are doing some coordination drills for this part’. We spend the next little part reviewing this and he starts to get the hang of it. I draw his attention back to projecting the left hand still using partial practice and gestural movement up and to the left (‘over to me … let me catch your sound … got it’) which he copies well. We continue in this vein with Adrian throwing his hands and arms to the left. I explain to Adrian that ‘those coordination drills that I’m showing you force the hands to come together … you’ll find that the sound is then better as well’. After he has assimilated the gestural detail with hands together, I demonstrate contrasting dynamic swell in each hand. He tries a few times and eventually gets each, which I approve with a ‘thumbs up’. Adrian says ‘yay!’ ‘It’s coordinated and it has a sense of flow’ and I demonstrate the two ‘versions’ to Adrian, but as he’s already ‘got it’, he’s now moved on to looking at the score of *Little Bird* – ‘that’s weird’ – he asks me (again) what poco ritardando means and I tell him and also demonstrate by say the Italian with variation of speed.

- *Little Bird*: I sit down and demonstrate the piece albeit at a slower tempo ‘I’ve never taught this before’. Adrian says, ‘that looks hard’. Adrian starts to wander around, then picks up the metronome and tells me what speed to play it at, which I do with some difficulty. I tell him that it sounds harder than it is and he says ‘Really? What grade is it?’ He seems surprised that it’s for his Grade 5 exam. We make some goals to sit the exam in October and we decide to learn the first section during the week which Adrian then ‘shows’ me on the score. I ask him to have a try now which he does with hands together; I ask him if he can imagine a little bird in a Norwegian forest. Adrian asks me what Norwegian means. I read the back of the album to give historical background. Neil asks me what repertoire means. Adrian wants to see a picture of Grieg. He continues to try but misses B flat. I tell him that the piece is in D minor. I ask what the cousin key of D minor is, but Neil answers first, much to Adrian’s disappointment though he seems cheerful anyway. I mention to Neil that I
am getting him two more pieces. Adrian says he wants to learn the easy piece. Jane
seems stressed that he is wasting time.

- Sonatina in A: he asks me what Viennese means and I answer and then mention that
he had asked me that last week – he seemed to remember; he plays it, though it seems
a bit of a rush and there are many notes not sounding clearly and he has errors in the
middle section. He says he doesn’t get the 4-1/5-2 part which we explore together. I
mention that the fingering might be a bit stretchy. I show him an alternative using just
1 and 5 instead which I ask him to try. He does and it fits nicely under the hand – we
then work on the overlapping harmonic suspensions. We then review fingering for the
next couple of bars and I coach him with the up/down movements that relate to the
articulation. He asks me ‘how do you make a slur staccato’ which I then explain and
demonstrate the touch as ‘portamento’ (‘your finger doesn’t actually leave the key
surface’). We then review the fingering for legato thirds – he is very involved the
entire time. As I sit beside him, I then coach him on the gestural components of the
four-note slurs that follow the ‘portamento’ – he picks up the gestural detail and the
sound very quickly here. I tell him that he’s doing ok with the piece and ask him to
play it again because, it just doesn’t sound quite right yet. Jane asks me if it’s too fast,
and I answer yes and it also sounds a bit shallow (Jane – ‘not expressive?’) I tell him
that the tone’s not full and it sounds as if he is rushing. He plays the opening bars and
I say, ‘for instance, just there, you were playing that much better a week ago’; I then
demonstrate while singing the left-hand melodic line. I say that he did nicely and
demonstrate where the tone ‘suddenly dropped out’. He tries again and I say that’s
better. When he plays the thirds that follow after then ascending scale, I say, ‘that’s a
classic example … you’re picking at it like a chicken’. I show him using exaggerated
gestures, he tries and it’s better, I take his hands and make them floppy, which he
enjoys (smiles). He tries again and it’s much better. We refine the passage a little
more as I make up words and sing along (‘take your time Adrian’ – that’s better). He
plays again with hands together with a lovely deep touch. I tell him it’s much better
already and he is again pleased with himself. I demonstrate the part with left-hand
broken octaves and ask him not to rush through the semiquavers – I give him
coaching with lateral and vertical adjustment so that the wrist doesn’t lock, lest the
rhythm becomes wonky. I tell him ‘it’s like a C shape’ (which I gesture over the
keys). I tell him (using gestural demonstration in the air with pointer finger) that his
‘C shape’ needs to be wider (don’t get to the F# too early). He has success (he says ‘yeah’) and I remind him that it’s not a fast piece and there’s no need to rush. I mention that we’re coming up to finishing. While Jane and I are talking about Neil, Adrian continues to practise and says ‘yeah – I just did it!’ Adrian mentions that he might like some Lego as a reward, but not ‘duplo’.

- Aural: intervals with quality now. H/L notes he still is having difficulty pitching the notes. He looks at the text and asks what ‘aural’ means. He is excited when he gets the exercise correct. Sing chord descending which he is quite good at (he plays the chord at the second piano). Echo clapping – I divide the exercise into two halves and he is fine, he has initial difficulty with the entire exercise but gets it the second time. I tell him that he has improved this week, and he tells me that he has completed more sight-reading exercises this week too. He starts comparing his and my metronome, scanning for differences between the two.

Lesson 7: 5 April 2014

Reviewed 27 and 28 August 2015

- The lesson starts with Adrian wanting to ask me a specific question regarding fingering and Jane becomes anxious and wants him to do ‘the whole thing and then Mark will show you’, nonetheless I help him and then ask him to ‘go for it buddy’. Neil is quite noisy and I can hear the two arguing. Adrian plays as I listen – it’s fluent, he’s finished the entire piece and shows much more refinement than in previous weeks. ‘Congratulations buddy … it’s such a sweet song and you play it beautifully mate’. Adrian says ‘yay’. I ask him if I can give him feedback now, which he agrees. Adrian plays the first idea and I demonstrate decrescendo using chords and expressive vocalisation ‘loud back to soft’ and gestural comparison and instructing him to drop faster and then lift slower. Next phrase I use expressive vocalisation, words and gesture to convey the tonal shape which he assimilates quite easily, though we continue to review and I instruct ‘do an up movement so that you can come down faster … lovely buddy … that makes more musical sense’. He asks me if he’s doing well and I tell him that he is playing it beautifully. He then says he wants to play it for the competition. He asks me if it’s a joyful mood. He says that he listened to the Bach Invention No. 13 in the car and ‘they play it really fast’. I tell him not to worry about speed and that voicing and shape are the main ideas to convey. He tells me they play...
it joyfully but I suggest that it’s more of a sombre piece. He plays the beginning again and we review the tonal shape this time with me facing the camera and saying in order to get softer you have to start louder, which I then sing and with accompanying gesture. I offer a vocal comparison where ‘if you start soft you’ve got nowhere to go to’. We work on the left hand phrasing and tonal shape, which he implements and points to the score saying there’s a slur there. I tell him that’s lovely, demonstrate, vocalise expressively with gesture, and then again point out that to end soft he will need to start louder. I say, ‘you’re such a stylish player … he’s really good at it’ which he says ‘yay’ and smiles. ‘If I heard you play like that in the exam I would give you an A’. He asks me if this piece is for his Grade 5 exam which I reply yes and then remind him to keep practising the aural component with the CD’s I gave him. He asks me if he has to ‘guess the note’ and I tell him that that’s not tested as most people can’t do it – ‘didn’t you know that you and your brother are special’. Adrian asks me why there are two slurs in the final bars. I suggest that because he has a small hand, as long as the top is legato the bottom will sound smooth which we then work on. We shift to the broken octaves in the final bars which we review fingering for fluency. We work on the rhythm for the middle section where semiquavers need to pre-empt the beat. “Even though it’s soft it’s got to mean something … use dynamics to shape the fact that we’re going to B minor”. I convey the ideas with expressive gesture and vocalisation while walking around the room. He asks me ‘in this part is the left hand meant to stand out or the right hand?’ I reply ‘I meant to compliment you … you’re left hand is awesome there … you’ve become independent haven’t you? Adrian what’s happened? Did you know you’re turning into my best student?’ (Adrian smiles) which is probably the wrong thing to say in retrospect as Neil says ‘me … what about me?’ (‘You’re a good boy too’). I ask Adrian to play five pieces at the May workshop. Jane asks me how about the June concert. I ask him if he can review \textit{Elfin Dance} which Jane seems a bit worried about as he hasn’t been practising much, though Adrian sits down and plays it fairly fluently from the score (!) – ‘OK that is beautiful … it’s so exciting to be your teacher. Adrian says, ‘once I pick up a few bars I can play the whole thing’. I say, ‘I know, you’ve got a phenomenally good memory … once it sticks it sticks’. Adrian looks so proud of himself here; it’s adorable. I give him feedback on the rhythm in the final bars using expressive vocalisation, clapping and gesture; he comments that on YouTube they play very fast. I say, ‘no I like the way you play it, yours is very colourful … fast does not mean good’. Jane asks me if
page two of *Sonatina* needs improvement and Adrian asks me if he should use pedal. I ask him if he’s got the idea with the tonal shape at the beginning, which he says yes and then plays. I suggest that these sort of shaping principles give the audience a feeling of anticipation and resolution which I then explain (and contrast) using expressive vocalisation and gesture. I also summarise the expressive content of the middle section using expressive vocalisation and gesture ‘make sure it’s got shape, particularly in the left hand’. Adrian plays. Jane asks me if the left hand should be strong, which then say not necessarily, but to make sure it goes somewhere, it’s got to mean something. I then summarise to Adrian what we were talking about (while he was playing) – I use gesture and vocalisation first deadpan and then expressively which I say, ‘arrive’ at the end of the phrase. He asks me if he should ‘get louder on those two notes’ (points to the score) which I say yes and then carry on to suggest (using expressive gesture and vocalisation) that ‘the whole orchestra is playing … very exciting!’ I suggest to Adrian to make sure that he doesn’t bang the repeated notes – ‘Start the first one softer … drop back to soft and then come back up again. He has some challenges here and looks a little concerned, but I tell him to start the first E ‘with not much activity’. He slows right down and gets it – ‘that’s it; yeah that’s better’. I sit down at the second piano demonstrate. I then say to come down slower on the first E. He keeps trying and continues to refine the idea. I suggest to take time with the last few notes, demonstrating first with gesture and expressive vocalisation and then at the second piano using chords, expressive gesture and vocalisation ‘and … that’s the return … we call that the recapitulation’. He interrupts with another question ‘is there any difference?’ I say, ‘I’m talking’, he smiles and says ‘OK’. I say that’s where the main theme comes back so you want to make the listener think (expressive voice) ‘what’s going to happen … uh … uh … oh, thank you’. Adrian continues with his previous question (observation) in which he describes the two different slurring within similar material in the piece, he asks me if there’s anything different to do, and I suggest that he do the same in each part; I then move on the descending sixths, demonstrating that you generate power by rocking from one note to the next, which he tries, ‘good, now try to overlap them a bit’, which he tries quite successfully. I sit down at the second piano and demonstrate the two variations, asking him to do the second one which we play together. He says, ‘like this?’ to which I say yes and then ask (and expressively vocalise and gesture) him to ‘make the top notes smile – send them out to Neil and make him smile’. He plays the next
staccato part but I suggest there’s no shape there – ‘can you come up shorter (quicker)?’ as I demonstrate with random notes at second piano (focus on gesture). I tell him ‘good’ within expressive vocalisation and gesture while he is playing. I tell him that we’re coming up to finishing, but then realise that it’s only been doing half an hour (!) ‘We’ve got so much done, your attitude is so different to earlier in the year, it’s incredible’. Poor Neil says ‘and me’. Adrian plays the second half again while I’m walking around the room – ‘smile’. I ask Adrian to review the sound of the left-hand three-note slurs on the second half of page two, once again coaching him with expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation – ‘more sound on those’. I realise that he has a few wrong notes, which we correct. ‘Stop playing it! Geesh, he just loves it doesn’t he’. Jane said that he spent nearly two hours on the piece, that’s why he’s good at it. Neil continues to try and talk over us with him saying he can play iPad for two hours too (!) I ask the boys if they would like to participate in the practice prize (practice test tube)

- *Little Bird*: he plays the first section with correct notes and a nice sound but completely out of time. I mention the 6/8 time signature, but all I can hear is Neil vying for my attention with constant chitter-chatter; I play and count (6e&a-1). Adrian tries and does quite well. I write in the beat numbers on the score. He has some challenges but with encouragement and me counting, he starts to get the hang of it. My phone rings. I suggest that it would be could to pair with *Sonatina* in the QPC. Adrian asks me about the pentuplet semiquavers and I show him, working with him to find the notes and fingering. I coach him on top and bottom notes and then adding all others in a single gesture to the left. I give Neil a hug and ask him to practise for me and I will give him attention too. Jane is becoming a bit emotional and Neil leaves to go to the toilet. Adrian works more with the add-a-note technique on the descending semiquaver ‘gestures’ (finding the spatial pattern of the physical gesture that fits the musical gesture one step at a time helps freedom, sound and coordination here). Adrian is very excited when he has success. I coach him from the second piano using start and end notes and then filling in (‘try and think of where you are going to end … get a run up … good … feel it in your arms … lift and drop. I thought that you’d be good at this piece’). We discuss 6 pieces for Grade 5. I suggest that he does a concerto for one of his extra lists. I talk about 3 different children doing a movement each. We talk about aiming for August/September for the Grade 5 exam. Jane suggests that
August would be a good time because QPC is in September. We talk about which age group Adrian will participate in. Jane and I talk about it’s important to focus on doing your best rather than focusing on winning. Back to *Little Bird*: he has digested the rhythmic detail from earlier and is still able to retain it on the first attempt (I am counting along while he plays). I demonstrate coordinating each pair of notes with lateral swing to the left of right, which is then extended into a group of three notes along with discussion of fingering choice. Interestingly, Jane asks me if these drills are for the fingering, but I answer it’s for ‘learning’ rotation and confidence with coordination of the hands. Adrian asks me if he has done well with this piece, which I reply of course. Jane asks me about the duet festival, and I suggest *He’s a Pirate* with Andrew and *Swan Lake* with Neil – I suggest that the goal would be the June concert/August Duo Festival rather than the May workshop.

*Lesson 8: 13 April 2014*

Reviewed 16 September 2015

- Haydn *Concerto* (First movement): the lesson starts with Adrian playing the first page with hands together. Neil walks out of the room without closing the door. We review the gestural component of two-note slurs with double notes and voicing of top notes; wrist loose on impact – I demonstrate, coach from the second piano and use critical comparison. We review the D and F# using a gravity drop in to random notes, then top note, then both notes, and then review the overall decrescendo of the phrase, especially with the last notes. I say, ‘lovely Adrian, you’re a clever kid’. He gets excited and I Jane if that makes sense. Adrian moves on instantly and starts asking another question. I talk further about ‘setting up’ the expressive detail early on, much the same as a director of a movie sets up the shots – ‘the art comes from very specific skills’. Adrian doesn’t seem too interested though and is ready to move on (‘it starts from bar 39’). I start coaching him on tied notes, which (repeated) E would be louder using critical comparison at the second piano (otherwise the music ‘stops’). Coordinating the hands precisely by suggesting partial practice (breaking the bar in half) while attending to tonal balance between hands. We do the same for the next ‘easy’ bar for extra confidence. I ask Adrian why we’re doing this, he replies ‘chaining’. I agree and also suggest that it’s for *extra* precision and to avoid ‘what most kids do’. We review the two-note slurs that were covered earlier but this time with hands together (all from the second piano). We also review ‘staying in the air’
rather than ‘doubling the movements’ which I then demonstrate on my lap using analogy. ‘Well done – that’s how you get the most natural sound by using the most natural movement’. Adrian starts asking another question about the clef change while I give him praise for completing the learning goal that was set in the previous lesson. Jane asks Neil if he is listening. Adrian asks why it starts at bar 39 (because of orchestral introduction) and I explain that part is played on the second piano. Right hand is finishing up and the left hand is getting going. Adrian mentions that his Grandad has a recording of this piece at home that he spent ½ hour looking for, presumably to play it for Adrian. I play a small part of the orchestral introduction and Adrian ‘has a go’, probably his first attempt with the second piano. I demonstrate how it might sound with the orchestral introduction and then the piano solo. Adrian gets out the score while I’m playing and asks what Klavier 1 and Klavier 2 means. Neil mentions that he stayed up to 11pm after I left from the home visit yesterday. Adrian continues to play the first section again and I ask him if he’s having fun there. I correct a couple of errors and coach him with the gestural components (down/lift) of the phrasing following the D Major scale (land faster on the louder note). He asks me what fingering to use and I suggest 1314 and then write it in the score. I coach him on the difference between leaning note and acciaccatura in Haydn’s time. He asks me if he’s playing this piece in the exam and I tell him not to worry and just keep learning quickly. We continue to review fingering and gesture simultaneously, but interesting I am doing all the writing of the score. I try out fingering and then continue to write it in, working out the phrasing too. I ask him to play the right hand while coaching lifting of phrases and fingering from the score. I tell him that he had learnt the notes well and that together we have reworked the fingering to suit the phrasing and corresponding gestures, but in summary (with a pat on the back) ‘great job’ which he is (verbally) pleased with and so is Neil incidentally. I say that that’s my interpretation of the fingering and phrasing (which is not often written in). Adrian asks why there’s a rest and a note, which I explain that there are two voices operating within the same hand (pedal point) at that point. I praise Adrian for his choice of fingering. Neil asks if you can have 3 voices in the same hand. I ask Adrian if ‘that’s exciting’ which he replies ‘yeah!’ We continue to review fingering, phrasing and gestural lift that was covered a little earlier. I sit next to him, pointing to the score, conducting, vocalising and helping him choreograph in and out movements by adjusting his right hand. I continue to explain ornaments are treated as semiquavers
here and coach notes, fingering, phrasing and gesture simultaneously. Curiously, Adrian turns around and smiles widely at Jane. I ask him if he’s feeling proud – ‘yeah’. I say (with a pat on the back) ‘you’re a good kid aren’t you?’ I ask him what a realistic learning goal might be for me (us) to set this week but Adrian has moved on seeing if a magnet that he found will stick to the piano stool. I ask him if he’s paying attention – ‘rather than letting me do it all, why don’t you come and have a look … since you did that much in a day, how about you do the next page?’ He and Jane suggest it might be too much because Jane says he still has some questions to ask me regarding *Little Bird*. I say that’s OK, suggesting a half page is fine; ‘By the way there’s a lot more detail in the first page that you have done than the next page’. Jane suggests to Adrian that he could try his best, perhaps aiming to finish the second page by the week following next week (as there is no lesson next week) which he seems happy with. I ask him if he wants me to ‘give him all the answers’ in terms of fingering but Jane suggests that it might be good to let him have a try. I suggest to Adrian that he might find some similarities between pages 1 and 2 that he could implement himself. I sit down at the first piano and play the solo and tutti (explaining the difference) while Adrian watches and bobs up and down excitingly. I explain that when he gets to the bracketed note, just do it with the right hand rather than both hands. He asks if it might be possible to do the extra E’s an octave lower or higher, which I then demonstrate – he seems pleased with thinking of the option. I then ask him if I can hear the *Little Bird* but he sits down and starts playing the Concerto again – ‘stop practising this one! (He laughs). Adrian plays a little bit of the demisemiquavers. Jane starts getting agitated. Adrian starts playing from the beginning – the tone and overall shape are going well but the rhythmic detail is not at all consistent. He asks me if he has the right notes – I reply mostly and ask him to show me the descending left-hand thirds. I say, ‘good boy Adrian’. He says, ‘look a little bird there’ (on the computer). I take out the orange highlighter and highlight the slurs. Adrian anticipates the accents and I ask him how these might be achieved – he replies, ‘dropping quickly and then roll’, which he then tries while standing and I’m sitting. I ask him to have a seat and we review gesture, fingering and 6/8 rhythm. He asks me about the tied notes and I explain, suggest fingering and then ask him to write in this fingering. Jane asks me if I am talking about fingering. I suggest to them both that the piece has improved since the last lesson. I then put the metronome on, he plays it and then we find another similar tied note and Adrian writes it in the score
with red pen. We find similar spots and write in the fingering there too. Adrian asks me about the staccato slur, which I critically compare (float off) while standing next to him. We find more fingering and Adrian writes it in. I suggest and demonstrate that even at this slow tempo, try to ‘stay in the air’. I sit down at the second piano and demonstrate softer on the second of the two-note slur. If he makes a mistake he tends to go back to the beginning of the section but I guide him to repeat where he’s at instead (saves time). I ask him not to bump on the second note, demonstrating (while sitting next to him) the drop and the roll slowly and ‘catch it on the way through’. ‘You barely need any finger action, you just roll through the note … yes … no that’s too much finger. Now that you’ve practised those, chain them together’. Adrian replies (wanting to please me) that when he first practised the opening he using chaining technique which I praise him for – ‘Oh look, you’ve done a good job … I’m just trying to help you’. He seems very pleased, smiles and then continues playing. ‘That’s brilliant!’ He says ‘yeah, I pick it up quickly’. I draw his attention to MM = 110. I ask him if he wants me to write anything down, but I suggest the sticky notes if fine and I write goals (practise counting for this section) and metronome speed. I ask him what the main goals for learning a new piece are. He adds chaining to my suggestions of movement, sound and rhythm (use chaining if you can’t do all of those things simultaneously). I then show him an example of what I mean with the left hand, but he interrupts asking about the right hand in a different spot. I ask him if we can just stay with this for a minute, but then realise (and verbalise) that he has the idea and wants to move on (he shows me he’s got the idea). We move to the right hand as he suggested. I play it and then he plays it. I correct a couple of notes (C and E) and then suggest something else which we then workshop together. I remind him that the written fingering is only a suggestion. Before team playing the hands, I remind him using demonstration and verbalisation of the gestural components of (his) right-hand part (‘drop-e-and-a roll’). I then repeat this step with beat numbers instead. We team play it quite well – ‘good’. I suggest that he try it again but just ‘float off’ instead. I write in fingering and then ask him if he wants to try – he says ‘yay!’ I mention that we’re coming up to finishing. We review the gestural components of the right hand again (with verbalisation of drop-e-and-a roll). He asks me the fingering ‘is it 2/5?’ I say excellent and then he takes the lead and writes it in. I seem surprised that he is left-handed. He also mentions that he is left footed (‘good to hear’) and winks with his right eye. I mention that I have a sore eye. I suggest and demonstrate to start up closer
to the black notes so as not to twist (and I get very excited when he does so). I mention that ‘those sort of things’ produce tension and the coordination suffers. Jane mentions about his hand size and I agree but also infer that it’s for everyone – ‘especially when you have a small hand, you have to be economical with your movements’. I review the rhythmic detail of the right hand with Adrian and also the speed of the ascent of the hand, lest the last note of the phrase becomes too harsh. I demonstrate while standing behind him and verbalising ‘strong then soft’. I then stand behind him and ‘demonstrate’ what it feels like on his shoulders and this seems to make a big difference, I mention that he needs to do tonal shaping but also keep the passage in time – ‘Excellent, couldn’t have done it better myself … that’s awesome!’ Adrian mentions that he is ‘counting in his heart’. I mention that when people start to put the rhythm back in they start to get clumsy. I suggest that we want to hear the bird fluttering. I also mention that if he wants to play quickly, he will have to rotate quickly. He tries and is quite quick already, but I mention that speed is not the goal at this stage. I mention and demonstrate that his timing isn’t correct in the middle of the first page. Jane checks his skin while we continue to workshop the rhythm here (I verbalise and Adrian plays). We do a quick triple time activity while verbalising and then he plays it again accurately. I mention that he needs to get the rhythm correct so that the birds can keep ‘flowing’. Adrian starts playing the Haydn again. I ask him to ‘ask me something …’ to get the most out of his time. We have a bit of fun role-playing him asking me questions and me giving feedback. He then plays the passage again but the rhythm is still not understood so we continue to review until he gets it (I also write on the score). I then turn on the metronome and demonstrate. I ask him to tell me (not show) where the beats go for this part, which he does and then writes it in. I sit down, sigh, act relaxed and say, ‘he’s teaching himself now’. I then ask him to play what he has written – ‘good boy!’ I suggest that if I was you, I would spend another week fixing up the rhythm for page one. I also mention that we mainly spent time in ‘randomised partial practice’ and set him the learning goal to do that do – ‘Yes Mark? Yeah Mark!’ I then sit down and give him a demonstration of what the section will sound like and what would be a good part to practise. I put in stickers to show him the ‘borders’ of one section that he needs to practise. I then ask him to do the triple metre exercise while I play (Neil laughs).
- He mentions that he is up to … in sight-reading. He then brings the book over to show me. He also mentions he has been doing his technical work. I mention that we have run out of time but he is resistant to stop!

*Lesson 9: 19 April 2014*

Reviewed 2 October 2015

- As usual Jane sets up his book while asking him not to waste time and Adrian is very enthusiastic and cheerful. Adrian mentions that he has only got one line of the *Little Bird* to go.

- Haydn *Concerto in D*: Adrian plays hands together with very obvious rhythmic mistakes. I say, ‘yay!’ and he says that he learnt ‘these two bars’ that morning. He asks me if there is a lesson next week and when I say yes, he says that he has to go up to there (sets his own learning goal for the week). We begin to review some right-hand fingering and articulation (I show him two possibilities). He tries, but say that I prefer that one because it’s cheekier. We go a little further but as I exit the room sneezing, Adrian goes back to the start of that section and implements the fingering and articulatory detail that was just covered. I come back and just coach a little more and then write in the fingering. Adrian asks me what II means (piano 2). I mention that he has a few timing errors which I then show him while counting out the quaver subdivisions (he then corrects it, saying that’s a crotchet). I then help him count out the timing for dotted crotchet. I mention that ‘when you go up (the staccato scale) see if you can smile for me’ which he does. I coach the fingering as he makes a few mistakes. I then manually correct his right hand pronation, posture and head position. Jane mentions that Neil always has this problem. Adrian does well with the staccato scale but the timing is incorrect so I sing expressively while conducting – he then corrects it as I sing along. I ask him to stand up so that he can see my arm. I show him two versions and ask him to copy the one where I’m using my arm and body to show the audience that the music is smiling. Adrian tries with success but the rhythm is incorrect again (trouble merging both ideas simultaneously). He tries again and has success so I ask him to decrescendo on the last three notes. I say that he is turning into ‘a fine little player (yeah!) … just imagine what you’ll be like when you’re older’. Jane mentions that he has been working really hard. Adrian looks further into the score, asking me how to play the trill at the end of the first section (start on upper
note). I then ask him to play it again from the beginning (sit up tall/be proud). He does much better with the rhythm this time but we stop to correct a couple of wrong notes (I refer to the harmonic structure). Adrian contributes to the conversation and I sit down and give him an outline of the overall harmonic structure in block chords while verbalising as I go. He then asks me if the leaning notes are right which I reply ‘lovely’ and I then coach him to ‘lean in’. He does quite well so I go further – ‘can you take a big breath in and then breathe out on that one? (I play and demonstrate the concept) … The way that you coordinate your breath with your body and the instrument make it come alive’. Adrian tries and does well – I mention (and demonstrate while whistling) that it’s like a wind player would go … I mention that as pianists we can mimic this idea. I discuss with Adrian that lifting up between slurs is for that reason (to take a breath). I then coach him on the upbeat breath at the beginning of the piece. Adrian tries and has a bit of a sputter! (He laughs). I mention that we don’t literally have to take so many breaths, but it’s the concept that is important. I mention to sit with his head back, soft and supple arms, count and breath in. Adrian plays while I coach him with expressive vocalisation and conducting (gesture) – he is quick to pick up on previous errors and corrects them as we go. I pause to coach him with the leaning notes – ‘Aim to lean in with your body as you play them (he tells me that they’re not leaning notes!) I ask him to move forwards from the hips. He tries and it’s OK, so I sit down in my chair and demonstrate. I ask him to put his feet down and move the chair back a bit. I sing and move from the hips and ask him to do the same before moving back to playing again (he does well and I briefly discuss this subtle concept with Jane as she asked me to clarify). Adrian plays the ascending ‘smiling’ scale but I mention that it doesn’t sound that cheerful, so I ask him to use his body, his arms, and his breath. He has another go but it’s obvious that the left-hand notes are getting in the way, so without being coached he ‘checks’ the left hand and then replays hands together with expressive success (I am coaching him with expressive vocalisation and gesture here). I mention ‘very good … it changes the sound, doesn’t it?’ I sit down and critically demonstrate the contrast between without expressive body movement and with expressive body movement, but Adrian tells me I messed up on the A, which I take graciously. I demonstrate the suspended D with body movement ‘like an ostrich’ which he then copies. We discuss the need not to over-exaggerate (don’t lift nose/be more natural). I mention that as he does ‘it’, try to ‘smile inside’. Adrian seems pleased and smiles, and Jane says that ‘it seems more
alive … if you are alive, so is your music’. I say, ‘remember you told me about the
snow leopard? (something living)… that was a really good interview’; Adrian starts
telling me that there are three types of galaxies and that he has a lot of knowledge about
space (Mars used to have water). I mention that I can’t wait to play the concerto with
him (‘it’s going to be so exciting’), to which Adrian reminds me that he has 7 pages to
learn (though). I say, ‘is that all … that’s not much’ (he seems a bit surprised). Jane
asks me if he has done OK with the second page, which I reply yes he has done well
overall. I sit down and play the passage and mention a couple of note corrections and
write them in (all three of us are involved in the process here – it’s a wonderful
moment!) I ask Adrian to sit down and have a go and then we talk further (and
experiment) with integrating the notes of the right-hand scale with a uniform touch by
using forearm pronation as well as thumb turning under. He continues to improve
quickly here and I mention that it’s about 90% ‘good’. I show him chaining pairs of
notes together in order to study the physical aspects involved more systematically and
he is quick to identify ‘chaining’. I show him that between fingers 3 and 1 is usually
where people ‘land down (with a bump) instead of tilt and go up’. Adrian tries several
times looking at me in order to seek approval. I mention that between G# and A, he
needs to avoid a different ‘kind’ of sound. He (cleverly) partial practices the adjacent
notes aiming to unify the touch, or ‘matched’ as I put it. He continues to refine the
skill, mentioning himself that ‘these match’. Adrian also mentions here that (in scales)
‘your body is made for going down not up’ which I realise and comment that he is
referring to the greater ease of forearm than backhand in tennis. ‘So that’s why it’s a
lot easier to go down’ (plays a descending scale). We continue to refine the skill, and I
mention not to lift the thumb up too early, thereby avoiding a gap in the legato. He
then puts the hands back together slowly, after which I ask him to play faster and then
say ‘that’s so much better … I wouldn’t say it was 100%, maybe 92%, but well done’.
Adrian keeps trying and (perhaps worryingly) doesn’t even look at his hands, but
rather is fixed on my gaze in order to receive direction, nonetheless he keeps trying
(me – ‘I can hear the change’) and Jane mentions ‘the volume the same – true, but
gradually getting louder as well … oh, not suddenly louder’. Adrian is taking it all in
and I demonstrate what I would like him to achieve by using gesture, expressive
vocalisation and critical comparison. He does well and so he mentions that he found
this scale easier than this one. I mention (and demonstrate) that it may be because the
white and black notes are different, thus causing them to be of a different overall
shape. He quickly asks me, ‘how about this one here’ and I mention that the configuration is similar to ‘that one’; ‘that’s beautiful... I love the way that you play – anyway, nice job – ‘Yay! – It’s definitely moved on’; he asks me why this note is in brackets and I explain using demonstration and reasoning; I start to question whether my option is the best one before Adrian suggests that he finds doing the bracketed note in the right hand easier; I mention to ‘see how you go, as that fingering option is not set in stone’ he also asks me what vi means (violin 1); I demonstrate on the keyboard what the orchestral part might sound like (he says ‘oh cool’) and then plays a small section on the keyboard using strings; I mention to him about being a soloist when playing concertos – be a little theatrical and use your body a bit more, which I sit down and demonstrate; he plays the opening before I mention the forward tilt of the pelvis again – Adrian asks me what a pelvis is; he is very smiley and continues to play while I manipulate the in/out movement from his hips; I also try to adjust his head and spine alignment here; he calls out ‘Beethoven’ when he sees the picture of Chopin on the wall

- Little Bird: Jane tells Adrian to hurry up; I ask about the air-conditioning; Adrian plays hands together fluently, but there are problems with coordination of demisemiquavers and a non-uniform pulse; the middle section has beautiful gestural detail in terms of preparatory movement; I start playing triple time on the keyboard in ensemble, but he gets distracted and stops playing altogether; when I mention to finish the piece off, he says that he hasn’t learned the last line yet, ‘I learned nearly a page!’; I give him encouragement ‘you’ve done a good job – that’s good’; I tell him that it’s not quite in the 6/8 time – I show him on the keyboard, playing the harmonic outline while singing the melodic material; we play in ensemble and that seems to really help (he does well even when I stop for a half page); I show him what his sounded like earlier; I take his hands and we waltz from side to side while both singing the melodic material; he says that he did get the fingering right in the middle section to which I reply, yes, don’t worry you did so much very well and overall have improved – ‘just because I’m not saying good things (at this very moment) doesn’t mean I don’t think you’re good’; we play in ensemble again and it works very well; we play all the way fluently except for the last line – ‘Wow, that’s so much better! Adrian: Yeah, we just did it!’ (He bobs up and down excitedly); I ask him if he feels the 1-2-3 time a bit better now and he replies positively and we both continue to conduct, count and move
around the room. I play it on the keyboard emphasising gesture and triple lilt rather than correct notes (‘the notes aren’t important – it’s the feel). He plays it briefly on the keyboard but not with the triple little. He starts to become distracted, so I herd him back to the piano (‘come on we’re on a roll’). I say that I will give him a metronome speed but he corrects me saying that I gave him one last week. I suggest that he needs a faster one. While pointing to the score, he (knowingly) tells me that the beat needs to be quaver. I say that I want him to try 150 which we play in ensemble, though it takes him longer to ‘find the groove’ than before – in fact the whole piece doesn’t sound as comfortable with the metronome, though I say, ‘yay!’ when he finishes, mentioning that amongst all that his shaping is beautiful, but he doesn’t look as excited. He says that the metronome sounds ‘rocky’ (mentions it all sounds the same) – I suggest that we set it on triple time. He suggests every two which I suggest every six. He asks what every seven would be and I say that some pieces are in seven time. He says that he’s never had a piece in seven – I say, ‘me neither’ (conversation occurs while I am playing waltz chords with some melodic material). I draw his attention to the rhythmic detail where there are broken descending chords. I mention not to worry about correct notes – ‘to be a good piano player, you need to understand the movement … you put the notes into the movement’. Adrian asks me how much the piano weighs. Jane asks Adrian if he needs to write down the speed, which he does. I sit down and demonstrate the triple lilt and where it started to go off track a bit.

- Scales and Chords – he mentions that he did chord progressions. He plays E-flat Major in contrary motion and tells me excitedly while smiling and bobbing up and down. I mention that I’d like to write down some performance goals for him. Adrian is looking at the computer (press any key to continue). He starts to play primary chords in all Major keys with (blurry) pedal – I say have you done all the keys? I’m impressed! He smiles gleefully and he checks to see whether I have written down E flat in contrary motion. He starts playing E-flat Major arpeggios. Wendy brings in coffee and Adrian asks me why, which I explain that they are being nice because I help her. Adrian says that I should be fired from the Conservatorium so that he can work there and earn $200 per day. He isn’t being malicious, as demonstrated by his language (zombies), which doesn’t quite ‘fit’. He says that then he would only work one hour per day, but I say what about all the free lessons that you will need to give people if they practise hard? He replies that they will still have to give him 10 bucks. I
ask him what he will play on 4 May – ‘I know how to chop a whole tree down (?) I ask him not to be silly and to focus. We discuss (and he plays) In the Wind and Sonatina in A Major – Jane also suggests Jinker Ride but ‘it seems a bit rushed’ so she asks me to hear it. Adrian agrees but says ‘I’ll try not to burp because I just had two cokes’. I mention to hurry up because we’re running out of time.

- Jinker Ride: he plays it fluently with hands together but it’s quite messy, uncoordinated and rushed. He gets half way through before I stop him and tell him it’s too fast. He tells me ‘but it says allegretto 122–134’ and then grabs the metronome to set it. After I struggle to get his attention, I tell him that it’s too fast and it’s missing all of the lovely (musical) detail that he used to play with. I tell him that rather than me going through it all again, I suggest that he might consider himself how he might make it better. I tell him that the lesson is over – we’re going to the movies (Lego one?) I detail the semester performance goals with him, including dates. We revise which Major scales to play for the technique exam. Jane reminds him that he needs to go home and practice these scales. After I have his attention, we go through all of the learning goals for the remainder of the year (‘try not to keep interrupting’) ‘Why did you say negotiate a time?’ He finishes the lesson by saying that he did ‘good’ on his concerto though and asks his Dad if he can get his lollipop.

Lesson 10: 27 April 2014

Reviewed 9 October 2015

- We start the lesson talking about how much Adrian and Andrew love their concertos and mention that I’m going to their house for the research interview tonight. Adrian asks me about how to execute the ornaments (why is there ossia?) I explain and demonstrate. He also asks me two other questions in quick succession (!) I explain that there are different ways to do the same thing. I give my opinion, and then (after playing it again) ask him which one he likes. He seems to genuinely agree with me here. He asks two other questions regarding German translation and we talk about instrumentation clues for articulation. I demonstrate pizzicato using Kelly’s concerto and he actually knows which movement it is.

- Haydn Concerto (first movement): He plays the opening section and I accompany on the second piano. ‘Oh that’s wonderful – Yay!’ (Pat on the back) Adrian smiles gleefully. I suggest and then write in fingering for rotary right-hand semiquavers. I
suggest that if he has trouble with fluency, he should try daisy chaining one beat at a
time. He doesn’t seem to pick up the hint and replays it the same way, but I direct him
(I play/you play) and then he imitates 1, then 2, then 3 beats being chained together
(‘it helps your brain to sort it out’) Adrian is engrossed in the score while I mention to
Neil that he can apply these ideas too. Adrian says that the fingering for the crushed
notes doesn’t make sense, but I explain that in Haydn’s time, the notes are played as
straight semiquavers. He assimilates the information very quickly, but I suggest and
write in fingering (he says, ‘it says 3 there’) and so he is actively involved in the
process. I mention (and adjust) to angle his hand to the corner so that the elbow is
higher than the hand, allowing for lateral alignment on the wrist with the notes.
Adrian asks me about the fingering for the trill and I mention that everyone is
different and that Andrew is good at 3 – 1. Adrian is really good at 2–3, and he gets
very excited when I tell him he is really good at the trill. I mention that it would be
fun to have a trill competition at the Young Con. Adrian me what fingering I use and
then when go through every combination together. We talk about resolution notes that
the trill ends on and I use (expressive) analogy of after dinner mint (‘that’s so
refreshing’) I ask Adrian if he’s every had an after dinner mint or coffee, and Adrian
mentions that his Mum drinks coffee (sometimes) and so does Neil. I demonstrate by
playing both parts, how the timing should be. I coach Adrian with keeping the pulse
uniform between sections, as his semiquavers are becoming too fast here.
Interestingly, he has more difficulty with accuracy when playing slower. I suggest
chaining method ‘to feel where the beats are, to get the finger patterns learnt and to
work on gesture/sound correlation’ (Neil agrees!) We then move to chaining half bars
together (I demonstrate first). I caution Adrian against ‘mumbling’ the notes to which
he laughs and then tries again with good success (‘oh that’s nice’). I then coach him
with getting the left-hand chord and final note of the right hand to synchronise with
greater precision which he repeats many times and then turns and smiles proudly at
his mother and then the camera (he puts his thumbs up). During this time I mention
that I just received a text from Lyn saying that Andrew is coming, but he will take a
nap first. We discuss the benefits of napping in terms of enhanced concentration. I
mention to Adrian that (these days) he has brought the piece to a very high level quite
quickly, but Adrian has already moved on and asks me how to play ‘that part’ (my
part!) I sit down and play it for him and sing his part while he moves around, almost
dancing at a couple of points. He asks me why there are so many rests in II (orchestral
part) which I answer that he is the most important part and most of my ‘solo’ material is at the beginning of the piece (I then play it for him). Adrian is bobbing up and down and smiling here. I mention that when he has his part down pat then I will start practising mine, showing him where the easy and tricky parts of on the score. I then play the eight bars intro and we sing and ‘conduct’ Adrian’s solo part while adding the orchestral interludes. I mention that there is a Q & A happening that is very exciting to be a part of – ‘it’s very fun’ (Adrian continues bobbing and says, ‘it is’) I mention that it’s like a cool duet; he (and Neil) ask me how many concertos there are. I mention hundreds (‘thousands?’) I mention the hardest one is the Rachmaninoff third in D minor (I play the introductory part and Adrian looks back at Jane and smiles). I ask Adrian where ‘we’ are going to get up to this week. I mention that there is no lesson next week due to the performance workshop. I ask Adrian what he is going to play. I ask him if we can set a goal where to get up to for next lesson. Jane joins in and suggests (at least) complete the two staves for page three and ‘have a go at page four’. I mention that the timing is a bit tricky on page four. Adrian is already starting to work out notes and the octaves for page four (!); I mention that if the octave is too big, just drop off the bottom note. I mention to Adrian that because of his sustained hard work, he is playing pieces that older children normally play (he is very chuffed - ‘Yay!’) We move to the next section and I coach/write in the fingering for him. He and Neil have a momentary silliness before I direct Adrian back again. He asks me about natural/sharp detail (‘good question’). We keep persisting with the fingering here and he doesn’t show any signs of frustration at all despite my constantly correcting him – ‘good boy Adrian’. I say to Jane, ‘He’s very determined isn’t he … my favourite type of student who will do it over and over until it’s right’.

- Little Bird: Jane mentions that he needs help with the last line, as Adrian said he didn’t really understand it. I sit down and play it and then again whilst counting in 6. I write in the beat subdivisions in red/green pen while Adrian is distracted with sticky tape, which I mention. Adrian sits down and I coach the left hand using chord terminology, similar material and beat subdivision. It takes a short while but he gets there with encouragement. I mention to Jane that he has an excellent working memory. As I discuss with Jane, Adrian is tapping, bobbing and coaching himself. He plays the last line without fault, after which he gets very excited as if he has just won a race (!) I mention to Jane that along with an excellent working memory, he seems to
understand how to take it to his long-term memory for storage very efficiently. I mention that Neil’s short-term memory could improve. Adrian is still very pleased with himself after he plays it accurately again and again. I mention to Neil that everyone is different and self-improvement and trying your best are worthy goals; Adrian asks me what the D-flat augmented chord is – I show him; we continue to work on the rhythm for the pentuplet and sextuplet area (Adrian bobs the rhythm) – he is very involved here, zoning in and out of the score and conversing with me constantly; I sit down at the second piano and that seems to help with rhythmic retention of these figures; I take the Grieg book out (both boys seem very interested) and Adrian wants to know where Elfin Dance is – he also asks me if there is a contents page; I ask him to return to his piano and play Little Bird from the beginning – his rhythmic subdivision of the opening bars is incorrect, but seems to even out when I start playing with him, evening if just single notes on quaver pulses 1, 3, 4 and 6; he is having some difficulty keeping the demisemiquavers clear (no mumbling). I mention that while he has the overall piece quite tidy, but the coordination of the opening figures is not precise. We sit down and work on it together. Adrian mentions that 1 – 3 is better for his left hand, but I caution that it may not be best long term for the quick rotary movement required. He is finding the left hand rotary movement difficult so I suggest to ‘turn around the bones’ rather than lifting the wrist up. There is a really good analogy (with Adrian’s forearm) of ‘looking at your watch’. I’m not so sure, is 2–4 is the best option for him actually. I then direct him towards doing drills using pairs of notes in the direction of travel. I mention again that ‘in the long run’, 2–4 is best for Adrian, though I’m not so sure now. I ask him to put the lid down and we ‘discover’ the rotary movement comes from the upper arm and elbow rather than the wrist. We then transfer that movement to the keys and then that movement on to single notes; ‘like a rod and that you rotate across the rod’. I mention the ulnar and the radius bones in the forearm turn over each other when supinating the left forearm. Adrian asks me why his vein is grey and mine is red. I ask him if he had a good lesson and he responds by flapping and bobbing while singing ‘yay!’ and then saying ‘yeah, I did’.

Lesson 11: 11 May 2014

Reviewed 15 October 2015
- Haydn *Concerto*: Adrian plays hands together with fluency and a steady pace overall. He has gone further independently, but (typically) has a few rhythmic errors and imperfections with the pulse. As he finishes playing, I give him encouragement and start to give feedback but interrupts to tell me ‘I’ve still got some parts here’, but I say, ‘listen, don’t you want to hear what I was about to say (yeah)’. ‘Let me give you some advice, first of all, all of this stuff … (plays broken chords part) is just lovely mate, but when you have (plays ascending off-beat quavers), don’t poke the notes’. Adrian sits down and I play. I suggest he ‘Take them up and into the world’. He does well, and I suggest some different fingering to balance his hand. I then coach him not to ‘stop’ between each note, but rather combine the up and down movements together. As he plays the top note, I coach him to ‘turn your arm out’ so that forearm aligns with the fifth finger, and then I ask him for a bit more sound, but without banging. What follows is a critical comparison where I ask Adrian if he can hear the difference (don’t take any extra movements in between, and that way the sound is very pure – he responds very well and I coach him with expressive vocalisation and gesture). I ask him why I got him to change the fingering – he doesn’t seem to know, but when I suggest that it’s because it’s ‘the end of the hand’ he nods (?). What is clear is that he intrinsically understands the circular motion of the following semiquavers, as they are rhythmically precise and beautifully shaped (‘you’re playing so nicely’). I get a tiny smile, but he doesn’t seem as enthusiastic as usual. I go on to coach him with the rapidity of the trill, but then look into my piano (something wrong?) Adrian looks into the piano briefly, and then we carry on to correcting the rhythmic detail of the next (A minor) part, all the while I am coaching him and playing from the second piano. He is having a few problems with the ‘turns’ part, so I come over and review it more carefully with him. I return to my piano, coach a little more, before moving on to the (expressive) ‘Adrian’ interval, where I ask him to use his second finger so that he can ‘swivel’ across. I write in the fingering on his score. He has moved on in his head and says, ‘I don’t get that’, referring to the last few notes before the pause. We then work on the ascending scale, where I encourage him to ‘show the audience that that’s (top note) the main note’. I coach him with a little freedom with the trill, saying ‘It’s customary to wait a little on the first note’. He is having a bit of trouble so I do the left hand, he does the right hand, and then he puts the hands back together. I tell Adrian that he played really well at the performance workshop on Sunday (Yay!) Jane seems surprised and said ‘he made so many mistakes’. Adrian ignores this comment
and exclaims ‘I finished page five’, so I tell him again and he says ‘Yay … I finished page five’. I give him feedback on Bach (the tempo is not uniform between pages and I show him using ‘fluid levels’ in the air). Elfin Dance – ‘You’re clearly the best at that piece … I wasn’t trying to set up a comparison, but rather inspire the other two who played it to keep practising, as they hadn’t had the piece very long … I also wanted you to feel proud of all of your hard work (he smiles gleefully)’. Admirably, he’s desperately, wanting to play the piece and twice I have to tell him not to play and just to listen. Jane offers her positive feedback regarding the dynamic contrasts. In the Wind – I said that I thought that it was good, but that I thought that it sounded a bit ‘notey’, and to use smaller finger movements to create the sound effect. Sonatina – really good work! I say, ‘you’re clearly one of the best students … you’ve got all these pieces, they’re all at a very good level … you just did so well’ (by now Adrian is beaming with pride). Jane intervenes and asks Adrian to show me the bit that he’s not sure of (‘ask your teacher’). I sit down and say the left hand has the B (at the cadence where we just were). Adrian confuses the beat numbers with fingering, so I write in fingering in orange. I coach him with some legato fingering here, but it ends up being too big for him so I add a finger substitution in as well. I ask him to stand up, I write in the fingering, demonstrate, coach (Oh!) and then he tries a couple of times in the higher register. I tell him that the whole idea of this fingering is to get the bottom notes legato (Oh!) I coach him again not to take of the (top) C so that legato is maintained. It’s clear here that it’s too fast for him to think of everything, but I don’t intervene. He does get there eventually (finger pedalling). He is very excited (Yay!) He asks me what rit. means, but answers his own question. We also discuss the bracketed C# (‘you’re smarter than you let on, aren’t you?’). Use your fifth finger on the top note. Every time he gets something right or does something I ask him, it’s like a revelation (Oh!) I sit down and demonstrate what ‘the whole effect’ of the section we’ve been practising will be like. I suggest that this part is one of the hardest of the whole piece. Adrian gets very excited to show me the next section – ‘I know that part … I know this part’. He shows me the B minor part hands together. He asks me why it says two there, but I suggest that the change from third to second finger isn’t really necessary (to be in position) because it’s staccato touch anyway. He tells me ‘we should use three for there’, which I try several times, before saying, ‘yep, I would’. I correct his notes in the F#7 chord, then ask him what key – ‘what key is F#7 the dominant seventh of – B minor (relative minor of D Major) – what has Haydn done?
Jane says that he’s changed the mood, and we briefly discuss taking the main theme into the minor being very typical while Adrian carries on playing the B minor section. She says that she finds it very interesting, and I agree. I take out the Circle of fifths sheet, Adrian comes over and we talk about D Major and B minor both having two sharps and they are cousin keys. I excuse myself from the room to go to the bathroom – Adrian keeps practising, but he shows signs of not partial practising effectively while I’m gone. He stops briefly, looks at his Mum, and then plays the B minor section again, before I return. I adjust a treble fingering, some rhythmic errors with quavers (while demonstrating at the second piano), give advice regarding leaning note versus crushed note, and change a fingering – ‘Who would you believe … me or someone you don’t know?’ Adrian says that he doesn’t have a time machine, which I reply, ‘I don’t think the fingering would have been added by Haydn, but rather by the editor/publisher’. I go on to say that (my) fingering will help him to roll through the notes with an expressive touch, which he then does a superb example of – ‘that’s so good … gee, you’re really good at the gestures aren’t you?’ I manually shift him into a more upright posture, before some more coaching on the gestural components of the phrases, before moving to correcting notation. Surprisingly, he merges accuracy of notation with gesture very quickly here – ‘good boy!’ He then plays the broken chords, saying ‘that’s hard’, but I suggest that the faster it is, the easier it will be – ‘if you want to get it faster go … ‘ (Demonstration and imitation of getting each part of the bar faster first, adding these together, and also focusing on main notes for security of pulse and coordination, before you ‘fill that in’). He has great success and I become very excited. I start talking about the Duet Festival in August, saying that he wants to the Haydn Concerto, but I suggest He’s a Pirate with Andrew. Both boys say they have been progressing (independently) with their sight -reading which I praise them for. Jane says to move on to Little Bird (several times). He says he’s finished Little Bird, and I talk about the upcoming technique exam. Adrian sits down and plays his chord progressions with pedalling.

- Little Bird: He plays it quite ok (errors with the pulse) and I stop him half way, suggesting that, ‘it’s not really improving’. I tell him that the demisemiquavers are too slow, and I coach him using gesture, conducting each dotted crotchet and expressive vocalisation. He tries again and seems to be getting there. We continue to practise hands together ‘throw it out of your hand’. I encourage him not to ‘stop’ between
musical gestures – ‘keep everything moving’. We do some practice of the hands separately but I interrupt to tell Adrian (!) that the whole piece is stagnating. When he asks me what that means and I tell him that the piece is not improving he seems genuinely surprised. I say that it’s not improving because he’s no good, but because he’s got to do ‘something different … you’ve got to push it a bit and try not to be too careful’. Adrian says that a bird doesn’t fly that fast, but I suggest (and demonstrate at the second piano) that the demisemiquavers are just a ‘shimmer of light on the bird’s feathers’, not the bird actually flapping its wings quickly. He tries again with some success (I clap and say, ‘that’s it!’). I say, ‘try not to think of notes, it’s just a (musical) gesture’. He has immediate and great success with speed and coordination between the hands when I ask him not to think of going from the first note, but arriving at the last note here. As he goes into the middle section, I suggest that he might need to ‘do something different there too’. We start with add-a-note drills, shifting rhythms, and ‘partial, partial, partial practice’, i.e. working backwards from the arrival point (‘instead of doing all of them, just the last three notes’), learning the directional aspects of the musical gestures in the process. While in good spirits and having great success by ‘chance’, he seems reluctant to follow my lead in breaking down the figure into its smallest elements, so I suggest that if he wants to be good at this section, he needs to follow this method (3 notes first). We apply the same idea to the next part, while sitting at the two pianos and he imitates me. After some time and having mixed success along the way, I state, ‘listen, they won’t improve unless you force them to’. I ask Jane if she would like me to give him extra time on Thursday but Adrian says that he has soccer. I suggest Monday at 7pm, but not for Neil because he’s not practising enough. Jane asks Adrian if he can show me the last line, to which I say, ‘that’s improved, well done’. Before we finish I ask Adrian to play the repeated quavers with two different sounds, before coaching him with arriving on ‘the last notes’ of the demisemiquavers groups (again). This culminates in a great moment where I (rhythmically) ‘narrate’ the action (‘and then there – oh gosh!’) – Adrian smiles broadly and we both laugh.

Lesson 12: 12 May 2014

Reviewed 28 October 2015

- Little Bird: The lesson starts with Adrian and Jane telling me that they found about $700 on the footpath outside their house and there are ‘robbers in the area’. Adrian
asks me what *leggerio* means (allegro lightly). I mention again about the ‘feathers’. The demisemiquavers are musical representations of the birds shaking their heads and the feathers ‘pop up’ (demonstrate and dramatise) – over here (middle section) ‘it’s danger!’ I mention that it’s not really a bird flapping, except perhaps a humming bird. Adrian agrees and also suggests ‘or fairy wren’. I go on to ask him which of the repeated notes would be stronger. He answers correctly and I go to explain, demonstrate, vocalise and conduct that it’s on the half beat of the bar, otherwise it will sound sort of stilted (Adrian – ‘oh yeah’) – ‘I’m dead! We don’t want the playing to sound like chicken nuggets do we? ... We want it to sound like it’s alive’. Jane prompts Adrian to ‘show Mark’. Adrian starts and I ask him if my piano is weird and he agrees. He goes on to say that his fourth finger (left hand) is ‘not working’. I suggest that he might be sitting too low and the arm doesn’t have the required elevation. As he plays, I conduct occasionally and suggest (using expressive vocalisation and gesture) dynamic build up towards the cadential points (and then more, and then more, and then most!) I comment that the middle section is a ‘little tired’ (‘Oh’), so I draw his attention to the right-hand staccato and ask him what sort of movement he might use to achieve that effect and he says ‘up’. I say yes, but is it a slow up or a quick up (‘quick’). He gets it then we go on to a free fall with random notes for the subsequent chord before I mention again about ‘catching’ the staccato. We combine these movements and ‘catch’ with a gravity drop on random notes. I mention that perhaps he is not allowed to do that at home. It seems true (Jane says Neil might abuse it), but I suggest that it’s actually a good practice technique. I demonstrate to Adrian, using gesture and saying, ‘sometimes people play the *notes*, instead of *playing* the notes’. He (understandably) seems a bit confused, but I say don’t be too careful and just throw your arm down, because then you’ll get a better sound – ‘Now it sounds more sinister’ (I demonstrate and vocalise) Adrian plays while I use words and gesture to coach him. He asks me about the *pp* marking, but I say, ‘It’s probably better to have the section ‘a bit louder and expressive’, than to keep it soft and lifeless. We can always adjust the overall dynamic later’, I demonstrate – ‘there’s no life in this’. Adrian plays well. When we get to the left hand quavers I say, ‘those are full of personality’ and mention that as the right hand idea finishes, the left hand idea takes over. I improvise a waltz, conduct, vocalise, and use gesture to help him with the triple lilt, as the feel is still not quite right here. When is having difficulty with the clarity of the descending (sequential) demisemiquavers, I ask him.
if he knows why – ‘no’. I mention that fingers 3 and 4 are joined by the same tendon
(‘oh’), so he can either have an operation or do more practice there (he smiles and
strokes his chin thoughtfully). I say that I could do the operation here if he likes (‘I’m
joking!’) I say that this makes the two fingers a bit like conjoined twins and we
explore lifting the fourth finger up while others stay down. I suggest that 3 and 4 work
as a pair, (‘yeah, 2 and 4 is easy!’) and it means that they are quite resistant to
working independently, and that is probably why the editor has got … but I still think
you should do 3 and 4. I go on to adjust his posture and head position (‘try and get rid
of that hump’). I ask him to put all five fingers down and then we do 3 and 4 slowly.
He says he finds it hard to press all five. Next – just 4. I say, ‘I wouldn’t recommend
doing these isolation exercises for any more than a couple of minutes, otherwise you
will ruin your arms’. Adrian says ‘OK’ – Adrian says a few minutes is four minutes
(?) Which finger’s sticking? He answers, we analyse how we can fix this and then go
on to do more ‘shifting rhythms’, add-a-note in the direction of travel, backwards add-
a-note. He always looks to me for acknowledgement. We do a little more with each
subsequent group – his forward movement from the elbow and the end of each group
works well here. We don’t talk much here until I say, ‘you’ve got the first one now
haven’t you’. Adrian don’t seem too convinced here, so I go on to explain why we did
those types drills – (to help activate the third finger to lift as you play the fourth, i.e.
training the fingers to separate, but with less and less time between to do so). I go to
say that we still need to combine these finger movements with a preparatory up
movement and a follow through – ‘don’t just play cold – it’s like trying to start a race
without getting ready, steady, go!’ (I dramatise with expressive movement and
vocalisation here). Adrian explains his own take on this, with me interpreting his
comments as ‘being efficient’. I sit down and demonstrate the preparatory movement
and how the up of one acts as the down of the next, but not too much, lest efficiency
is lost (I demonstrate this too – Adrian says, ‘that’s too high’). We do some
‘reminder’ drills before ‘closing up the gap’. I suggest that to chain all groups
together is tricky, so I ask him to play each group, rest, relax and next one first. I
comment that he needs to be sure to combine arm movement with finger movement
for success here – ‘you need that preparatory movement to propel you, just like at the
start of a race’. Adrian does each group with preparatory movement, taking a ‘rest’ in
between (to build mental and physical momentum) and when fingers are not clear, he
(pleasingly) defaults to the exercises I was just coaching him. I ask him to feel where
the bottom of the key is and then move off it when you get there. Adrian starts to go
going on a tangent, mentioning that he can ‘cross fingers 3 and 4!’ before I pull him back
(Listen – ‘OK’) Jane asks him to listen carefully as he smiles broadly. We then
return to the beginning and I coach him to come in ‘right on 6’ with the
demisemiquavers – sometimes he is early, sometimes late – Jane comments that it is
hard and I agree, reminding them both that Adrian is doing well – ‘he’s got to come in
right on the sixth quaver beat and get four notes in’. I mention that it’s even hard
when you have a few in a row, but all the while he is smiling and is positive. I
mention that sometimes when he plays these passages hands together, the technical
difficulty is getting in the way of the rhythm (?) I suggest that the left hand needs
more practice and has to be faster. I say, ‘it’s hard to do isn’t it’, and Adrian says
‘yeah’ – I further say that I did question giving Adrian this piece, but I say (in an
encouraging tone) that I think he can do it (he seems relieved to hear this!) Adrian
questions what the four in the title means (four birds?) Adrian asks repeatedly
whether ‘lyric’ (pieces) means ‘paradise’. Adrian says that this piece is lyrical, and so
is (Haydn) Concerto – I agree and say that pretty much everything is, except for … (I
play a part of In the Wind). Adrian says that my pedal ‘farts’ and that ‘I don’t oil it a
lot … I can tell’ (?) Jane asks Adrian to concentrate. I ask him to bring his oil kit next
week. We start some more drills for the left hand, with Adrian taking the lead when I
pause to think what to do ‘next’ (we work backwards). He says ‘I can’t stop myself
sometimes from playing notes’. We keep working – ‘try not to think, just move’ – I
coach him with preparatory movement (not too much) – as soon as you feel the
bottom of the key you start moving away – we go back a step – when it gets to the
point where he stumbles, I ask him to question why this occurred ‘when it’s only one
extra note than before’. I suggest that he tricks his body into thinking it’s easy. We
keep cycling through each drill, adding more notes and altering the rhythm – I say that
he’s got to get the point where he can execute the notes without really thinking too
hard – ‘Oh yeah’ – you can do that by chaining one note to another, and as soon as
you feel tense or the notes don’t work, it’s because something has ‘gone stiff’. We
then start drills for the hands together – you can do 3 easy – let go of your arms as you
do it – you did it! I suggest that if he does the exercises diligently, he will certainly
get there. I suggest that part of his timing problem is due to him being scared of the
notes (?), perhaps trying to get in early so as to finish on time. There were some in
there that were spot on, so you have to ask yourself (self-reflection) did a miracle
happen – or did I make it happen through my practice techniques. Interestingly, Adrian mentions here that some people ‘just play and they get it (Mozart)’. I go on to say, perhaps, but that’s not me, and that’s not you … I suggest that he may be surprised to know that some people work a lot harder than what you may think – you probably think that everyone who is really good just finds it so simple, but perhaps that is a bit of a myth’. We talk a bit about ASD, Mozart, Chopin, Beethoven and the German for Little Bird. He seems to be getting a bit silly and Jane asks him to be more serious. I ask him what is happening with the duet of Pirates of the Caribbean, and whether we will practise on Friday nights. Jane mentions that he has soccer early on Saturdays. He says that he’s been practising, so I ask him to show me. I also ask if he and Neil are doing Swan Lake, but he says they haven’t practised it together yet. He is extremely cheerful, and I ask him if he is enjoying his lesson. He plays the secondo part for the Pirates duet – Jane turns pages – there are significant problems with the rhythm here – after he finishes, he asks me what a tremolo is, which I answer ‘the rapid alternation between two notes’. I say that was a lot better than I thought it was going to be – Adrian says he hasn’t practised for a week – Jane says not exactly true – I say first page fine, second page pretty fine – Adrian interrupts and says that ‘he got that note right’ (compared to previously) – he says that he doesn’t get the part where quaver = quaver, and what follows is discussion regarding the changing time signature, but speed is still the same. I mention that some of his bars are 7.5 or more instead of 6. He says how? I say that he is holding some notes longer than indicated, and then play some those bars (correctly) but then has trouble changing back from 3/4 to 6/8 time. I demonstrate while counting, and say that unless his part is accurate, the duet ‘won’t work’ – I ask him to attend to his part ‘immediately!’ – he salutes and we all laugh. He tries again, but I ask him to slow down and count – I write on the score where the beats fall – I explain compound time (quavers grouped in threes) and simple time (quavers grouped in 2’s). He seems to get it and suggest that he continue with Grade 2 theory. Did you sell it on eBay? (… everyone laughs). I say that he played very well at the performance workshop yesterday – we talk about Wendy playing very well too – Jane says that she was the best, but Adrian says that I’m the best and suggests that I should have played something. Oliver and Jane mention that Wendy has made a big jump in the last 6 months. Oliver asks Adrian if he wants to make a big jump too. He starts playing again, slowly and with improved rhythm. He asks me is the score indicates tenuto, and I say emphasise the notes yes, but still with
expressive shape (gesture and vocals) and ‘not like you’re shouting’. I ask him if ‘we are understanding what’s happening’ and he replies yes while nodding. He plays again while I count and he gets it apart from a couple of spots. I mention that I’m hyperventilating and need a rest – I’m working really hard for you so make sure you work really hard for me. Jane asks me what metronome speed for the changing time signature, and asks Adrian to be more serious (again). I say, go back to basics – MM=120, quaver pulse (demonstrates). Adrian says that he was clapping and was ‘working for you (me)’. I ask him to play while I clap this time; he says that he just did that (!) He plays it all through from beginning to end with the metronome and has success, despite stopping momentarily because he thought he had some wrong notes and also to check his place. He starts to talk about Minecraft and then ‘tribute to Mozart’ in the sight-reading examples. He also tells me that Neil doesn’t do sight-reading properly, and his parents comment on his lack of self-motivation. Jane asks me what piu means. I put stickers on the parts that I would like him to practise particularly, and he says he understands. I say that make sure because each sticker costs 10c each. He mentions he has $87 in his moneybox. Jane says he practised an hour on the Haydn *Concerto*, and we also talk about tax (?) Adrian says that he wants to keep going and for me to hear the Haydn Concerto – ‘I’ll pay you!’ I say that it’s time to go, but he plays the first section anyway; I put on the music minus one track on the CD. He plays too slowly, so we start again and he manages to keep up a little better this time. I suggest that he listen to the recording each night at bedtime and visualise himself playing. I suggest that he needs to learn the ‘whole book’ in order to play with the orchestra. We look a little at the ‘Famous Instrumentalists’ book and he asks me when Josef Hoffman died. I ask him what practice prize he wants and he says the pink pig puppet! I ask him if he reads and he says ‘not really, I read stories for five year olds’.

*Adrian and Andrew duet rehearsal: 16 May 2014*

Reviewed 21 December 2015

- First part of the rehearsal is with Andrew and Neil playing *Lady Gaga Fugue*. Neil’s behaviour is just appalling. It’s really embarrassing to watch how unaware of others he seems to be. In reference to playing the subject of the Fugue, I coach and explain to Neil that when Andrew plays the subject, he uses his body and tilts forward from the hips. In effect, he is using his whole body to shape the sound. I ask Neil if he can
copy that way that Andrew is moving – ‘we all learn from each other’. Around 17’00’ Adrian joins Andrew for the Pirates duet. When I am coaching Adrian with the rhythm of his part, it seems that I am restricted by the physical set-up, where there is only one upright piano, and I have to rely mostly on verbal instruction. This is especially difficult when the bars are changing from 6/8 to ¾ and back again. My voice seems very soft here. I’m not sure if I’m deliberately trying to remain calm or if I’m just speaking softer than usual. One thing is for sure, I’m feeling very frustrated while watching this lesson! Andrew says that he practised with the CD, but Adrian doesn’t seem to be listening. ‘What CD?’ Andrew says, ‘The one that Mark sent you’. Adrian rebuts me and says, ‘That’s not a CD (it’s an mp3).’ Adrian is very resistant to direction here and becomes defensive and gives ‘attitude’. When I say, ‘nice adjusting’, Adrian becomes very excited. A few minutes later, after giving him time and counting in, Adrian says, ‘I’m not ready, Mark’. For someone who is having difficulty, Adrian is being very obstinate. When I am coaching them with particular bars, especially when I rehearse individual parts before combining them, Adrian seems quite inflexible and unable to cognitively ‘keep up’ in the same way that Andrew does. Even when he is able to have some success rehearsing a couple of tricky bars, Adrian continues playing on and increases the tempo too – very frustrating. ‘Listen … Listen … look at me … don’t fill the air with random stuff … let’s just do one thing at a time’. I can tell that I am starting to lose my patience with him. ‘When you come to a duet lesson, you have to have an extra sense … you’ve got to listen to your own part, but also open to new things’. Adrian – ‘Does that mean I have to have six senses instead of five?’ Mark – ‘That’s right, you’ve got to use the sixth sense’ Adrian – ‘but that’s not written in the health book’. It’s clear to me that Adrian is more interested in being right than in fixing up errors and making improvements here. Once corrected, I say, ‘Great, let’s do the first 2 pages again’. It probably would have been wiser to repeat this section a number of times before moving on. We take a short break as I the tension is palpable. There is brief talk regarding the practice sheets. ‘Let’s do this again, this is going well’. Andrew – ‘I like it!’ There is conversation regarding school sport. When playing again, it seems that Adrian is having difficulty with the compound rhythm and Andrew tries to compensate where possible, and consequently, makes errors of his own. When I am explaining to the boys that while they are both doing well with the tempo, their parts are not quite synchronised in terms of unison notes sounding exactly together. When I
am demonstrating what I am asking for, Adrian interrupts and corrects me, ‘Oh, that’s an E!’ I ask them to put the music away and they play together again, this time both of them have errors with notes and timing. I go and get the iPad to record them. We watch the recording, but they can both hear that the parts are not synchronised. Adrian seems more interested in asking me related, but unessential questions than becoming aware of how to improve. I seem to be pitting the boys against each other a little here, as it’s obvious that Adrian is the weaker of the two in terms of rhythmic consistency – I ask Andrew for feedback on Adrian’s part quite a bit. It seems that the verbal direction is not what is needed. He needs the metronome and lots of practice and or physical demonstration. Andrew – ‘I’m coming in too late there’ Mark – ‘Umm, maybe (turns to Adrian) ... your bottom note was late and that affected the next beat’. Next I coach Andrew with ‘conducting’ the ensemble, as he has the upbeat in this instance. While there are more wrong notes, the ensemble is better and I compliment both boys – ‘Andrew you are really trying hard and Adrian, you are being much more open minded (Yes, that’s because I was looking with this eye)’ I start explaining that it doesn’t matter how many rehearsals are held, it the musicians don’t listen to each other, it will never truly come together, but Adrian takes little notice and asks me what he should do with his Aural Test CD’s. There is talk about aural tests and exams (Adrian – ‘What level exam are you?’) I ask them to start again – attention! Andrew adjusts the chair and I ask the boys to make eye contact. It works quite well, but Adrian’s left-hand part is rhythmically unstable, but Andrew adjusts. I say that I feel that Adrian is being too overcautious now (?) which he takes to mean that I think he is not trying. I ask boys to ‘feel the beat’ and I start playing on the second keyboard and tapping the compound duple beat, but Adrian is still struggling, though we get through the first two pages reasonably well. We partial practise the end of page two again, but Andrew is an octave too low. I ask to hear Andrew’s part from bar 43 and I help him with his timing. Andrew seems to understand and we try again – ‘all good movies have to be planned’. They seem to be having fun, but the tone of the lesson isn’t as serious as it really needs to be. Shaeed comes home and the boys ‘have a sticky beak’. Andrew asks me if that’s my grandpa (!) They try again, but Andrew has forgotten. I help him again, but it seems that Adrian’s behaviour is influencing Andrew now, though I probably need to keep in mind that both boys are only 9 years old. I play Andrew’s part with Adrian and then both boys play two lines together with 90% accuracy. ‘It’s like herding cats’ – both boys seem to be losing concentration and
are getting more distracted by each other. At this point we move on and start to talk about both boys doing pieces about birds. Andrew plays some of his piece (Adrian correctly identifies the key), around half a page. Adrian sits down and plays most of his bird piece. Interestingly he isn’t strong with the rhythm of this piece either (compound duple). While I mention to Lyn that it’s important to be encouraging with the boys, I feel that I needed to be much stricter with them overall.

Lesson 13: 18 May 2014

Reviewed 21 December 2015

- The lesson starts with Jane offering Adrian his jacket (‘I don’t want my jacket’) Adrian adjusts the height of the chair and then starts playing the secondo part of the Pirates duet. He seems to manage very well on his own, but when he comes to the trickier part (very inaccurate), the beat that he is ‘feeling’ in his body doesn’t match what his hands do. I start playing the primo part from about half way through. When finished, Adrian says, (regarding the ending) ‘Why are there so many D’s’. I say, ‘It’s not too bad, but there are significant problems with the rhythm on pages 3 and 4, so we’ll have to go through it together, so … from 43? The main problem is that you keep changing the pace of the piece all the time. Let’s play along together, and hopefully we’ll get it sorted’. We play the secondo part in unison from bar 43, (no metronome); it’s around 80% accurate. I say, ‘OK good … stop there, let’s go back … that’s much better’, but I can tell from my mildly curt approach that I am losing patience with him. Adrian points to the score, ‘Here?’ (Yep) ‘From 43 …’ We start to play again, but there is a problem with part synchronisation – ‘No, you always come in too early there – listen’. I play the passage for him doing a (very) brief critical comparison including counting the quaver pulses 4/5/6, but I don’t think that the message that he is compacting the time between pulses 6 and 1 has been successfully conveyed here. ‘Try again … 43’ Adrian takes it again and does quite well this time, though the metronome would have been a useful adjunct. We both play the secondo part in unison, but I can tell he playing mainly by instinct and not from intellectual knowledge. He appears to speed up and I am trying my best to contract the tempo. I do a (very) quick demonstration, counting 123 – 123 and 12 – 12 – 12 while slapping my leg and then I ask Adrian to do it, but it doesn’t seem clear what the purpose is or which part of the piece it relates to. At this point, I start to ‘explain’ that he and Andrew sometimes have opposing rhythms simultaneously, but perhaps it’s a little
premature to be mentioning such to Adrian at this time, especially as he is confused as to what I mean and brings his score over to me, saying, ‘I’m secondo’. It retrospect, a duet in simple time that contains less challenging rhythmic detail is probably a better option for Adrian. I say, ‘It’s absolutely essential that you make sure that your rhythm is correct. I gave him (Andrew) a lesson on this as well and he has problems in his part as well, which he is working on’. I think that I said that to try to get Adrian to take greater responsibility for fixing his errors (just as Andrew is). Adrian correctly identifies the two ‘corresponding’ bars but I continue trying to explain the concept when it is clearly not the most important thing at this time. Jane walks over. Adrian asks me, ‘What’s the difference of that?’ referring to different subdivisions of 6/8 time where a tie is used to cover pulses 3 and 4. I try to explain while demonstrating. I suggest that we go back to bar 43 and I will play the primo and Adrian the secondo. Once again there is no metronome and we inevitably become unstuck. I start playing the secondo in unison with him, and when finished I clap and refer to the 123 – 123 and 12 – 12 – 12 contrast. Adrian seems confused and asks me if the beat is 123456. I say, ‘No, the beat is 123 – 123 for 6/8, but all your orange bars are 12 – 12 – 12’ (Adrian is scratching his neck and seems confused). Jane walks over again. Adrian ‘tells’ me what I just said – ‘Correct’. It’s obvious to me that I just want him to stop wasting time and ‘get it’, when really I should be coaching him to use the metronome – his part is just very unreliable. I stop him, saying, ‘Good … Much better … (while clapping dotted crotchet beats) Don’t get slower’ Adrian starts touching his neck underneath his chin again (as before), and while he attempts to agree by saying, ‘Oh’, I can tell he is still unsure. ‘I know the other night I told you to get slower; I think you’re being a bit overcautious now’ I ‘demonstrate’ my becoming slower as I count – ‘you’re trying to be accurate, but just keep it moving’. I say, ‘Let’s play your part again … 46’ which we do but the same mistakes are there and without any firm reference point or specific instructions, Adrian isn’t likely to improve in my view, though it’s about 80 – 85% at this point. I stop playing in unison with him and start clapping the dotted crotchets, but he seems to make errors when I do this. Despite this, I say, ‘Good boy’, interrupt and ask him to repeat again from bar 43. Adrian scratches his head. He plays the secondo while I clap either in dotted crotchets or crotchets, depending on where he is. It seems quite successful until I make a mistake! I say, ‘Stop, nice … Let’s do the same thing again’. If I was doing this lesson over again, I would definitely make a recording of this section with the metronome for
Adrian to listen to repeatedly, perhaps at a few different tempi – it seems that valuable
time is being lost here, and this type of instruction isn’t what he needs. Oh well … He
starts playing from 43, but he doesn’t get very far before I stop him again, shake my
head and say (while he is scratching his head), ‘Sometimes you’re coming in early …
(I do a brief and probably unhelpful critical comparison) Don’t rush … It just makes it
so much harder … If I could please plead to you – please learn your rhythms, (‘OK’).
You must learn your rhythms properly … The duet will not work otherwise … (A
sheepish ‘OK’) Adrian tries again from bar 43, but I interrupt again, saying, ‘I’m
sitting here trying my best to help you, but you’re not listening’. Adrian says, ‘OK’.
He tries again, ‘No, you’re coming in early there …’ I walk over pointing to the score,
and ‘telling’ him his error through a very vague critical comparison. He tries again,
while I conduct and start to sit down again. There is a pause … and Adrian turns
around, looking very worried at Jane. I say, ‘OK, let’s try again … 43 … 123456’
Adrian plays again while I sit at the second piano, continuing to clap dotted crotchets
and crotchets as before, but it is obvious to me that Adrian is cutting his left hand
dotted crotchets short. Instead of saying such, I say, ‘No no no … no … it’s 123 – 123
… so it’s (playing now) 123 – 123’ Adrian says, ‘Oh’. I say, ‘You’ll never be a good
musician if you can’t count and do rhythm properly, doesn’t matter how beautiful the
sound is’. While I’m looking down, Adrian looks around to Jane, this time closer to
tears and she says, ‘Try again and count the beat’. He does better this time, at least for
the first portion, but has errors thereafter. He does pretty well up to the end of that
section, but instead of giving him praise, I say, ‘For instance there… That’s too slow
there’ (Adrian touches his neck briefly). I don’t say too much, instead just playing the
‘offending’ bars again – he tries, unsuccessfully – I shake my head and say, ‘It
doesn’t mean that you go randomly fast, it’s 123 – 123 fast’ I’m not making much
sense here. Adrian tries again and gets a nod from me. Once he has this bar correct, I
ask him (and demonstrate) to add the bar before. He says, ‘59’ and I say, ‘59, yep’. He
plays well – ‘That’s good, but then you’re going (plays) … it’s too slow!’ He plays
again while I conduct the main beats with my hands. It’s better than before, but he is
still shaving the dotted crotchet beats a little short – ‘OK, good, that’s better …
moving on, 68’ Adrian points to the score and says, ‘there’. He plays while I clap,
before I interrupt, ‘No, you’re fast again’ We ‘to and fro’ with me clapping and
circularising and Adrian trying to play correctly, but the tension is palpable. ‘Try again,
68’. After a while I stop clapping. He looks at me for approval – ‘OK, you need to
sort it out mate … the reason the rehearsal didn’t go so good is because you’re very unreliable with your rhythm (Adrian starts touching his neck again and says, ‘Oh’). Andrew knows his part … there’s a few mistakes, but your part is very, very haphazard. I tried to be as patient as I was with you … but realistically … don’t come again if you haven’t prepared your part (OK). Might as well just not come. When it’s a duet, you must know your part properly.’ Adrian looks over at Jane again and she says, ‘You must practise more’. I continue, ‘I was pleading with you to slow down and you just would not listen to me. That’s why when I did it with Andrew it fell into place, you need to do the same thing’. Adrian gets up and walks away; tears in his eyes. He leaves the room with his Mum going after him, ‘Sorry Mark’. I stop the camera at this point and it resumes at 18’ 52’ with Adrian back at the piano. Jane says while patting his shoulder, ‘Do it from the beginning and Mark will tell you how to fix the mistakes’ Adrian says, ‘What?’ He then starts playing the Haydn Concerto first movement with hands together. Jane is talking to Neil in the background. Adrian gets distracted and makes errors when Neil starts eating something from a packet. I take out the score at sit down at the second piano. It’s quite fluent, at least until the cadence into A minor. He plays the end of the first section and I come in with the orchestral tutti. As I’m playing, Adrian starts touching his neck and says, ‘Where are we up to?’ I ignore him and keep playing. Strangely, he knows where to come in and plays the first bar of his solo. I get up, smile and say, ‘That’s it … I just played all of that’. He asks me about why he doesn’t …. (Because that’s the orchestral interlude where you don’t play … Oh). I say, ‘That’s pretty good, you’ve fixed up quite a lot’. While he is distracted by his music (Jane rushes over to assist) I say, ‘Here’ and then start playing before asking to go from bar 90. Jane helps him to find it and then he starts playing … I say, ‘So do the left hand’, which he does. I then ask him to put the right hand (back) in, which he does. I ask him (demonstrating) to repeat the left hand with ‘no mistakes there … very clear’. I ask him to hold onto the bottom A for longer – ‘So that’s like a melody … this one’s going up (demonstrates) and this one’s going down (demonstrates). Adrian asks, ‘So 90?’ He plays, pausing briefly at the bar line; I ask him if he can go straight on while clapping and singing. We play together in unison – ‘good’. I say and demonstrate using a rolling gesture to the right, ‘Do this with right hand’. Adrian copies well, but I ask him to use a different finger. I get up, come over and demonstrate ending on the fourth finger. I take a pen, and write in the fingering while saying and gesturing, ‘real singy sound’. He seems to be scratching
his head a lot here. I say, ‘That’s it, use your gesture there’. He is having difficulty coming in on the quaver half beat with the C natural here, I try to demonstrate using gesture, conducting, vocalisation and body movement, but it doesn’t seem to help him, at least not immediately. He tries again, incorrectly and scratches his head. I say that I’ll do the left hand (?) but after two attempts it doesn’t make any difference (scratches head). I demonstrate the right hand alone whilst counting the beats; he tries, I demonstrate, he tries (he cuts off two beats from the trill, yet I say, ‘That’s it’) Eventually we get there, but it seems more of a process of trial and error than true understanding (scratches head). In true master/apprentice style, I say, ‘So you practise it so that it sounds like this …’ (I demonstrate). ‘I can’t wait for the day when both of you having two or three good lessons in a row … That’s when things will really start to happen for you (Neil – Oh yeah)’ I get out the sticky highlighter tape and attach it to his book, assuming it’s the area that was just covered. ‘OK, so I want no mucking about, straight in, do your work, respect the person that has more knowledge than you, learn from them, get on with it, right? (Clap) Good’. Neil says ‘yeah’ and Adrian asks, referring to the fingering, ‘Why does it say 4 – 4?’ I play left hand of the A minor bar saying that the ‘they’ are saying to slide. Adrian tries and I ask him what he thinks. He plays again, looking at me nodding. I play the passage slowly. Adrian tries it slowly and I coach him a little more, saying that the idea is to make it (sound) legato. Adrian says, ‘You said you can hold onto A’ (If you can, yeah) Adrian plays the left hand, after which I say (while writing into the score) ‘Good boy, so make these notes smooth and connected and these notes hold as long as possible’. I do a critical comparison (singing and gesture) referring to the fact the bottom notes form a melody. Neil says that it sounds like someone panting. I laugh and then finish writing in the fingering. Adrian asks me why the piece doesn’t change key signature if it’s in D Major. I ask him to repeat the question. I explain that pieces from the Classical period often change key (modulation) but not necessarily key signature. I sit down and ‘show’ him A minor and also where we finished, we’re in A Major (‘You can have a change of key without a change of key signature’). Adrian comments that there is a lot of changing clefs. I mention that we are going to be coming up to finishing. I say, ‘You were very lucky that you came for an extra lesson’ (Jane says so) While looking at the score, Adrian says, ‘I did that part’. I continue, ‘Listen (Jane – Listen) … You make sure you respect my time and my house, OK?’ Adrian says OK. Jane asks Adrian to say thank you. Adrian does so and I say, ‘That’ all right mate, my
pleasure’ (?) Jane asks Adrian if he has any more questions. I say that I’m sorry to Adrian and give him a hug. Jane reiterates that he needs to follow the ‘house rules’ and listen when at my house. Jane clarifies that Adrian needs to count 12 – 12 – 12 where the orange stickers are and 123 – 123 where they aren’t – ‘Show Mark next lesson’. I reiterate to both boys that when they come to my house, ‘It’s not a movie night, so there is to be no jumping on the couch, no shouting, and no giggling. You are there for a lesson, it’s not a social visit.’ Both boys give me their practice sheets and I am genuinely surprised by their efforts. I mention that Kelly barely says anything in the lesson; she’s very focused. Adrian says that he has done 8 hours. Adrian comes over to ask me about the pedal at the end of Little Bird, but I ask him to ask me on Friday at 6.50pm, which Jane and I then discuss. I say that Friday is my day off, and that I’m happy to help, but make sure that you come prepared.

Lesson 14: 25 May 2014

Reviewed 22 December 2015

- The lesson begins with me lecturing Neil about not implementing what he should have during the week. All while gesturing, I outline the following – Grasshoppers’ Wedding: left hand too loud, hands are not coordinated. Jingpo Folk Song: pedal is no good, you’re blurring all the notes, there’s no shape, you’re missing notes, it’s too fast, there’s no special moments, it’s very mechanical. Beethoven: the hands are not together on the second page, but more importantly, what I showed you last week has not been implemented either (I start to sing and conduct that section expressively); there’s no light and shade, there’s no special moments, it’s very flat. I can’t help you mate. I really have tried my best with you. If you don’t want to learn to play the piano, if you want to learn to play buttons, go to someone else to teach you, I can’t teach you. You just want me to say, oh that’s wonderful, it’s not! During this time Adrian is silently practising on the keys. I take a seat beside him and he starts playing chord progressions with the pedal. ‘Your pedal is blurring a bit Adrian; as you pedal you need to listen and make adjustments’. Adrian ‘explains’ to me what he should be doing, I nod and then say, ‘Just go a little bit slower so that you’ve got more time (to think)’. He starts playing again. I get up and demonstrate, saying, ‘Try not to go …’ (I play and Adrian nods). I say, ‘It’s more likely that you’ll have a bit of this and a bit of that’. While he seems to understand, I’m not sure of what I was trying to say. He tries again and I say, ‘good’ as I sit down again beside him. He continues through all Major
keys. As he starts to blur again, I look down, he corrects and then I say, ‘that’s better’. He finishes, turns to me and I say, ‘OK, that’s good, so if you can do that, that will make that … obviously it’s good; can I have your scale sheet please?’ Jane gets up to hand it to me the orange book as Adrian says, ‘This one?’ ‘Can you just hand that book over? Thank you’. As Jane helps him to organise his books, I say, ‘Well let’s have a listen to B-flat Major hands together’. He asks me 4 octaves? I say nod and tell him he will need to start lower. He maps out the compass and then starts playing, having several attempts before getting into it. After he finishes, I say, ‘OK, that’s pretty good … Can you speed it up at all? Go a bit faster during the week’ Jane is talking to Neil regarding how Adrian is moving his body. I ask Adrian to play E Major with the right hand. While Adrian is mapping out the compass I ask Neil how much practice he has done this week. Jane says, ‘Everyday, even yesterday… just half an hour, that’s it’. I say, ‘That’s not enough’. Jane says that she asks him to practise more but he says, ‘I’m tired, I’m hungry (I roll my eyes and sigh) … This morning, if I go to church, I ask him to practise. No I don’t want to do that now, later, and I say, fine OK, later, don’t ask me for anything, and I already tell him this is the last year …’ I say, ‘I’m so sick of it, I’m so sorry Jane … as a teacher, it’s so soul destroying to put so much effort and encouragement into someone (Jane – ‘see Neil’) and they come back and just go (I blow a raspberry) … And that’s what it’s like when you come back (Jane ‘You hurt your teacher’s feelings’) … It’s just like, are you kidding? You expect me to think that’s any good? (Jane walks over and pats my shoulder) As a teacher, it hurts … It’s actually really disrespectful. I just think oh yeah Neil’s like really listening and like, oh yeah, and then you come back and basically just go (blows raspberry) ha, ha I didn’t do anything, and you look at me like, is that good? And it’s just like… Do you think I’m some kind of idiot? (Adrian chuckles) Do you honestly think that I can’t tell when you haven’t practised? (I laugh) As soon as you start playing, I just …’ Jane comes over, picks up the scale books and asks Adrian what scale he is doing (he says E) During all this time, Adrian has been silently practising, ‘checking’ his hand position a couple of times and occasionally looking around at me. Adrian plays E Major, I say, ‘Sorry (I wipe my face and sigh loudly) play E Major 4 octaves with the right hand’ After he finishes, Jane mentions something about his hand, Adrian looks at Jane, but for some reason I don’t respond, saying, ‘Do you do staccato at all?’ Adrian starts playing and I say, ‘Shall we add staccato in now? What do you reckon?’ Adrian says OK. I ask him to play B Major
staccato hands together and then go over and right on his scale sheet – ‘All scales, chromatic and scales, can you do them staccato as well now’ Adrian says OK and Jane walks over to see what I’m writing. I say that I will send a new copy of the revised technical work and she nods and then walks back again. I say, (while gesturing) ‘Look, honestly, I’m more than happy to go five hundred times extra for anyone that puts the effort in, but those who ignore me, I get really disinterested in’ Jane says, ‘Yeah Mark, you are right, don’t waste time (on Neil)’. I say, ‘It’s just like, ahh … sorry go for it’. Adrian plays slowly but fluently; I come back and sit down at the second piano and ask him (and demonstrate) to make it a bit louder, to which he says while scratching his head, ‘Tenuto?’ I say, ‘Yeah, a little bit … just sort of go… ’ (I throw my arms randomly into the keys and I ask him to copy, which he does. I then return to playing staccato with the scale and ask him to copy, which he does during which I say, ‘Throw your arms into the keys … That’s it’. He plays the whole four octaves again (I can hear Jane scolding Neil in the background about practice duration for scales). I ask Adrian to play E-flat Major in contrary motion, which he does mostly correct on the second attempt. He turns around to me for feedback – ‘That’s OK, it sounds like that one needs a bit more practice though, ay? Adrian nods. After he asks me whether he does staccato or legato, I go on to explain (while sitting and demonstrating at the second piano), that you ‘rotate your arms inwards so that your thumbs get longer … (Adrian comes over to watch), otherwise you’ll have this happen’ (I demonstrate) Adrian says, ‘a gap’ and I say (while gesturing), ‘You’ll hear a gap and a bump … Rotate and place the thumbs, rather than bumping on them’. Adrian sits down and plays. When he comes to the register extremes, I say, ‘by the time you get out there, you should be … move forward’. I come over and adjust his elbows, his head and tilt his trunk forwards. He is doing well with unifying the sound and turns to ask me if he goes back a bit (with his trunk) as he returns to the starting point – ‘Yeah, that’s right, so you sort of start there and as you turn your thumbs … (I am standing over him and pronating his forearms) … gives you thumbs more room’. Adrian says, ‘Oh yeah, on the side’. He keeps experimenting, to which I say, ‘Make sure that when you get out there, make sure your upper arms don’t suddenly switch off (I manipulate his arms), or everything will fall down (I manipulate his arms) and you’ll bump the next note’. He plays again and I adjust him – ‘Good, tilt inwards, head up … (He plays again) Tilting, good boy.’ After he finishes, he turns to me and I say, ‘The whole idea with those is to be able to demonstrate a uniform tone (gestures)
across all registers … That’s why we use pronation (gestures) so that we can blend the thumbs in’. I sit down and demonstrate and Adrian nods. ‘When you don’t do that, this is what happens when the hands are sort of flat and straight on (I demonstrate) you end up having to squeeze, and when you squeeze (gestures) and have a tight wrist, it goes all the way up the arm (gestures) and it will come out as a bump in the sound. Adrian says ‘Ahh’. Jane says, ‘Neil, could you listen and understand what Mark is talking about?’ I ask Adrian to play B-flat chromatic hands together. Adrian repeats this while pointing to his chin, then asks four octaves? I then go on to lecture Neil about the fact that he should have been doing more practice this week particularly as he is leading up to his technique exam next week. ‘If you’ve got an exam, you should be increasing (the practice) not decreasing … (I click my fingers) … everyone knows that, you’ve got an examination’ Adrian plays as I say, ‘If it was my exam …’ I correct Adrian’s fingering with hands together (top register). Even though it’s not fast, fluent or accurate, I say, ‘Very good’ and Adrian shakes his fists and whispers, ‘Yay’. He asks me if arpeggios have to be four octaves (Yes). I ask him to play E minor arpeggio, left hand. He starts playing, and I ask him to use 4 in the left hand. I say, ‘Start lower … if you’re sitting there, come up on to his sit bones, there should be a gap between your bottom and the seat, push your feet into the floor’. He interrupts, asking me if it’s 3 for the Major and 4 for the minor (yeah). He plays again while I fold my arms and watch, standing next to him. I sit down and demonstrate, saying, ‘As you come down there (descending) it’s really important to pronate there as well … otherwise you get this…(demonstration)’ Adrian says, ‘a gap’. ‘Yeah so, pronate and that makes your thumb longer … If you don’t move the top of your arm, my thumb can only get to hear (shows), whereas if I roll here, my thumb goes under further’ Adrian says, ‘Oh’. I demonstrate again. He asks me to clarify – ‘If you don’t do it, do you get a bump on the E?’ I rephrase and say, ‘Yes, you will, if everything goes like … (I drop my upper arm) As you pronate, the upper arm stays switched on (I adjust Adrian’s upper arm), and that way you don’t keep your upper arm switched on (demonstrates), and that way you won’t get any extra weight on the note’ Adrian tries again and I correct his fourth finger. I ask him to start from the top register and descend and I ask him to keep the upper arm switched on and move the trunk across instead. He ascends and descends while I tilt him forwards. As he finishes, I say, ‘My teacher used to say (gestures) have air under your arm like it’s pushing your arm up’ Adrian – ‘Oh’ I say and demonstrate, ‘(it’s like) someone
sitting there going fffff … (wind sound). Adrian is very impressed with this idea,
smiles broadly and looks around at Jane. I ask him to play staccato thirds with the
right hand (I play 2 octaves ascending) and he clarifies, using gesture (2 octaves). He
then plays, but I say, ‘Good boy … but your wrist is too stiff. As you make impact
with the bottom of the keys, let go, let go’ (I am sitting and demonstrating at the
second piano) … Don’t sort of, not let go, not let go … let go (I demonstrate all of
these)’ He does well ascending but on the descending I ask him not to curve his
thumb under as that will make everything on the left hand side of your (right) arm
stiff. I come over and ask him to hold his feet flat and firm, and tilt across (I adjust
him so that he is aligned with the notes). I ask him to try not to get tight in there
(thumb). He starts and I adjust his forearm and wrist, ‘Have a bit more give … that’s
it, let go’. He continues and I say (and check), ‘Check that it’s nice and bouncy … So
you actually do it with the whole forearm, just let go of your arm’ Adrian lets go and
then smiles broadly when I activate his whole forearm (into the keys) from the elbow
with my right hand. He tries again, ‘That’s better … Move from the elbow joint’. He
clarifies and moves the forearm from the elbow asking, ‘Is it this part?’ I say, ‘That’s
awesome, that’s it, that’s how you play it (Adrian smiles and scratches his head) …
So it’s not with forearm, it’s more with the elbow and the upper arm’ Adrian says,
‘Oh, OK … same with the left hand’. He plays the left hand twice; I say, ‘that’s good’
and lightly tap his third finger and wrist. ‘When the third finger sticks out like that
(demonstrates) it means that there’s a muscle switched on when it doesn’t need to be’.
He plays again and I help him, saying, ‘That’s it, move from the upper arm and elbow
joint’. He says that when he doesn’t hold the third finger up, he ends up playing it.
After experimenting beside him, I say, ‘That is true, but it doesn’t need to be like an
elephant’ He plays again, ‘No elephant trunk’. He tries, but when he stops a couple of
times he turns to me and I say, ‘It’s trickier isn’t it (than the right hand)’ Adrian
agrees. I play again, pointing out that my thumb is nice and loose. Adrian breaks it
into octaves as I did. I say, ‘That’s fine, let’s move on, they’re all quite good actually’
I then ask Adrian what two pieces he will play for the exam. He asks me what a study
is and I sit down and demonstrate. Jane notices that it is like Study for Scales and
Staccato. I say that the invention is still a study though, it’s a study in … part playing.
Jane asks him to focus on this piece (Invention) instead of the concerto; Adrian
agrees. I ask him to play the invention and Jane summaries what I asked him to do last
week while pointing at the score. I caution him against speeding up as the piece goes
along – ‘Keep the same tempo all the way through’ He reminds me that, ‘He is doing number 13’. He starts playing with lovely opening and closing of the phrases, but starts increasing tempo and soon after makes errors. I stop him, nodding and saying, ‘That’s fine, you’re actually faster than you were at the beginning already’. He says, ‘Really?’ and I nod yes. He asks me how much and instead of giving him a direct answer which is probably what he needed, I ask him to start the beginning, which he does and then I find the metronome tempo, which is not working (I’ve ordered another one). I say that it was 120. Jane says that I can use theirs. Adrian sets the metronome and while still standing, starts playing the right hand. I seem distracted by the wooden hand. I ask him to play it that speed all the way through. He starts playing hands together. He has some difficulty around the end of the second page, and he turns to me after he ‘stops’. I say, ‘Good boy, the speed is much better now’. I ask him to try and pick it up from the C Major modulation. He asks me to clarify and I do, playing the right-hand broken chords as block chords while verbally labelling them. He picks up the A minor chord himself (yes, that would be Amin7 to D, GMaj7 to C, B7 to E minor). He is peering out of very thin eyes here, looking quite confused and says that it’s not E minor it’s C Major. Jane says not to waste time and do it. I clap my hands and say pick it up. He has difficulty picking it up, but gets there on the third attempt. He keeps the tempo very well and manages to play reasonably fluently until the end, but there is no expression here. The ending is troublesome for him. I am frowning, but when he looks around for reassurance, I smile encouragingly, but then go back to frowning. When he finishes, I get up saying, ‘Good boy, this part’s nice, but your bass needs to be much more authoritative there (I demonstrate left hand while standing). He tries to tell me that the right hand ‘goes a bit squishy’ while pointing to the score, but I ignore him. I ask him to ‘get it much more exciting’ and I coach him with expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation, and it is much better but the right hand has errors not previously seen. He says that the fingering feels squishy in the right hand final bar. I say, never mind and then start to experiment, breaking up the right hand into three-note slurs while gesturing in the direction of travel. I take out a pen and stand behind him, watching as he tries. I suggest ‘five on that note’ and I write in 2453. He asks me about the previous part, and I say, ‘that’s a good idea’. We then keep working on segments, with me suggesting fingering, sometimes after he asks me ‘What about that one?’ I write in the revised fingering. He then tries hands together – ‘OK good, that’s not going to
improve unless you do some practice there’ (Adrian scratches his head) I say that it
(the piece) isn’t too bad, but it doesn’t sound very confident. He asks me what that
means. I simply say that it needs to improve and he understands that. Jane says that
after the recent workshop, he put it away. I (and Jane) ask him to practise more this
week please. He says OK. I say that having the metronome on really did seem to help.
Jane asks the tempo (120) but Adrian says they only have 116. I take a sticky note and
write MM quaver = 120, and I say not to go any faster until I was confident … Just
don’t go any faster – OK. I then play the left hand at the bottom of page one, saying
that, ‘you’re missing an opportunity to shape there’. I start using gesture, body
movement and singing and it really does seem to help him, ‘That’s lovely … OK,
good, stop there – that’s nice’. I say to Neil, ‘That’s why I like teaching kids like your
brother, because I give them energy and they give it right back to me … they don’t
suck it from you and then give you nothing’ – a mean thing to say! Adrian is playing
the end of Elfin Dance. Adrian asks me if he is playing that (?) for the Intermediate
Concert, but I brush him off saying, ‘Let’s worry about that next week’. He asks me
the date of the Intermediate Concert (15 June – Jane says she wrote it down last week)
We find the repertoire, but he is disappointed to be playing two and not three pieces; I
explain to him that’s why we had the other workshop (30 people). He asks me if the
Intermediate group is the biggest group and I say, no the Young Beginner has 80
people. Jane mentions that the YB group plays shorter pieces than you. We both ask
him to play this one (Mozart) – Jane asks me about the repeats (no repeats for AMEB
exam, Conservatorium exam if fine). He starts playing and there are a few errors with
coordination. I stop him when he gets to the end of the first section. I coach him with
the first melodic phrase, using gesture and vocalisation to ‘keep it loud! You sort of
went back to soft there’ (at the apex of the phrase) He plays again but this time keeps
everything after the apex of the phrase loud. I ask him to ‘keep it softer at the end of
that bit’ which he does in a two-note slur. He says, ‘Those 3 quavers’ and I say, ‘So
you go …’ (I demonstrate the apex idea again, first loud then soft). Adrian says, ‘Like
this?’ and then he plays hands together, much better! I say, ‘Good boy, so you go …’
and then I demonstrate right hand again, going on to say that you’ve brought the
audience up with you, and you don’t want to let them down. I demonstrate this idea
physically and then use expressive gesture and vocalisation to sustain the energy of
the ascending phrase. He plays while I coach using gesture and expressive
vocalisation – ‘Good!’ Adrian – ‘I get it’ Again (!) I say to Neil that that’s what I gave
him last week – ‘If you want me to give you energy, you give me something back’. Jane asks me if he had the same ‘problem’ (with this piece) in the workshop. I say that it’s not really a problem, but (using gesture) ‘it just didn’t shine’. The both seem to understand. Adrian sits down and starts playing and using gesture and body movement, I ask him to ‘show us’. I say, ‘No you did that part soft’. He tries again – ‘Good, that’s it … Good job’ Adrian says, ‘It shines now’ and I say, ‘It’s a very small thing, but without it …’ Adrian says, ‘You have to make it stand out’ I say, ‘Yeah! It’s like having sushi and it doesn’t have any decoration’ (gestures). Jane and I both prompt him to keep going, without giving him a chance to ask his question. When he reaches the bar where there is a top A, I stop him and use expressive gesture and vocalisation (and I play the right hand) to coach him regarding the apex of the phrase – ‘That’s your top note!’ He plays and I say, ‘Good boy’ in time with the music. I continue to coach him verbally – ‘Show us the top note … Lovely!’ When he comes to the minor – ‘Oh my goodness, what’s happening … ba da da da da …’ (I use expressive ‘up’ staccato gestures ‘around’ him) ‘Loud!’ He continues to play all the way to the end, beautifully, and I occasionally coach him using gesture and voice. When he finishes, I say, ‘Oh, that’s lovely!’ He says, ‘Yay’ and shakes his fists. I ask him not to speed up (voice speeds up) as he gets louder. He plays again. He asks me whether he should go softer towards the end. I say yes and demonstrate, missing some of the notes. In response, Adrian says, ‘But not too soft’. ‘No, that was too soft. Sorry!’ Jane clarifies where he should repeat. I then go back to the start of the second section, sit down, and ask him to be bold with the right hand sixths. I do a quick critical comparison without/with a bold right hand. I seem to be talking over the top of him a bit here. We swap places and he plays; when he gets to the staccato, I take his hands and play for him, saying ‘Make sure it’s not so soft that we can’t here it’. He says OK and then plays the staccato passage again. I ask him to ‘catch’ the staccato. He continues to play as I swing my arms from side to side, saying, ‘Wow – Wow!’ Adrian stops and says while pointing to the score, ‘That’s like a swing’. I continue, ‘It’s so charming – You’re doing – So well!’ Adrian asks me what ossia means and I say that it’s an alternative. He asks me if it’s an Italian word. I let out a satisfied sigh, suggesting that he look it up on Google – OK. I write ‘bold’ in the score. ‘I really like the way that you play that … There’s not much to do there … You’ve got significant work to do with the other one though (Invention)’ I say that it’s sort of quite good – ‘I think you can do it though’. Adrian asks me what I rate the Mozart out of 20 – I say
19/20 with those improvements just made (Adrian bobs up and down and says, ‘Oh, that’s good!), and the Invention 13/20. I ask him to ‘come up more – it’s not terrible, but I want it to come up to 18 (OK)’ He says, ‘How about 17?’ I turn to Neil (!) and say that when he left last week his pieces were about 18 or 19 but they’ve slid back to 13. I go on to say that that is what has been happening weekly and ‘I just get bored – you do what I ask you to do, and then we move on’ We talk about leaving the Friday rehearsal this week as next Sunday is the exam – Leave the pirate song for a week, still practise, but don’t spend heaps of time. I say that the Mozart is quite good just to revise, but the Bach needs about 3 hours throughout the week to bring it up to par. He asks me what if he can only get up to 16, and I say, that’s fine, aim for 17, to 18 and keep going, don’t stop (OK). He is bobbing excitedly – I say scales 15, chords 19, with the pedal 20 (fist pump – ‘don’t blur the pedal). I say to Neil that this is where Adrian is, and he will come back even better, rather than where it (he) was or worse… I want to see improvement, and that’s when you’ll get the best out of me (finger clicks), otherwise I’ll get frustrated … It’s as simple as that mate’ Adrian puts his hand up (‘Mark?’) to ask a question as I turn off the camera.

Lesson 15: 1 June 2014

Reviewed 23 December 2015

- The lesson starts with Adrian saying that he feels awesome, and I ask him what it feels like to feel awesome (I don’t know). Jane comes over and gently pats him. Adrian (and then Jane) says that he has done all the arpeggios. As they both continue to tell me what he completed, Jane strokes his hair. I am fiddling with the camera and Adrian says that he didn’t do any staccato, and I say no worries. I say that I am just so pleased for him and ask him how he wants to spend the lesson (I don’t know). We say more scales or concerto, he smiles and starts bobbing with excitement when Jane mentions the concerto as she brought ‘the wrong folder’, and we both laugh. I say that’s the first time in 4 years! Adrian says that he remembers it and is up to the seventh page; Jane prompts him to start. When Adrian is looking at his medal, I suggest that we try a bit of it together (would that be fun? Yeah), and he asks me if I have learnt my part. I say no, but it will be ok as I can learn it quickly when he has finished his part. Jane gives me a notepad and asks me to write in it and then tells Adrian to hurry up and not waste time. Adrian asks me about the second movement, and then we talk (and I demonstrate) the cadenza. Adrian is smiling when I tell him
that that is where he ‘shows off’. I tell him the purpose of the cadenza and I demonstrate. Jane asks me how many movements. Adrian asks me about the other two movements, if the piece ‘continues’. I say that maybe he can play the whole concerto when he is older. He asks me what *maior* means; I explain, referring to (and demonstrating Neil’s piece). Adrian says, ‘I get it’. Jane asks him to sit down and ‘start’ the lesson; Adrian refers to his medal as cool and says he wants to wear it. I ask him if he feels proud wearing it (Yeah); ‘What’s it like to be good at piano?’ (I don’t know). Jane is whispering to me about Neil. Jane claps and says, ‘Come on, don’t waste time, do the lesson now’. After I coach Adrian with his entry, we play in ensemble. Interesting, I am not observing the rhythm correctly; shaving time off rests, causing the ensemble to be uncoordinated! Other times, I am playing too slowly and not following him. When we get to the end of the section and I start with the orchestral tutti, Adrian turns to Jane and smiles. He starts the B minor section well, but then stops soon after … ‘Wow! You’ve come some far!’ Jane claps (I’ve done 7 pages). I give him a hug, saying, ‘Well Done, good job … you just do so well with piano lessons’ (Yay) Jane says that it sounds so great when we play together and I agree. ‘More rich, the accompaniment is more rich’ (Adrian and I agree). I mention that I’m also doing a concertino with Kelly for her exam (Adrian is doing a harder one). We talk about the difference between concerto and concertino and it seems to be very interesting to Adrian. He asks, ‘What about Andrew?’ and I say that he is also doing a concertino. I mention that Kelly is also doing a middle movement of a Mozart concerto and Adrian asks me what a middle movement is. I say that it’s usually slow and I demonstrate. I ask him if he knows this one and he turns to look at Jane. As I continue to play, he asks me if it’s famous (very famous). He asks me if it’s world number one famous (pretty much). As I finish, he asks me about mid-concerto (?) or half a concerto (?) and I say you either play one, two or three movements. He asks me how long the concerto by Mozart is (a whole book). I say that I was originally going to give him the third movement of K467, but his hand is too small (I can just stretch an octave). I show him the book, saying that I used to play this when I was young (Oh Cool! Awesome!) We talk about the different size writing for solo and orchestra. I say the whole piece finishes with a C Major scale, saying that I would like him to do this one in the future. He asks me what tutti means (whole orchestra plays). He asks me about 12 (footnote) and I explain and then demonstrate what some editions have (fill it out) and he says, ‘more rich’. With a smile, I ask him if he found that (playing with
me) fun. He bobs and says ‘Yeah’ (Jane – sounds so good). I ask him if he would like feedback on how he is going. He says yeah; I say, ‘You must be pretty excited?’ as I exit to get a drink. He waves his hands, cheers and then shows his medal to the camera. Jane asks Adrian to be careful, to get ready to get some feedback from the teacher. As I come back in I mention that someone from Angel’s class is playing Swinging Souix that Neil used to play. ‘All right, can you start playing your part and I will give you some tips (From the beginning?) Yes thanks He starts playing; I say don’t rush there (play right hand quavers), just be playful. He plays and I demonstrate again saying, ‘Now a little bit brighter’. He plays again (good) He says, ‘Bring the sound out’ (yeah it’s too soft, like it’s lovely and sweet but you are never going to get heard over an orchestra with that softness) (OK) I say that there’s soft when you’re playing solo and there’s soft when you’re playing with orchestra; you need to project over the top of the orchestra, even in the solo parts. Adrian says, ‘microphone’. We both smile and he turns to Jane. ‘It’s marked p, but try and play it more extroverted’ (I demonstrate the beginning). He comes over, bobbing, and then I demonstrate coordination of the two D’s (try and aim for the bottom) before adding in the crushed note; he tries the right hand (that’s it). I say, ‘You go and coordinate that for me’. While we experiment, he asks me if he should use 23 on the crushed notes. I say, ‘yeah [but] … if it were me I’d use 45 … because it sits on the end of my hand’. He plays again using 23 and I say try 45. He tries a couple of times and then I play right hand from the beginning asking him to copy, which he does. He nods and I say, ‘I would do that because it sits on the end of my hand and it makes me feel like I’m doing that more, do you understand? (I demonstrate a forearm gesture with a loose wrist – yeah, yeah). ‘You get a brighter sound as well (Oh)’ I go on to ask him to use 234 instead of 345 on the F#GA because of the joined tendon and it’s harder to get a cleaner sound. He asks me how he would do this (then), thinking that I meant for him to apply to the broken chord too. I say, oh no you would … (Oh) He sits back down and then plays the right hand – ‘Now those little changes (in fingering) will make a big difference to the sound’ Adrian nods (Oh, OK). ‘Maybe I wasn’t strict enough with the fingering initially, but that’s fine – you know what it’s like (yeah), you come back and revise everything, try things differently the second time through (Adrian turns and smiles at Jane). I coach him with starting the solo part with a firm sense of the beat in order to coordinate the top note of the rolled chord with the left hand: ‘as you sit there, sort of pump your wrists like this, like your breathing’. He plays well
(good). He plays again (that’s good) He plays again and I add the other part (good boy). I ask (and demonstrate) him to be quite strident with the em/A7 chords at the cadence, using hands together and then a free fall splat with hands together. I help him get the notes before coaching him with the two-note slurs aspect of the chords, using both notes and free-fall splat. He tries … ‘Yeah, try not to overplay that note (demonstrates the second note too loud) … Just go … (I demonstrate hands together with expressive vocalisation). He says while scratching his neck, Mark, it’s a bit hard for me … (to fully drop into the left-hand octave G’s), so I suggest maybe concentrate on doing that in the right hand then (he plays right hand) and then add the left hand (he plays hands together) I say good boy. I play and say, basically you want loud-soft, loud-soft, loud (he plays right hand – that’s it) He then plays hands together: Well done – Adrian looks at Jane and says ‘Yay!’ – I love how you do that (I play left-hand arpeggio) … and then the right hand takes over (I play – Ah, cool). I ask him to copy me: Can you do that? (I play) You’re good at it. Adrian plays hands together. I then demonstrate drills for getting the right hand to come exactly on the fourth beat (‘right on time there’). Adrian doesn’t do it, and instead continues with the whole scale; I say, ‘That’s it, so you don’t’ want to rush (demonstrates rushing’) He tries again, better this time. I say, ‘Yeah, you just, slightly rushed’ (demonstrates in time) Adrian plays again, in time. I say good, going on to demonstrate what is good, and what is (was) being rushed (last few notes) – ‘Make sure you don’t go…(plays rushed). We then go into add-a-note in the direction of travel with the right hand (follow-through gesture). Interesting, Adrian seems to pick up the sympathetic torso movement without any direction from me here. He keeps trying, I say, ‘good boy’ after each attempt. We then go back into the drill started earlier, stopping on the fourth beat of the bar, this time with hands together (‘find that beat, then carry on’) It takes a few rounds of him imitating me and reviewing the fingering (yeah, thumb there). ‘Good boy, then carry on (he does) … Excellent! OK, so you’re building a nice sense of pulse … (I use hand gesture/Adrian says OK) Those sort of … drills are to get the pulse right’ Adrian comments on the word ‘drill’, likening it to physical drills like 20 push-ups. I say, ‘That’s right, well basically you’re trying to get more fit with the song’ While looking over at Jane, Adrian suggests that the piano drills be referred to as ‘drill 2’, as ‘drill’ is more like with physical stuff (?) I say, ‘Yeah, can we keep going?’ and then I start playing the next six bars hands together. I ask him to be strong and confident as he starts playing. He stops after a few bars and looks at me – ‘Yeah,
that’s good, but it’s too soft, come on … (I play and then stand up) As Adrian plays, I say, ‘Come on you’re the star, you’re the superstar … You’ve got a medal to prove it’ He continues to play, as I use expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation to coach him. I suggest that we can clean his right-hand semiquavers up a bit (I play right hand) and then he imitates me … then staccato (no G# – A Major scale starting on E), then groups of five notes starting and ending on the beat; I suggest (and write down) that he will need to do drills bar 70 – 73 for clarity, rhythm, and brightness … (As I write, Adrian plays again without stopping and I say that was better). He says he likes the term ‘exercises’ rather than drills … ‘And confidence (Adrian is bobbing and shouts whooo! Jane laughs) because you’re the star (He says, “I am” and looks at his medal) – in a concerto everyone’s come to hear you, not the orchestra’. He smiles proudly and looks at Jane when I say, ‘You’ve got a medal to prove it – you’re not going to sleep with that thing (the medal) are you?’ He says, ‘maybe’. I say, ‘Put it under your pillow for good luck (Yay!) Dream big Adrian, dream big; if you want to be a musician, dream big’. He says, ‘I’m going to wear it to school so that I get A for everything (he looks at Jane)’. Adrian says he can’t dream, I say I dream all the time; he says he dreams about Minecraft … and apples. I demonstrate two-note slurs in pairs based on the scale just reviewed, Jane prompts Adrian, saying, ‘Come on Adrian; follow your teacher’. He starts to copy and I ask him to check his alignment (‘Sometimes you don’t get a good speed or a good rhythm because your alignment’s not right, for example … see how I’m not following …’ I demonstrate here). Adrian tries and immediately I see that he is not only well aligned but his trunk is moving in sympathy too. I give him a big ‘thumbs up’, look shocked and wink. ‘There’s your problem, if you don’t align yourself with the notes, the notes won’t align themselves with you (he plays again) … And then you won’t get this ahhhhh sound (I use gesture and Adrian says, ‘Oh’) I use the analogy (while playing and then standing) of ‘Hey I’m here! … and then I’m not) Adrian says, ‘You pop in and then you pop out’ which I then elaborate on, but he corrects me! (pop out) I say, ‘It’s an interruption in sound – hello! I’m still here! I’m the star!’ Adrian is still talking about ‘out versus down’ and not being correct in terms of opposite terminology, and he looks around to Jane and smiles. I keep playing, suggesting that the extension of his solo is ‘This time I’m going to take over!’ He plays, but I smile say that he has some significant problems with clarity; Adrian says, ‘Clarity?’ I start to demonstrate, but there is a knock on the door and someone says, ‘I just have to steal Mark for one second’. Adrian says ‘Ohh!’
Jane says that I will be back very soon and to keep practising. Adrian asks where I’m going and Jane explains (in Chinese) that I’m going to play the second part with Kelly for her exam. He continues to practise hands together, trying to improve the clarity (Jane says, ‘Yeah, that’s good’). After a few repetitions, he keeps going but it is getting faster and faster, and less ‘focused’ in intent. Jane says good, and he talks about his medal ‘for your hard working, you need to keep working hard’. He asks his Mum to come over and look at it with him. She mentions that it ‘tailor made’ and goes on to explain what that means. He wonders how much it cost and how he could make if he sold it! Jane starts claps, sings, and tries to get him back on track. She says, ‘Come on, do it again’. He starts playing from the two-note slur chords covered earlier in the lesson. He has a few problems with fluency and conveying expressive intent, mostly due to rushing through without focusing on distilling the best from every note. Interesting, he doesn’t do a lot of partial practising, at least not in the detail that I would expect. He moves on to the B minor section, often not looking at his hands, rather at Jane and Oliver and Neil who enter the room. Oliver says wow and Neil asks where he got that. Adrian puts the medal up to the camera. I come back in and Neil says that he practised for half an hour in room 1.26 – I say, ‘Wow’ and Adrian asks me what I had to do; I explain and he asks me how long it is (7 pages). He says that his is 14 and he is half way. Jane asks Adrian to show me whether he has fixed the problem. I play, asking him how the ‘interruption’ bit is going. He tries a couple of times, and I start him off towards partial practising, saying that he has some issues regarding clarity there. He asks me what clarity is and I say, ‘clearness of fingers’. I say, ‘This is what I want (I play) … (and) yours’ sounds a bit like this (I play)’ Adrian says Oh, plays right hand, and then I say, ‘That’s all right, do these exercises’. We then go into imitation of LSLS with the right hand. I suggest different fingering for the ending 432, taking him through it a couple of times. I say the other option would be, 3121 – which he tries and then agrees. I explain that there are 3 options … I say that the last one is probably the best one. Using demonstration, I say, ‘When you have scales, the 3 and 4 tend to overlap because of the joined tendon, so you’ve got to work hard to get rid of (get them clear)’ … we start playing again in dotted rhythms, this time SLSL and he imitates me. ‘Don’t let them get drunk’ i.e. slow down and do them exact. ‘So you what you are trying to achieve is the whole thing slower but speeding up the adjacent fingers’ He plays again well – ‘Aim for the tips of the distal joints; sit up; no they’re going drunk again … What I mean is go
dada, dada (really quick)’ He plays again while I vocalise. I then ask him (and play) to do SSLL, before turning to Neil saying that is what he is doing to (starts to play the left-hand semiquavers of Beethoven minore section) ‘Whenever you have passagework, do shifting accents’ I return to SSLL with Adrian and he imitates, then we do LSSL – I write down in his book, saying tika ti-ti, then ti tika ti (LSSL) which he tries his best with. I explain that each group of four … and then he starts imitating me. ‘Each group of four like this now – ti ti tika’, which we play in unison. I say, ‘Do all of that, you do staccato, you do alignment, then you do add-a-group technique’ He takes off his medal, comes over and stands beside me and bobs, saying, ‘So all of them’ He writing number for each step in his book before I ask Neil if he’s been working (Yeah I’ve been working). Sorry it wasn’t an accusation, I haven’t got a gun in my pocket or anything. Oliver laughs. I show Adrian what I mean by add-a-group technique before showing him what ‘he’ wants using critical comparison (I play right-hand semiquavers clear and then untidy, saying ‘You don’t want any specks of dust … and you don’t want any tenseness, you don’t want any mistakes, you don’t want any over-lapping, you don’t want any tenseness, you don’t want any bumps … You just go (demonstrates) oh, so easy. You don’t want (I play with messiness) … You want, (plays) just easy’ Adrian plays with his medal saying, ‘It’s floating in mid-air’ I say, ‘You’re supposed to sound like a celebrity playing this’ and I explain how concerto soloists where like the olden day version of movie stars’ (Oh). Adrian starts talking about The Mentalist, R-rated movies and him watching Harry Potter last night. I ask Adrian if he had showed his Dad the medal, we all laugh as Adrian says he is going to eat chips. Jane says that he will put it in his treasure box or a safe place and Neil sits down for his lesson, smiling so beautifully.

Lesson 16: 9 June 2014

Reviewed 24 December 2015

- The lesson starts with Neil telling me the family went bush walking. Also talking about concerts, dinner and wine. Jane points to the score and says to Adrian, ‘Don’t worry, just do your best, you’re a good boy’ and asks Neil to go outside. Adrian asks me what wine tastes like, and I say it’s like grape juice that makes you sleepy (Oliver laughs). Jane is trying to get him started, but the boys keep asking me questions: what colour is it? I put the paper keyboard away, and as I say off you go, Holly comes in and distracts Adrian. Jane plays with Holly and her toy as I say, ‘Are you looking
forward to showing everyone your skills on Sunday? (Maybe) Oh, yes; off you go’ Oliver tells Adrian to hurry up and start, but it’s clear that Adrian is scared of Holly. Jane says, ‘He won’t bite you’ (Yes he will). Adrian starts playing In the Wind full throttle! It’s a bit untidy in terms of coordination and therefore rhythm, but it’s fluent. He looks at me, shakes his fists mildly and whispers, ‘yay’. I say, ‘Good boy … let the sound ring (Oh?) Like this …’ I sit down to demonstrate … Using gesture and narrative, I say, ‘It’s sort of like you’re opening up … it’s like a movie and you’re just sort of looking into the movie … you’re just looking at a scene, so it’s like, you know this big wind comes through town, it wreaks havoc and then at the end (of the piece) …’ I play the last bar, slowly lift my arms and let the sound fade. Adrian says Oh. Standing up, I say, ‘Try not … don’t let the piece sort of stop, let it sort of … imagine’ Adrian plays the last few bars again (I obscure the view) He does quite well and looks up at me, I’m silent, he says yay and pats his thigh (good boy). ‘It doesn’t say ritard (points to the score) until here so you would do it like this…’ We swap places and I demonstrate, then vocalise while demonstrate (Oh) and then I ask him to try it again, but it’s not much different. He looks at me when finished and I ask him where he started is rit – last four or five notes? (Yeah) Because that’s where it says to (points to score). ‘I think you started over here (points) … Try again’ He plays while I clap and count with ritard, telling him to hold, start lifting his hands slowly and then lift the pedal slowly, without a buzz – ‘You’ll get a buzz when you lift the pedal too quickly … So when you’re on the grand piano… Have you got a grand piano at home yet?’ Adrian smiles; Jane and Oliver laugh. I say to listen for a nice clean cut, not a buzz (vocalisation). Adrian says Oh. I pat him on the shoulder and say, ‘That’s good Adrian’ and he says yay rather quietly. I ask him to stand up, saying that we will keep working on the piece for another 10 minutes – ‘I reckon we can get it up to an A+, at the moment it’s about a B+’ (Oh) Jane says, ‘It’s OK’; I say, ‘You’re doing fine’ and Adrian says ‘Yay’. I ask him if he’s going to cry (no) … put your medal on (don’t have one) Oh. Using critical comparison, I then start coaching him with more gradual crescendo but he points to the score saying it’s mf. I say that’s fine, but try to start softer. He has a try, I say, ‘Can you start softer though? Try not to go (bump) … tap it lightly’ Adrian plays again and I say, ‘Especially there … no you’re slowing down too much’ (Oh) I conduct and count, he tries the left hand briefly. I ask him to start again from here (points). He plays very well this time; I conduct, count and use my voice to indicate the dynamics, particularly a loud ‘growl’ which makes Adrian smile.
as he plays. When he is finished, I say, ‘It’s like the wind growling, it’s just picked up someone (I lift Adrian up a little) … some car (he smiles) and rahhh! Ha ha!’ Adrian, smiles, throws both arms up and shouts, ‘Godzilla!’ I say, ‘Yeah! It’s just completely destroyed your street and your house is just a complete ruin!’ Adrian says, ‘You mean your city?’ Oliver laughs as I say just your street. I say, ‘Like Godzilla stepped on your house’ I ask him to stand up and say, ‘You know what would be really good…’ I start to help him further refine the width of the crescendo, mainly alluding to keeping the right hand soft and aiming for crescendo in the left hand repeated F’s. After a brief critical comparison (at the moment I can hear … the others), I start to stand up, saying and playing left hand, ‘So try and go … F F F F F (with crescendo)’ Adrian tries several times before I say, ‘Can I help you … just let me control your arm’ and I take his left hand and play the repeated F’s. He tries again, but I say not to move off the surface of the key (?) He has another go and then I ask him to watch my hand not moving off the surface. Adrian tries again 3 more times, looking up at me, and then I ask him to play the left hand again, this time using numbers to indicate volume levels (I demonstrate using his hand while vocalising): 1, then 4, then 7, then 10, then 12. He tries on his own quite well; then as he plays, I ‘play’ on his shoulder so he can ‘feel’ the different levels of sound (good boy). I then demonstrate using his hand twice more, saying ‘Let this all go free’. He plays again (good) ‘The tighter you hold your wrist in an effort to control, the harder it will be to control … You’ve just to sort of let it … give’ As Adrian adjusts his seat, both Jane and I are use wrist gestures here. Adrian tries several more times, looking up at me (Well Done) He plays again (Oh, that’s excellent) On the third (extended) time, I say come one, and then use gesture and my voice to give him energy, taking his left hand fifth finger and playing it louder, and then decrescendo. Adrian points to score and queries the written dynamics, but I say, ‘Well who cares, it’s your piece…well it’s our piece’ I start playing, saying we don’t want to hear notes, we want to hear the effect (Adrian – buzzing). I say that I need a grand piano – would you sponsor me? Let’s get two grand pianos, one for me and one for you guys. Neil laughs. Adrian says that his piano buzzes too. Oliver (and Neil) laugh as Oliver says buy one and get one free. I say that that is why I like teaching at the Con, because we have grand pianos there (in here it’s a bit small). I play and ask Adrian to try the left hand last bar again, ‘be quite bossy there’. Adrian plays and then says yay, and I say that’s good. Demonstrating over his hand, I ask him to use (double) rotary movement. ‘That’s it, and by the end
we don’t want to really hear the individual notes’. He plays again and I click the beat, then I use gesture to coach the fade away. ‘Awesome, good boy! OK, it brings it up a level’ Without prompting, he tries again, starting from the earlier repeated F’s but I ask him to make sure he clears the pedal; he tries again (I say good) and again (Well Done) … 234 really bossy! I say that we started at the end first, now let’s hear the beginning; overall the piece needs more shape (expressive vocalisation, body movement and gesture) Adrian plays the first 3 bars and then I say, ‘Can you turn up the volume?’ as I make a peacock (?) sound. Adrian says that sounds like a creeper. Can you do that? Adrian plays again as I stand beside him, using body movement to illustrate the crescendos. ‘That’s good, see now it sounds more like … like devilish’ He goes again, and in the section thereafter I say that he needs more active fingers there, you’re sort of losing finger clarity … (I wail). He plays again and I say, that’s better, so do sort of more, shimmery here and then da da da da (sounds like a witch!) there. He plays again (quite good now) and then stops, puts his arms up and shouts ‘Yay!’ and I say, yeah that sounds good. Adrian immediately points to next few bars and says, ‘How about that part?’ I say, well there you need to sort of go … (I play first in the bass trying to find notes but then go to the treble) saying and then singing in a creepy voice, ‘It’s like a little goblin dancing … it’s like the devil is playing games’. Adrian scratches his head and then as I sway beside him, he plays again, though the hands are not well synchronised. I say, ‘OK good, your right hand is excellent, the left hand is too slow and sticky (he tries again) … So, what do I mean by too slow and sticky? He keeps experimenting, and then I say that’s good, but all your shape in the right hand is gone now. He plays hands together again, he looks at me, and I say, ‘That’s better; good … shape good, stickiness gone, coordination not great’. (Oh, what’s … how do I do that?) I say, make sure the hands come together. He tries again and I say, ‘Good, that’s good coordination, good non-sticky, not very good shape’. (Oh) He tries again (good) and then again but I say (and gesture with the right hand) where your down/up gone? I say good, but the left hand has gone back to sort of sluggish again. He tries several times and then I say, ‘Good boy, you practise that … I reckon’. I ask him to stand up and then I have a go, saying it’s hard to play, see I can’t even do it myself. While Adrian plays the left hand in the top register, I start doing drills, then I say, ‘Check out what I’m doing, I’m giving you some clues’ I start doing quick pair drills in the direction of travel, before chaining notes together – there is a moment where I adjust my shoulder to release all tension. Adrian bobs up
and down excitedly. I stand up and ask him to do those drills, ‘Basically you’re trying (gesture) to force it to get faster’ Adrian starts doing the quick pair drills, but he looks to me for direction, so I come over and ask him to do this pair, then this pair … he corrects me (it’s a G) but interestingly, he seems to pick up the direction of travel without me mentioning it. He then does groups of 3; he turns at looks at me. I say good boy, then demonstrate LSL, ‘Be more active…’ He keeps trying; I point out there’s a weakness there ‘You’re sort of flattening your third finger … here, like this’ He continues to imitate me. He does the first few really well but the rhythm gets less precise as he adds more notes (Your devil sounds drunk) I do a critical comparison using my voice (Adrian – because he’s a devil, he drinks wine and beer!) I make the analogy of nice sharp horns for a precise rhythm. I play the left hand, and Jane says, ‘More determined’ and I say, ‘Yeah, more exact (using gesture and vocalisation)’ Adrian keeps trying – ‘Good boy, it’s getting better’ – I say and demonstrate that he is doing well on each pair of notes except the last two F#F; it’s too slow. He goes straight in to drill that pair this time, then he plays all notes. He looks at me, and I demonstrate the left hand again, saying LSL SL SL SL SL SL. Adrian tries but is having trouble so he goes back to drilling each pair instead (good boy). I ask him to do the same exercise, but hold onto the G (i.e. actually hold onto the long note instead of playing it staccato when doing the drills) I show him in the higher register and he tries (good) We play in unison for a few times. He plays again and I say it’s starting to get loose again (gesture and vocalisation) He keeps trying and I keep coaching! I say, ‘Make sure that you don’t rush the long notes because then it’s out of time’ I start counting in 3’s (?) and then clapping the rhythm, ‘You can’t have short short notes and short long notes, otherwise it’s out of time’. I say, ‘Good, now try not to move your head (head movement) … use your body’ He tries again, and I ruffle his hair saying, ‘Bzzzz! Electricity in your head that comes out through your fingers’ (Adrian smiles and does a funny wail as I play left hand again) He starts saying something, but I say, ‘Go!’ He plays left hand again; now speed up (clicking, singing and conducting as he plays) I say that you can see that you can do a couple of them really well, but then by the third or fourth one it starts to (Listen!) you start (a couple is two – Mmm?) I play and demonstrate, ‘These two are really good but then you sort of … starts to come apart, so how about we go … just do two’ I ask him to imitate me, playing each half bar and landing on the next beat. He tries, but then says (in reference to landing on the next beat) but that’s the third one – oh well, that’s what I mean, two complete
ones and then … I say, ‘Do you wanna be right or better?’ He says, ‘I wanna be right because I’m a right person’ I say, ‘Yeah, but who’s in charge?’ He plays, I say, good now do two whole bars which he does but then corrects me saying it’s actually four because of the repeat. I say, Oh, well we’ve got heaps to do then. After he tries again and the rhythm gets progressively less precise, I stop him and say, ‘What’s the problem?’ He says, ‘Mushing’ I say, ‘Yeah, you can do it for a short time, but an extended time is not working, so what do you do? Beat yourself up? (Neil laughs) Or, do a short one and then start adding bits until you can do all’ (Adrian says, I guess, yeah). I say, ‘That’s what I said, do you want to be right or better?’ I take him through various imitation drills, all with me giving directions ‘in rhythm’. He tries three groups, but does four – I correct him and he says it’s hard to count. I say, ‘Well that’s why you’re having trouble because it’s hard … to count – Go!’ He says, ‘are we doing two?’ (Yep, we did three and it got all mushy, so you come back a step – Oh). I ask him to do three again, but he does four (No that was 4). He is getting better at three with a few trials and I say, ‘good’ each time. I say that it’s starting to get loose again as I demonstrate. I demonstrate and ask him to do 3½ - he tries and says it’s hard to count. I say well go back to three; that’s too loose; it has to be really exact here. I say, ‘No on the second one you are getting all loose’. He tries a group of three a couple of times and does a good job (good boy) and then I suggest a group of four. He tries, but I say you’re getting loose on the last one. He tries again, but then says, ‘Where are we up to?’ I say, ‘Exactly, so … we go back to two’ He does that a couple of times and then we build it up again to three and then four – ‘Good, see how it’s getting better? Good boy’ He tries that again before I say we are going to do five (2 bars plus one group). As I demonstrate, he points to the score and clarifies. He plays five – ‘Good boy… starting to get loose again’ (Oh) He plays again (‘on the last one it’s too loose) and again (good boy, now we’re going to go for six – Adrian says that’s 3 bars). I demonstrate and then he plays (good, tighten it up a bit; don’t use excess body movement here, use your fingers) He keeps trying, but I interrupt saying that his long notes are not long enough and your short notes are not short enough. I suggest that we go back to the drawing board, back to where we started. I say, while gesticulating, ‘So that’s what I mean, the longer it (the passage) goes on, the more likely your longs become too short and your shorts become too long (‘Oh’) and that’s what we’re trying to not do. So in order to have success over four bars worth of this, it’s like being a gymnast, you have to work to that (‘what gymnast?’) You can’t go
from touching your toes to doing the splits in 5 seconds; you have to build up to that. So you do one (group) really good, then two really good, then three really good, then four … (Uh-oh too far) … back to two really good, then three really good, then four… (Uh-oh too far) … back to two really good, three really good, four really good, then five … (Uh-oh) … back to two really good, and then you just keep pushing and pushing and pushing, all the time aiming for perfection until you can do all of it without losing count … (Adrian starts playing – Listen! A: sorry. He turns to Jane and smiles while I breathe out). I scold him for making me lose my train of thought – it could have been something really helpful, oh well, your loss. Adrian says, ‘Whoopsies’ and smiles. Jane tells Adrian that he needs to do more practice and I say, ‘Respect’. Adrian says that at least they didn’t get lost on the bushwalk, and Neil tells him not to say random stuff. I say, ‘Anyway, that’s what you need to do there, and then put the hands back together’ (Yeah I know … Yeah … Yeah) I say that the piece is of a good standard, but not an A+ yet. He reminds me that he got the beginning right – ‘Yeah! It really sounded like a wild-fire – the wind came into the bush, and swept up this bush fire, and then Neil Chan went (scream) and he started running, and it was chasing him (scream); the fire was licking at his … behind him (scream)’ Both Adrian and Neil are laughing. Adrian says, ‘But a fire wouldn’t light for one second and then go off for one second, and then light for one second and then go off for one second. I continue, ‘Until finally … (I start playing the left hand ending) they got back to the car, and they all just went … Oh god (moaning with relief)’ Adrian says (again) that the fire wouldn’t go on off on off. I continue, ‘If you don’t play this part really good (I play the goblin bit and Adrian says that’s the fire chasing somebody) … well that’s Neil running, but if he trips (I shout AHHH! Burned! All while playing mushy rhythm) It’s amazing when Adrian plays again how much better it is! Neil asks if I can put Adrian in the story instead, but Adrian says, ‘No, I’m the fire’ I say, ‘Oh, so you’re the fire and Neil’s the person running’ Neil says, ‘No, I’m the devil’ We all laugh. They start making up further variations, mentioning Andrew and Minecraft … I ask to hear the beginning again; Adrian says only the first 3 bars. He plays really well, and I say it’s good, but you are losing the beat a little towards the top. I stand beside him and conduct, but it doesn’t help – ‘Hang on, it’s starting to get out of control’. As I use expressive vocalisation, gesture and body movement, Adrian moves his body sympathetically. ‘We’ve still got to hear the beat’. It’s much better this time, and I clap and vocalise along with him. I say, ‘I’m giving you all this energy, what are
you going to do for me?’ Adrian starts clapping and moving with great energy. I continue, ‘You’re going to give it back to me in your wonderful playing, OK?’ (Yeah … Yeah) I go on to say (mainly directed towards Neil as Adrian is bouncing around) ‘… otherwise it’s completely unfair … how do you expect me to inspire you if you don’t do the same.’ Adrian asks me if he did it right (yeah it was really good). I sit down and ‘demonstrate’ using random notes, asking him to be ‘really fingering’ as he starts the descent. He tries and I ask him to focus on bringing out the left hand (good boy). He asks me if it’s too ‘notey’ but I say that, ‘it’s really good there’, but I would like it to be more sort of (sound effects and gesture while pointing to the score) … but here it’s like someone’s, like the fire’s coming up behind you, the wind’s whipping it up and you’re like (scream and body movement) you’re sort of, you know you’re running away, so you can hear someone’s legs going (sound effects and gesture) and you can hear the legs going … (Adrian – Ah OK) … So it’s the fire and this (points to score) is the people going (dramatises) … Adrian asks me ‘is it like this?’ He then dramatises and I say, ‘You can hear arms and legs flailing’. I sit down at the piano and demonstrate the part where the people are running with the left hand, ‘So we want …’ before adding the right hand back in, albeit not accurately – I say to Adrian – ‘Sorry, you do it’, which he does (good!) I say, ‘That’s good, but stand up …’ I do a quick analysis, saying and demonstrating, ‘When you get up to the top D flat, that’s you signal to come down, so give that an extra … give it a preparatory up movement’ (Oh) I say, ‘Yeah, that’s better, that gives it more shape, it’s like… here it’s come to the top and then you go …’ (Adrian joins in with my vocalisation!!) He plays again and I say that it’s getting too fast. He plays again and I say good, ‘Now do the same thing but … (I use expressive gesture and vocalisation in an attempt to get him to widen the crescendo) … It would be better like this (sits down)’ I demonstrate making the second D flat ‘not delayed, but pull back a bit’. Adrian says, ‘Oh, make it stronger?’ He tries several times, each time I encourage him ‘Yeah, yeah yeah!’ I say, ‘Now, the audience will make sense of that, they’ll go, oh so it went up and then it went down, and I can really hear that shape … otherwise it will be like this, what on earth was that? (Adrian laughs) Was he playing random notes or something? That was terrible!’ Adrian dramatises the (possible) audience reaction. ‘You’ve got to show them what the piece is, don’t just … you show them what the piece is, you’re starting to show off a bit … you’re starting to go look I can play really fast, but you’re not telling them about the piece’ (OK, show not tell) I ask him to show me the next bit
where he comes back up. He tries a couple of times and then starts playing from the
descending part again (I have to go from here), but still has trouble remembering the
next section. I say, ‘You’re a bit lost, that’s OK’. He says while pointing to his chin, ‘I
sometimes get that’. I ask him to try again. He does so well this time, and I say (and
demonstrate) that I can’t really hear the notes (clearly) there. He says, ‘you said to
make it more…’, and then plays again a couple of times, but then I find a couple of
wrong notes, which I help him to fix up – ‘They’re all G and E in this hand but the G
G flat G G flat’. He plays slowly and then says, ‘I don’t know’ I say, ‘It’s OK, don’t
panic!’ We both laugh. I demonstrate slowly and then says, ‘I’ll have an investigation
about that at home’ I suggest that we try now ‘I’m sorry that I let that creep in’ With
great exuberance, Adrian sits down and starts to sort it out, while I watch and
occasionally coach him. He asks if the G is stronger than the G flat – ‘Yes, you
would, but then you would do the second bar softer (I sit down and demonstrate)
Adrian says ‘Oh’ and sits down and plays … ‘And even more if you can … Well
 Done Adrian’. He says, ‘Whoo-hoo’. I sit back down and say, ‘Now make the first
one sort of a bit louder, (I demonstrate) so it’s like this flash of ember’ He plays a
couple more times, and I suggest (and play) that he might as well make both of them
(G and G flat) loud. He starts to get the hand of it … ‘Yeah, that’s it, good, so I want
you to do some investigation (Adrian points to the score and asks for clarification), so
that you end up with… (I sit down and demonstrate)... and some practice (I play the
high goblin part)’ Adrian reminds me ‘and the shaping here’ referring and pointing to
the beginning on the score. I also ask him to practise the lower goblin part, ‘Do you
want to try and show me that bit now?’ He asks me to clarify, which I do. He has a bit
of trouble starting. I say that I have been tired today and also my computer died,
which I ask Oliver about. There is a quick break with conversation and the boys play
with Holly. Jane directs Adrian back and we do the lower goblin part, I say it’s a bit
sticky there – ‘you’re overlapping those notes’. He tries and then I ask him if he can
exaggerate the long and exaggerate the short, reminding him to make sure he’s not
twisting and has alignment. Neil is starting to distract the lesson and Adrian asks if I
can get him a Dalmatian (dog). Jane directs Adrian back, reminding him of my
instructions regarding exaggeration of long and short. I say that when he plays the 4,
he is twisting, which makes the muscles tight and Adrian agrees (view is obscured). I
say, ‘Once you get tight, what happens to the muscles?’ Neil answers, ‘they get stiff’.
I say, ‘And then what happens to the fingers?’ Adrian laughs and says, ‘They blow
up’ and I say, ‘Well yeah … (Then I dramatise cause and effect with a silly voice) … that’s what you’re doing, by not aligning’ Adrian say, ‘So you think this (grabs his wrist) is a neck’ I say, ‘Yeah, it is like a neck… and you don’t want to sort of have it like this …(obscured). Adrian shouts, ‘The neck life of a hand!’ Adrian starts playing LSLS and then SLSL (I demonstrate intermittently and shake his forearm loose which he seems to enjoy) I ask him to exaggerate more and make it very clear between the fingers. I then ask him to a group of 3, but he appears to have lost concentration. I say, ‘Next! Do you want to have any more lesson? (Yes) Well, listen!’ We then go into imitation drills shifting the group of 3’s and then analysing how many bars (6 bars). I refer to how we practised the previous (similar) section and how we apply the same concepts here (build it up bit by bit). He starts saying that he ‘gets his third one floppy’ and I ask to hear it. I vocalise, saying that he is going … which I then ‘correct’ using my voice. He tries to fix it, but I demonstrate again, asking him not to turn the rhythm into triplets. We all (Adrian, Neil and I all vocalise) I say, ‘No you’re rattling it off and not listening’ He slows down … ‘No, there’s no point in doing more than what you need, how many do you need?’ He says, six. I ask him, ‘Can you do two without any wonkiness? (He plays) Can you do three without any wonkiness?’ I continue to coach him to listen – ‘Yeah, I heard that’. ‘Now listen, I’ve given you more than enough time (Thanks Mark) and I’ve given you more than enough advice for free (Yeah, thanks Mark) so what are you going to do for me?’ Adrian says, ‘Um, play good’ – ‘Great, awesome, sounds good’ He stands up and claps saying, ‘Thanks Mark’ (You’re welcome) We give each other a handshake (or a punch) and laugh. I say that I don’t mind having fun with you, but just remember I’m the master and you’re the apprentice’. Adrian says, ‘Just to tell you, the dog’s eyes are bigger than my eyes’. We discuss what he is playing on Sunday – Adrian asks me what Khoa is playing.

Adrian and Andrew duet rehearsal – 58’05’: 13 June 2014

Reviewed 27 and 29 December 2015

- The rehearsal starts with conversation (Adrian is shouting) regarding results for the recent technique exam. I ask Adrian why he was worried – ‘Why do you worry so much? Surely you must know you are good at it by now?’ (I don’t know) Andrew says that maybe he wanted to get an HD. I ask Adrian if he has just right compulsive disorder. Adrian says that he wants to get the top 0.3% prise (like in his school Maths
competition). He says, ‘I want to rule the results’. We swap to the piano closest the
doors. I talk about my ANZCA organ exam mark; there is always something that you
can improve. The boys are warming up and Jane talks to me. I ask them to practise
their performance bow and I adjust the seat. Andrew asks what result Wendy got in
the technique exam, and so does Adrian, but Jane says that it’s none of Adrian’s
business. They take their bow and Jane is in the background recording on the iPad;
she is annoyed by his attitude. They start and the ensemble is much more successful
this week. Both boys feel the dotted crotchet beat well, but there are a few problems
with the middle section. I ask them to take their bow. Lyn and Oliver laugh and Jane
is smiling; the boys are excited. Andrew asks if it’s better than last week (it is but I
tell him that it’s about the same). I give them feedback, mainly asking Andrew to play
a little louder, and just before they start playing again, I ask them to repeat my
directions. I ask Adrian to be more exact with the left-hand articulation when
pedalling. I ask him to then play the second left-hand note shorter, the left hand
generally louder and the chords the same volume. I then ask them both to put it all
back together with Andrew playing louder ‘as well’. Adrian clarifies that I would like
him to play loudly during the introductory bars. I coach them ‘come on!’ The
ensemble and balance really do sound good here. As they approach the end of the first
section, I come and stand next to them – ‘Both of you nice and loud! Come on
Adrian! Loud! Good, come on!’ As I direct Andrew to play softer, I ‘conduct’ and
then continue in a similar way with the remainder of the piece. To achieve a bigger
sound, I ask Adrian if he can play the D tremolo in the final bars with alternating
hands, but that makes both boys a bit overexcited. After I have their attention, I say
that the intro is much better now, reminding Adrian to refine his bass and play it
louder. He asks me where and I demonstrate, reminding him of the clarity of
articulation and pedal. I ask Adrian to play the chords louder the second time, as well
as the bass. He points to the score, seeking clarification, which I give, though a little
annoyed (?) I take the score over to the second piano and demonstrate the balance for
the first section and then for the second section – both boys come over to watch.
Adrian says ‘Oh’, and then tries in the treble register of the second piano. I take the
music, and then ask them to return to their seats. They try, but the ensemble isn’t
right, as Andrew comes in too early. I ask them to try again and ask Adrian if he can
provide more sound on the low D’s, but he says that he is not big enough. I lean over
him, playing and suggesting one note instead of two. They try again, this time with
success, but the second section is very messy. I stop them and ask ‘What’s going on there? It’s all out of time’. They shrug and start being a bit silly. I suggest that in Adrian’s effort to be louder, he has lost the beat. I suggest maybe leaving it the way that it was, asking them to start again. It takes them awhile to start again, as Adrian is getting distracted. I distract him by giving him praise (good intro Adrian) but Andrew wants validation too! They boys start again and manage much better this time. ‘Come on guys – fire! Andrew take over here’. I seem to be focusing on the overall here, but I really think that there could be some slow partial practising within the rehearsal too. Nonetheless, I praise them for sounding ‘really cool’, and they take their bow – they are clearly very proud and excited by the experience. Everyone claps and Jane is smiling broadly. I say to Andrew that he is a little late with the powerful chords, suggesting he may be using a little too much arm movement – ‘Aim the gesture towards the bottom of the keys’ (I am gesturing and vocalising my directions here). ‘It’s still good … good guys!’ Jane smiles and says they did well. ‘There’s always going to be something that is not quite right, but it’s a very high standard … Good boys’. Adrian says something random about Mozart having nothing right (?) No one even Andrew understands what he means – Adrian eventually says, ‘I don’t know’. I say that I’m sure Mozart made a few mistakes when he was little, but Adrian seems to find it unlikely – ‘I’m sure he never did as he was born a genius’ I mention that he found it difficult to hold down a job (Adrian – I don’t get that because he was playing in the King’s palace), because he was very argumentative – ‘That’s a bit like you isn’t it, or is that Neil?’ Adrian says, ‘I know why he died so early, because he was arguing with the King’. I suggest that he likely died of kidney poisoning (disease) from too much drinking. Adrian laughs and says, ‘He’s full of wine!’ (Jane shakes her head, almost a little embarrassed). I’m not sure why, but I mention that Mozart used to compose and perform the concertos (Adrian slouches and says, ‘That’s Grade 8!’), to attract more students. Andrew suggests that Mozart wanted to show off his trills (he plays right-hand trill). I mention (and demonstrate) that Kelly’s concerto has a double trill (solo and tutti). Adrian says, ‘I know this one’ and then plays the cadential trill (hands together) of his concerto. Andrew asks if we could have a trilling competition some day and everyone laughs. Adrian says that I’m going to win, but Andrew says that he will win. I ask both boys how long they can trill for without stopping, and we all start trilling. I try to tickle Andrew as he is standing beside me before suggesting that we use both hands. Adrian and Andrew are very excited – I suggest to play a
chromatic scale in the left hand while trilling with the right hand – Andrew does so and says, ‘I did it!’ Adrian then tries (well) and then I suggest chromatic double octaves in the left hand while trilling in the right hand. I ask them if either of them have ever tried chromatic minor thirds (hands together) before. Andrew tries a chromatic scale in contrary motion and I ask him to start on D. Adrian watches before suggesting that Andrew play on the piano where he is because it’s ‘more oiled’. Andrew prefers ‘his’ piano but Adrian says that it feels like it’s made of ‘spinifex grass’ (?) Adrian starts playing a fragment of the concerto before I lean over him and play, saying, ‘Hey, you know this bit here …’ I point to the score and ask him to give more volume to the chord. Adrian ‘corrects’ me, saying that (according to the score) the chords are supposed to be staccato, but I suggest that he change it and he says, OK. Andrew stands beside us and says, ‘You can change music whenever you like’, and I say, ‘Well, pretty much’. Andrew sits down and Adrian tries though he becomes agitated when he can’t start from the middle section. They mumble something between themselves (?) before I ask Adrian (through cueing him with Andrew’s melodic line and his secondo part) to keep pushing it forwards forwards forwards forwards (I tilt him forwards as I say). Andrew asks me to do it for him, which I do. As I ask Oliver how Neil’s been going (I will give him his medal on Sunday), Adrian plays Haydn broken chords and Andrew asks to start again. Adrian asks me to ‘watch this’ as he shows off his broken chords – I say and check (and so does Andrew) ‘You’re not getting tense I hope?’ Adrian mentions something random regarding doing the semiquavers across two octaves. I ask Adrian if he likes that concerto (‘Yeah, I like it’) I play the excerpt with hands together at the second piano. Adrian says he likes the trill (plays) and Andrew joins in with a trill too. I ask the boys if they would like to play one of their solo pieces for each other. Lyn seems enthusiastic and so does Andrew, ‘I want to play Radioactive!’ I mention that I don’t have the pedal extender in the room and Adrian says, ‘Oh, too bad’. Everyone laughs. Adrian plays more of the concerto and I say that Jane said that he was having a little bit of a panic (this week) because Little Bird wasn’t perfect. Adrian says, ‘Yeah, I fixed it up today’. I say, ‘Did you? … And no tears?’ (No – Jane smiles). Andrew says, ‘I’m going to play Two Little Birds (Adrian – that makes 3!) I start rearranging the chairs, suggesting that Adrian could play first. He suggests Concerto, but I suggest In the Wind. Adrian yells in my ear (which I point out), ‘But it’s really short!’ Andrew takes a seat and Adrian launches in immediately. He plays from memory fluently, Lyn is
impressed, and Jane (while touching her neck) asks if he fixed up the mistakes (since last lesson). The boys are looking at the score and Adrian is talking about the repeats. When I say, ‘It’s actually really good’, Adrian throws his arms in the air and shouts ‘Yay!’ Andrew rushes over to the other piano and says, ‘What about me?’ I say to Adrian that the Goblin part is better, but too slow. I coach him with shaping and tempo here, saying that the whole piece is really good, but there are these two bars in the middle that ‘don’t match’. He points to the score, counts and says, ‘1 2 3 4 5 6 you mean’. I ask him if he understands what I mean (it sounds like you’re having trouble there – it doesn’t sound right) and he says, ‘Yeah, yeah, I get it … It sounds a bit weird but not too much weird … average weird!’ I say that the whole piece sounds really exciting, but that bit sounds a little bit less exciting. I mention that his body movement is causing the bars to sound somewhat segmented, and I coach him using expressive vocalisation (gestures are not in camera shot). I ask him to try again. Andrew says, ‘Can I play my song?’ and stands beside Adrian. Adrian ‘reminds’ Andrew, ‘You said that you wanted the other piano, go!’ Andrew rushes over (no chair) and then sits down beside Jane. Adrian starts and plays well overall. I try to keep him to tempo by clapping during the middle section, but it still is too slow. I say that it’s better, and that it is substantially quicker than at the previous lesson. By clapping and vocalising, I ask him to play all sections the same tempo. ‘I get it, I get it’ I then say, ‘Speed up there, or slow the whole thing down’ Adrian takes off his shoe to show us his ‘blood stain’ that he got when playing football on the road. Jane ushers Adrian off and Andrew on. Andrew moves the chair over to the far piano. Jane helps him and Lyn organises the music. Andrew plays Mozart K570 (first), but he stops and says he forgot. Lyn comes over and adjusts the score. He skips half of the exposition, and then carries on. Adrian needs to be quiet. Andrew plays with good expressive intent, but is quite untidy in parts. He has a memory lapse towards the end, but is able to carry on well. Andrew says something random to do with his zipper. Andrew asks if he can play another piece. I ask him to play the opening ‘with a bit more body … your left hand is too soft’. I coach him with the uniformity of the beat during the first section (cutting bars short). While the beat improves, it sounds segmented, but then after coaching with critical comparison (vocalisation) he plays much more lyrically. The use of his arms is much more gestural and he utilises forward tilt of the torso. The difference in sound quality and expressive intent are quite noticeable. The next section (E-flat Major) starts quite ‘flat’ but as soon as I say,
‘very melodic all through here’, his playing manner becomes instantly visceral and he becomes involved in creating the sound in a much more holistic way. I say, ‘No right hand bones … fast fingers no bones. You don’t want a hardness to the sound’. Compared to earlier, he really is playing with much more stylistic and expressive intent now, but I do point out that he is rushing through the semiquavers somewhat. However, in an attempt to ‘fix up’ the rhythm as directed, the playing becomes quite dry, dynamically flat and intellectual. It certainly doesn’t sound anywhere near as exciting as before, seems to lack forward drive and purpose, and it appears that he is no longer involving his arms in the playing. Probably misguided, I caution him against ‘showing off’, saying, ‘Show and tell, not show off’. He smiles and asks if he can play another song. Lyn says that she thinks he needs to warm up with another song first (?) I suggest that at the concert, he play Radioactive, then the Sonata and finish with Two Little Birds. Adrian asks what Radioactive is and I say, ‘It’s a pop song’. Andrew takes a couple of tries to get used to the pedal, but then abandons the pedal as his leg is too short. I ask him to slow down a little bit. He is looking at the score quite a lot here and doesn’t seem as sure of the notes as he could be. He enjoys the applause. Jane and Adrian comment that it is quite a different ‘bird’ piece – ‘it’s a slow one’. I suggest that he play slower and ask Lyn what she thinks. She says it’s very typical of Andrew to always end up playing everything much faster as the piece improves (she mentions Invention and Mozart). I say, ‘Remember it’s a slow, calming song, so try to play it slow and calming’. He says, ‘OK … But it doesn’t say slow and calming (he points to the score)’. I ask him to write it in then, which he does. I ask Adrian if he likes Andrew’s playing, and he says, ‘Yeah … Isn’t two little birds supposed to be faster than one little bird?’ Lyn chuckles and I say, ‘No, the two little birds are in love and they’re having a conversation’ (Oh, like the stick insects today, the female was holding on to the male on a leaf sleeping, and I saw the male, it climbed up the tree and jumped down). Andrew says he wants to play Radioactive and Adrian says that he is interested to look at it (the score). Oliver asks Adrian to show me the piece that he keeps repeating. I ask to hear a bit of Radioactive first. Andrew adjusts the chair and then plays; his expressive intent is captivating. He is full of smiles when he finishes. Adrian says, ‘Oh, cool’ and I say that I like his ‘new’ left hand. I ask both boys what order they will play their pieces. After listing all his pieces, Adrian says he only has two pieces (Andrew – I have three!) Andrew asks why he has three pieces and everyone else has two. Adrian asks me if Wendy has two
(she has 2 long ones). I tell Andrew that I really wanted him to play the *Radioactive* song, because it’s something different. Andrew suggests he play a pop song at every concert. I mention that someone else is playing *Demons* by Imagine Dragons. Andrew seems pleased and Lyn asks if it’s an own arrangement. Adrian asks what a demon is (the opposite of an angel). I say, ‘I don’t have much to say about that one, it’s good, yeah, well done’. Andrew asks me if the pedalling is good. I say that I wasn’t going to mention it, but there was an occasional spot where the hand came off before the pedal came down and there was a … (abrupt sound)’. I say that I didn’t want to criticise you because you might think I was a bit mean. Lyn disagrees (‘not really’) as says that they want to hear my advice. I ask Andrew not to play so quickly with the Mozart – ‘it’s too good to just sort of destroy’ (?) ‘You’ve come so far with that, there’s no need to … ooh look how good I am, everyone knows you’re good, you don’t have to play fast to prove it (Ooh, OK) … Play with colour and style, and emotion … It’s already fast enough anyway’. Andrew asks if they can play the duet again. I suggest that Adrian play something. Andrew skips off and Adrian hops up and shifts the chair back to the first piano again (we laugh and Adrian smiles). I mention that the concert is in the Opera Space on Sunday and Andrew gets very excited about playing on the Steinway. Jane helps Adrian with the music but gets annoyed about him wasting time and asks him to play *Sonatina*. Adrian plays fluently and with sparkle, but it seems rather frantic to my ears. Adrian doesn’t seem too pleased as I say, ‘Good boy, well done. You can tell it’s Mozart can’t you?’ Adrian takes off his jacket as I tell him that it’s too fast. Andrew comments that ‘everyone’ is playing too fast. I say, ‘It’s not *In the Wind* – it’s not a cross between *In the Wind* and *Invention* – it’s Mozart. Listen, I will try to be critical but constructive … (OK OK OK) I don’t want you to go home and start obsessively practising (OK)’ I say again that it’s too fast and we don’t have the (sings da do da do da da do) in the left hand that we used to have. He looks puzzled for a moment, says, ‘Oh here’, and then plays the first couple of bars of the left hand with wonderful expressive shaping. I say, ‘Yeah, that’s sort of missing now … it’s so fast that I can’t hear the notes anymore’ (He smiles and says Oh). I suggest (and sing expressively) that it’s supposed to be like a singer (‘Oh really?’) I ask him to try again hands together. He plays the opening bars. I say that it’s better, but when you going (sings ascending staccato) don’t get faster. He plays right hand as I sing with him. I say, ‘Remember, we go … (I sing the melody with expressive inflection and phrasing) … use gesture there’. Adrian plays again (really well this time) as I sing down up
down, up down up. I say that that detail is not coming through anymore. He seems surprised. ‘You’ve lost all of your subtlety (Oh) … and it’s just been taken over by some sort of speed demon. Mozart’s very subtle, don’t destroy what you are already good at; don’t just go …’ I ask him to try again. He plays beautifully this time. The phrasing is refreshing, but he seems to be missing right-hand semiquavers at the cadential points. I say, ‘No wonder you’ve been repeating over and over you poor kid … you can hear there are missing notes through there (yeah)’. I play and then ask him to slow down a bit and give me (as a singer) some time to finish. He seems to be having trouble with the rhythm now, and is doubling the values. I put the metronome on 130, saying that he need not play it any faster than that. He tries again, but has trouble ‘getting started’ and then plays too fast during the ascending staccato. I say, ‘Mozart’s about rising and falling, not getting faster and slower’. I play over the top of his shoulder and he copies a couple of times. I say, ‘Take your time to speak … good (I use gesture and expressive vocalisation as he plays). That’s why you’re becoming obsessive with it, because you can hear it’s wrong (Oh), but the more you play it faster, the more detail you will lack, and then the cycle keeps continuing, and then you start getting anxious and then you go faster and then subtlety is lost … ah ha ha … I know exactly what it feels like’. Oliver says that he will spend half an hour just repeating. I say, ‘Yeah, you’ve got to slow down and get all the notes to speak (OK)’. I can hear Lyn comparing Adrian’s 30 minutes to Andrew’s 5. I say that both boys have individual gifts, and can learn from each other. Adrian asks if I can put the air-conditioning on higher. I ask him if he’s feeling hot and then become worried that I’m being too hard on him in front of others. I come in close, give him a pat on the back, and say, ‘Listen, you’re doing good … you’re doing great’. He says, ‘Yay!’ He plays a little of the right hand, saying, ‘Like that?’ I say, ‘That’s it, now from the beginning … You know I’m not angry with you don’t you? (Yeah)’ He seems more relaxed now and plays the opening bars very well. I say, ‘That’s lovely, that’s beautiful, that’s like oh yes, yes. We’ve brought him back … Adrian is back everyone! (Adrian throws his arms in the air above his head and shouts triumphantly). ‘That speed demon has been flushed down the toilet’. I ask him to continue playing from the beginning of the second section. When he comes to the staccato, I tilt him forward and move his arms, asking him to use his body to show us what’s happening … ‘Just enjoy the sounds.’ I caution him not to speed up on the repeated notes (probably the bar before is the culprit!) and he copies my movements as he watches.
As he plays again, I coach him with expressive body movement, gesture and vocalisation (‘feel the stretch’). While he is lacking clarity with the semiquavers here, he is able to tell me which notes he is missing. I suggest that he was just going a little too fast for the fingers to keep up. He plays again, clear this time and I ask him to pull back a little during the final few semiquavers, like ‘Put it down’ and use analogy (Adrian suggests ‘mat’) and dramatic narrative to compare (‘Oh would you like some cake?’ as opposed to ‘Here’s ya cake!’) Adrian smiles and everyone laughs. ‘Put it down gently, show us that … yes’ Adrian says, ‘Not cupcakes’. I put him on the back and say, ‘I’m so pleased you played it for me … we rescued it, didn’t we? (Yeah!)’ Oliver says, ‘I can hear, totally differently…’ I say, ‘It’s like I can breathe’ and everyone laughs. Adrian shows me where he’s up to in the concerto. Jane comes over to me and lets me know that Adrian is doing the same thing in the concerto, playing faster and faster and faster. ‘Can you please … I won’t think that you are any cleverer if you play fast’. Lyn is laughing and saying that Andrew is doing the same. Andrew says, ‘Yeah yeah, I’ll listen, I’ll listen!’ I tell both boys to listen and not play fast. I go and sit next to Adrian, and whisper to him, ‘Please don’t (I know), please no (I know), well please know (OK, no)’ While he is standing and ‘fiddling’, Jane asks Adrian if he remembers all the problems with the Sonatina. He says, ‘Yes, I still have 1 TB of memory’. I remind him that he has his Grade 5 examination (‘And that’s in August and I have 70 days’) Jane asks him to stop interrupting as it’s ‘so annoying’. I suggest that instead of concentrating on getting faster in the pieces, he might concentrate on the technical work for his exam instead of the Concerto.

Lesson 17: 21 June 2014

Reviewed 30 December 2015

The lesson begins with Adrian standing at the piano. I tell him that his concert was excellent. Neil says what about me? I tell him it’s probably the best I’ve ever heard him play – ‘It was very expressive’ Jane adjusts the chair for Adrian as Adrian proudly tells me he has completed 8 pages of his concerto. ‘And you have been practising harmonic and melodic minors?’ Neil interrupts and says that he has. I say to Neil that Adrian has got his exam soon, whereas you (Neil) still have another piece to learn. Jane prompts Adrian physically and says, ‘Come on, don’t waste time, (‘Show me the new part’) show Mark the new part of Concerto; sit properly’. Jane helps Adrian to decide where to start. I say to Jane that she must be very proud of
them. She says that I must be very proud of all my students. I ask them what they thought of Wendy’s playing and Jane agreed it was very good (very, very stable). We discuss Kelly’s Concertino and how it was very sweet and seemed to suit her style. Adrian is excited to tell me that he has learnt an arpeggio. I say to Adrian that his concerto is a nice boyish piece, which seems to excite him. He starts playing at around the F# minor section (I correct his E to E#). I ask him to play slower. It takes him a while to start up again, but he gets there. I continue to watch and listen, correcting a couple of errors along the way. I say that the notes are fine (yay), but I’m a little concerned that he might be playing a bit too fast at home (Oh). I say, ‘Remember, speed is not about speed, it’s about ease of movement’. He stands up and comes over as I sit down at the second piano. I go on to explain and demonstrate that when moving through each chord, there is a vertical (‘up’) aspect of the playing to consider (Oh), not exclusively lateral. He wanders away, but Jane intervenes. I ask him to watch again as I demonstrate again, before critically comparing: ‘There’s a whole aspect that you are not really doing at the moment, so how about you start to think about that and try that.’ This approach, where instructions are explicit, seems more effective. After Adrian tries a couple of times (OK that’s good) I play again (over his shoulder) saying ‘up and over’. He has a go, and I guide the movement of his elbow and wrist, saying ‘up and over’. As I take his wrist, I say, ‘Good, so we’re going to make sure that we’re nice and fluid in the wrist here (Oh)’. I demonstrate again, saying, ‘See how the thumb comes away from the B … and then the arm brings it back again’. Adrian plays again as I guide his elbow and wrist within an elliptical plane, counter-clockwise. I demonstrate again, and ask him to change the fingering 1242. Thereafter, I work with him to achieve a looseness of the wrist and an inward shift without twisting (‘slide in on this note … good boy Adrian, that’s it’) He asks me how to effectively shift to the next group. I sit down and experiment at the second piano, before demonstrating and suggesting ‘well actually you would jump’. He tries, quite effectively. I say good boy and then ask him to watch again, mainly to draw his attention to the alignment of elbow, forearm, wrist and hand when executing the top note. ‘No don’t lift it (the wrist) too far up … then you lift on the B … so go around to 3 o’clock … no that’s 2 o’clock … then lift up to 12, then back around to 9. Do you know what I mean? Can you see the clock? (Yeah)’ We go through again, as I explain that 3 o’clock is straight to the right, whereas 2 o’clock is a bit up to the right. What would have been good here, is illustrating this process with the laser pointer that I
have since used in this context. While at the 2 pianos, I further coach Adrian with the
elliptical movement, ‘around to 3, lift up to 11 and back to 9’. I say, ‘Well Done!
(Yay!) … Now most people do not understand that and that’s why their playing
doesn’t sound fast … you end up getting a tight wrist if you … (I demonstrate tight)
… If you don’t’ (I demonstrate elliptical movement) … That’s how you get speed –
by doing movement (gestures) (Oh) … And rather than waiting until it’s fast to do
that, start to do that now’. Jane comes over and takes the music out of the sleeve. I
say, ‘I’m just a bit concerned that you’re going home and just playing it too fast,
that’s not happening is it?’ Jane says no, not really. ‘No? He’s ok? Good, god boy’
Jane suggests to Adrian that it might be useful if he writes down the clock shape, and
he agrees. As Adrian continues to experiment with the right hand, I write down some
gestural choreography in the score. I continue to coach him as he experiments –
‘Make sure your fifth finger is aligned with your elbow … Good boy Adrian …
That’s it! (Adrian turns to Jane, smiles and says yay) … If you don’t have that
alignment, you are going to build up tension, which will eventually slow you down,
and it could cause pain or an injury (OK)’. He continues to experiment, but the
alignment isn’t perfect yet. I coach him with the gesture required to move from the F#
minor chord to the C#7 – ‘Lift you elbow up as you play the A, and that will
parachute you across … When you speed it up, you won’t hear any gap, you’ll just
hear (demonstrates)’. I go on to critically compare the resultant sound, with and
without the gestural freedom. He tells me that the score says ‘p’, so I sit down and
play the same passage softly. ‘Speed comes from knowledge of movement, not fast
fingers (Oh)’. He points to the score and tells me that he has learnt all the way ‘up to
there’. He smiles proudly as I say, ‘You are such a good boy’. Jane tells him to hurry
and up show me. I say, ‘He’s very excited about playing his concerto … What do you
enjoy about playing the concerto?’ He says, ‘I have no idea’ (?) He says he will start
from ‘here’ and I say that this was my favourite bit when I was young. He asks me
what dolce and ob. mean (a soft and sweet oboe). Adrian gets very excited and says
he knows how to spell oboe. He spells for me. I point to the score, prompting him,
‘Off you go’. He plays it for me with lots of misreadings and says, ‘that’s hard’. I say,
‘That’s good … it’s going to be easier for you if you play the notes written …’ I go on
to show him what these are. He watches me play the left hand, tries for himself and
gets it correct on the second attempt. I mention that Andrew also has something
similar in his concerto. I say, ‘Did you boys know that you did a good job with the
(Pirates) duet?’ Neil tells me that he got a D+ for his technique exam and I say that I’m impressed (Yay). I mention that what other people got. Adrian mentions that D is still a good mark. Neil asks me what Andrew got (HD) and I mention that maybe if he and Adrian keep working, they could get a HD next time. Jane prompts, and Adrian starts with the next left-hand section. We discuss the fingering options. I suggest that he likes that and I write in this fingering while Adrian continues to experiment. I then ask him to imitate me in three-note directional drills (‘this one on the way up, and this one on the way down’) Also covered was play high D on the way down and low D on the way up – ‘Good! Do you find that strange? (Yeah)’ Jane asks for clarification: ‘Up make it a bit stronger?’ I say, ‘No, what I mean is the direction of travel’, She seems a bit confused but Adrian continues to practise the concept quite well. I sit down at the second piano and we continue to ‘learn’ the directional movement that lies behind the notes. In this way, the gestural by-product of directional movement helps him to cover the wide intervals efficiently. I say, ‘Wow! It took Andrew three lessons to learn that, and you learnt it one second’ Adrian smiles and continues, applying the same idea to the left hand in the following bars. I say to Jane, ‘The bigger the gap (distance between notes), the more you have to understand how to move (in order) to cover the gap … If there’s a big gap, you don’t play the note and then move, you play it on the way as you move’. Adrian jumps up and down, shouting, ‘Whoooo!’ Jane – ‘So you move very quickly?’ I say, ‘You play the note as you move, (Jane – Oh, you play the note as you move) rather than playing the note and then move’ Jane – ‘to close the gap in between’. Me – ‘Yes, otherwise there’s not enough time’. Adrian points to the score, excitedly telling me that which bars he got right. Jane asks me to write it in the score (which I do) and tells Neil to watch and learn. I sit down and play the passage with hands together. I move on to point out a correction needing to be made in the right hand (E). Adrian looks closely, ‘Really?’ I write it in as he asks me what finger to start on. I continue to write in the fingering for the remainder of the descending scale. When playing staccato octaves, I ask (and demonstrate) Adrian to use an up movement rather than a down, because it will give him a different sound. ‘Always think – what kind of sound do I want, and how do I need to move to get that sound. That’s all piano playing is … and how do I cover this distance in the required time’ Adrian puts his hand up and suggests, ‘And how to read the notes’. I say, ‘The notes and the rhythms are the easy part, it’s understanding how to make the right sound (Adrian – Some people find sight-reading hard – ‘Yes’) …
and covering the huge distances (I gesture with my arms to illustrate). Adrian plays the right-hand staccato octaves and descending scales again (That’s nice). I remind him (and demonstrate) that when playing the top note of the scale, he aligns his elbow and fifth finger – ‘Make sure that you’re aligned, breath in and then drop’. Adrian continues to experiment as I kneel down behind him, before asking him to imitate me with some. ‘Breathe in, move to the left and add-a-note … any sort of scale, have a breath in … drop and roll’ Adrian does well (Good boy Adrian). I ask him ‘not to start cold’ before sitting down at the second piano and demonstrating ‘what other kids do’. I continue to coach him both ascending and descending – “Move you head … up with the thumb … feel up in the body … Lovely, you get this lovely, ascending to heaven sound, rather than, playing my scale … it’s just a (musical) gesture’. Adrian is pleased and starts bobbing up and down when I say, ‘Lovely, good boy’. Jane says, ‘It sounds sweet’ and I say while illustrating with body movement, ‘It’s all to do with how you approach it … rather than down, it’s up and through’. Adrian asks me what Vla (Viola) and Jane comes over to have a look too (it’s showing you which instruments are playing). Jane turns back the score and politely asks me – ‘Regarding the clock movement, does that apply to all of them?’ (Yes) She pats Adrian saying, ‘Adrian, you have to check this out’. I suggest that Adrian does ‘get it’ but he needs a bit of time to experiment with it and for the concept to sink in. I sit down at the second piano and Jane asks me if Adrian’s wrist was coming up too high earlier and I say yes, and then demonstrate what I’d like him to do and then what not to do (‘That’s going to throw you off balance). Adrian asks me, ‘Is it supposed to be like this?’ Jane comes over to help him find the wrist position as I continue to coach and encourage him to find the alignment with the elbow and fifth finger, without breaking at the wrist. I say, ‘Yeah, almost … let go of any tension in the wrist’. We do it together. I ask him to find the correct alignment and then ‘take a mental snapshot of that shape, and how it feels … put that into your kinaesthetic memory’, which he does diligently. ‘And now go from here around to that’, but it’s still too high there (Jane agrees). I come over and move his elbow out which makes his wrists fall lower (That’s it). I continue to coach him with the elliptical movement, while still maintaining softness in the arm and wrist. I can see that he needs to stay quite flat on the first three semiquavers before moving around to the left on the fourth semiquavers. I encourage him to switch on the upper arm muscles while remaining soft inside the wrist (Good!) After a couple of rounds, he starts coming up too high again, so while holding his elbow out, I ask
him to ‘let go there’ in his wrist, before playing the last semiquaver on the way through to start the process again. He gets it! I clap my hands and say, ‘That’s it! Whoa!’ Jane agrees. I say that it’s not a big round clock, but rather more of an oval shape. Adrian says, ‘Anti-clockwise oval clock’. As I write on the score, I say, ‘I suppose that the clock looks more like this …’ Adrian makes his own adjustment to the illustration so that it is indeed anti-clockwise. I further add which notes are played where ‘on the clock’, saying ‘9 o’clock, 6 o’clock, 3 o’clock, 12 o’clock (Jane asks Adrian to add the numbers). As I play, I ask Jane if she can see what I mean and she agrees, adding that earlier in the lesson, Adrian was ‘too high at 3 o’clock’, so she clearly understands the concept and how it can be the cause of a stiff sound. Jane says that when he was practising this part at home she could tell it didn’t sound right, but wasn’t sure how to help. I ask her and Adrian to always let me know, as ‘anytime there is something wrong in the sound, there will be a physical reason (Jane – especially the movement) … often something is locked’ Jane says, ‘That’s why when I look at some people on YouTube, especially those really good pianists, they use lots and lots of arm movement to shape the sound’. Jane asks Adrian if he has any more questions regarding the *Concerto*. I ask him where he is up to – ‘Wow, we’re almost there’ Adrian asks me what ad lib means and also why the dotted line (maybe slurred?) I say that he can leave out the cadenza if he is running out of time, though it would be good if he were able to, as this is where the soloist can show off. He says, ‘That’s hard’ and I say that it’s not *that* hard. I encourage him to keep going. He notices that there are no bar lines in the cadenza (which I explain it is to be played freely). Jane and I help him set a learning goal of one more page between now and next lesson (‘just one more page’). I suggest that we see how his scales are going. Jane reminds him to show me *Little Bird* to check the rhythm. I ask Neil if he was proud of his medal (yes) and if he’s going to work hard for me (yes). I say that I’m excited about playing the *Concerto* with him at the end-of-year concert. Adrian starts playing B minor (root position only for Grade 5). We discuss the formula for harmonic minor (KS plus #7). I ask him to play minor arpeggios, showing him how to ‘find’ the pages; right hand is fine, he asks me for clarification regarding the left-hand fingering. I ask him to move the chair back and tilt forwards. He plays B minor arpeggio, and I remind him (while demonstrating) to lean his body across to align the arm with the notes in top register, while keeping feet flat and firm (Good boy, that’s it). I ask to hear B minor left hand, reminding him of 5-4. I say that that one sounds a
bit stiff, so we break it into two octave groups with gestural freedom. As he starts the full 4 octaves, I suggest we move on, but yes, that would be the next step. I say, ‘Anytime it sounds a bit stiff or you’re not sure, just break it up into octaves (yep) and get it loose … get each part of it loose’. Adrian says, ‘Break it into quadrants’ which I then ‘demonstrate’ with him agreeing to my ‘method’. I ask him to play B-flat minor (I haven’t done that) – well let’s do it. I show him how to work out the relative major of D flat (Neil says 5 flats). I show Adrian the notes and he plays the left hand, asking me what finger it ends on (2). I ask him to start in the lower register – he plays a couple of times, works out the compass, and then I coach him with the right hand (231, start here) I say, ‘Cool, that was easy’. I ask him to play E-flat minor (Neil says he knows it). Jane says that she hears scales and arpeggios in classical music and asks me if they are found in contemporary music too. I go on to demonstrate how the left hand of Demons is really a small segment of the E-flat Major arpeggio or broken chord. Adrian asks me if that is Demons by Imagine Dragons. I ask the boys if they like pop music and I’m happy to teach them. Jane says that she doesn’t like Eye of the Tiger, but Neil says that he does. Jane asks me if Neil was to do pop music, could he do one that requires more expression. I talk about how Andrew does a mixture of Classical and Pop and that much of pop music still requires the same type of expression as Classical music. Jane agrees (shape the sound rather than banging). We move on to E-flat minor arpeggio right hand, then left hand (5421). I ask him to do all minor arpeggios and all majors. We agree that the technical workbook is good to keep the boys organised. I ask the boys if they will do the AMusA Diploma eventually (special robe and hat). I ask Adrian to have a look at the melodic minors himself, and Jane says that she can help him.

Lesson 18: 29 June 2014

Reviewed 31 December 2015 and 2 January 2016

- The lesson starts with conversation regarding no present from Neil when he went to Canberra and I give Adrian a cuddle. Jane says that Adrian has got some questions regarding the Grade 5 sight-reading. Adrian tells me that he has only 3 more scales to go until he completes all the harmonics, melodics and contrary motion. Jane says that he better understands the difference between harmonics and melodics. Adrian says that it’s because Jane showed him a YouTube video. I mention that I have sent them something similar before, but perhaps it is better explained, and I ask Jane if she could
send me the link – she agrees. Adrian mentions that the video has a different circle of fifths. As Adrian adjusts the chair, I suggest that we start with some scales. Neil says that he has nearly finished all of his scales. Both boys tell me what they have left to complete and I complement them (Neil particularly) on becoming more responsible for their own learning. Neil says that he has done ‘extra’ scales (all Majors and harmonic minors). Jane tells Neil to be more careful. I suggest we do some random ones, but he pulls me towards G# harmonic minor and mentions there is double sharps. I demonstrate, saying that F double sharp is G – I write it the letter names in his technical workbook. Adrian tries the left hand and I coach him with the fingering as I write it in his book (‘make sure it’s B natural, 4 on C# … good boy, that’s it’). He plays 4 octaves ascending and I ask him to play the top note with his second finger instead of third, which he does. He mentions that when playing melodic descending, there are naturals (that is true). I show him G# melodic ascending/descending, which he then tries, asking me to clarify the fingering descending. I say, ‘Bit of a tricky one that one (yeah) … You did fine (Yay) … I mean obviously you need a bit of practise’. I ask him if he would like to tick it off (Yay, both of them?) I say, ‘Make sure … that was just an introduction, you’ve got to practise them’. I give him a shake and exclaim, ‘You’ve finished them!’ He gets excited and says, ‘Whooo!’ He asks if he can tick the G# harmonic in contrary, but I say no he hasn’t done it yet. He asks me why there are no melodic in contrary motion – I say you could, I’ve never tried it. I play and then say, ‘It’s possible, but no one ever does it’. I say (and demonstrate) that some examination boards ask for chromatics in contrary motion. Adrian has a try, and I ask him to start both thumbs on D. He points and asks me about scales in thirds, which I explain; he peers at the book and then works it out. Jane asks him to ‘come on’. I ask him if we can hear a few to see what is happening; he says yeah and starts bobbing. He smiles when I say, ‘Adrian Chan, please play E Major hands together loudly (forte)’. He asks me legato or staccato, and I explain that unless they say staccato, play legato. I give examples and clarify. Adrian plays E Major hands together legato 4 octaves – I turn the metronome on, play a short excerpt and then ask him to start speeding them up, 84 four notes per beat. He tries but it’s still a bit slow – I ask him to play it in unison with me. After a couple of attempts he starts to get the idea, ‘Good boy Adrian, so you can start speeding them up a bit, hey? (Yeah)’ He mentions that he is finding it hard to speed up the melodic and harmonics, but I say that he is not ready to go faster with them yet, ‘but the ones that you did for your technique exam
for example, you would start speeding them up’ (Adrian agrees). I suggest that he
might start on 76, and I ask him to play with me, which we do well. I say that it’s
weird doing it in unison. Adrian agrees, but says, ‘it sounds good though’. I ask him
to play B Major right hand softly – we play in unison. Adrian turns and smiles at Jane
as adjust the metronome to semiquavers and then we play in unison again. I say that
it’s nice to see him not dropping on thumb. He proudly shows me that he ‘did this’,
referring to aligning his upper body and elbow with the top register – ‘I know, very
good, I did notice that’. He asks me about crescendo and decrescendo which I suggest
we try it with E-flat Major. He asks me how. I turn the metronome off and then
demonstrate/explain the volume for each octave ascending. He tells me what to do
when descending and give him the thumbs up. I ask him to put the chair up a bit, ‘You
look like you’re a bit low’. He adjusts the stool and I remind him to adjust the height
in the exam, referring to a small difference can make a huge difference to the sound.
He seems surprised. I use the analogy (and dramatise!) of one leg being slightly
shorter than the other – ‘Not very efficient and you end up with a very sore hip’. We
play in unison octave-by-octave ascending and then I coach him verbally for
descending. I remind him not to play slowly when playing softly. He plays again,
octave by octave. I say, ‘Make your scales sound more expressive, more loving (I
demonstrate).’ I ask him to tell me something that he loves (iPad!) I say that I was
thinking more along the lines of a pet. He says he would like a pretend dog, not a real
dog. He smiles at Jane as I play, saying, ‘Pretend (when you’re playing) you’re
patting a real dog’ As he plays again, I gesture and say, ‘Make the piano sound like
it’s living … thank you for playing me, I feel alive … I just love it when I feel alive. I
sit in this room all time, in the dark and no one ever plays me nicely … you’ve got to
pretend that the piano’s alive’. When finished, Adrian says, ‘I did that well’ and we
both laugh. Jane asks me if he needs to play without stopping between each octave in
the exam, and I say yes before demonstrating ‘the next step’. Adrian plays and seems
pretty pleased – ‘Good’. I suggest we try MM = 84 and we play in thirds, but it
doesn’t quite work. I ask him to play E-flat chromatic hands together loudly. We do
and I join in along the way. I encourage him to keep pushing forwards. I ask him to
play B chromatic. We play in unison this time, but he hesitates with the descending so
we drill two-octave segments. I explain that that is a good method to push the tempo
forwards without having ‘to do everything’ (Oh). I suggest that it could be called
‘add-an-octave technique’, similar to ‘add-a-note technique’ which I then demonstrate
using right-hand scales in the Haydn *Concerto*. I ask him what would come after ‘add-an-octave technique’, and he correctly answers ‘add-two-octaves technique’, which I then demonstrate. I then say ‘add-four-octaves technique’ would be next, and Adrian says, ‘Add-16-octaves technique’, and I say (and demonstrate) ‘the whole-scale technique’, first single notes, then in double octaves. Adrian tells me there are seven octaves on the piano. I ask him, ‘What did you get out of doing that with me?’ He answers, ‘Speed (speed, you have to increase the speed with the ones that you are confident with), dynamics (dynamic – how do you plan the dynamics for crescendo and diminuendo?) Um, do octave by octave (How do you plan for speed if it’s not working?) Oh, just go a bit slower and then go (gestures) um, set your metronome faster and faster (Good, what about if you didn’t want to do that, you just wanted to go to the top speed?) Um, I don’t know (Use octave by octave technique, because it’s easier to cope with) Oh, OK. I say that there’s no point doing it faster if you ‘can’t’. Adrian says, ‘If you were already doing it that good, that means you’re a genius’ and we both laugh. I ask him what his double thirds look like and he turns to the page. I ask him if he’s getting excited about his exam. He asks me if Neil is doing sixths and then tries (Neil says yeah). I show him and he asks me why sixths and not thirds or fifths (?) I suggest (and play) that sixths are more pleasing to listen to than fifths. I then play sixths in the left hand and thirds in the right hand. Adrian smiles at Jane. Adrian has a try, before I ask him to play hands separately. He plays the right hand – I ask him to adjust his trunk to the right (oh) and push his feet into the floor so he has something to lean on. He plays the complete scale with a few ‘holes’ so I suggest that we practise in octave segments. I demonstrate and he copies me as I come over and adjust his back and head. He smiles and says, ‘Ow, stop punching me (I’m not punching you) … you’re doing a karate knuckle’. I ask him to try and keep his spine tall. He gets up and does a back-bend. I demonstrate not to hunch and then pull the head forward, correcting my posture thereafter. He says I look like an emu (thank you). As I adjust Adrian’s shoulders, Neil asks me if I mean to inflate ‘my tummy with air’ (?) Adrian smiles and says, ‘It’s carbon dioxide’ (?) As Adrian ascends and descends octave by octave, I adjust his head and neck. I say nice job and then he reminds me that we then do two octaves (I nod and agree). I ask him to start low with the left hand, we check the compass and then he plays left hand in octaves (head up – good boy Adrian – so much nicer to look at). He say, ‘Sounds positive’. I agree, ‘Yeah, well if your body is in a more positive position (you sound good) you sound
more positive. I ask him to play E Major in contrary motion, before asking them if had mentioned that I was really proud of both boys in the concert. Adrian said yes you did and Neil said yes, you gave me a medal. Adrian mentions that he enjoyed the Raymond boys’ duet. I said it was a bit bangy, but still good, but his Bach was terrible – there were so many mistakes that I could enjoy the piece. Adrian quizzes me regarding the dynamic level for contrary motion, which he plays well. I say that he knows it well and remind him that he will be marked on his ability to blend the thumbs. He tries and I say that the middle one was really good – ‘can you do that for all of them?’ I demonstrate and ask him to rotate/pronate his arms as he turns the thumb. He tries, but I demonstrate that he is ‘sort of grabbing’ (Oh). He tries again and I ask him to watch me, saying, ‘So I keep the upper arms switched on and I rotate inwards (Yeah) and then just pop the thumbs in’. He tries and I tell him that’s better. Neil asks me if I’d like a chocolate and Jane tells Adrian he can have one when he finishes the lesson. I demonstrate E contrary and ask him to go again. He plays and when finished says, ‘So you wanna … just a soft touch’. I demonstrate, ‘So you want … no grabbing … just roll’ and he plays. I ask him to play with the nail of the thumb; he asks me why and I show and say don’t bend the end joint. ‘The reason I ask that … you see what happens when I try to play here’ Adrian rushes over to take a closer look … ‘Everything grabs and goes down’ While the view is obscured, Adrian shows me what I’m doing wrong. ‘So I turn the thumb, but I also rotate using my elbow, tap the note with the tip of my thumb, rotate across without dropping anything along the way’ He asks me to clarify what I mean by using the nail, ‘Is it like this?’ He shows me and I say yes. ‘You can use any part of thumb really, as long as it’s not a part that makes everything drop’. Adrian wanders back to his own piano and says, ‘grab … don’t grab on’. I say, ‘No grabbing or squeezing’. I ask him to try. First he goes down and then I ask him to go up. I ask him not to bend the first thumb joint, he tries but is distracted and his elbow drops again. I then demonstrate what not to do with the elbow when turning the thumb – ‘Yeah, but what you’re doing is … see my elbow? (Yeah) … you’re going like this … (Oh) and that extra weight (Adrian tries again) will make the tone louder. Adrian says, ‘It sounds a bit bangy, but (make it) not so obvious’. I agree and then ask him to watch while I do a critical comparison, referring to the position of the elbow. ‘If I drop my elbow, that extra downward weight will go into the finger and make the sound louder (Adrian – ‘And more obvious for the thumb’) … Yeah, and then you won’t blend’. He plays again, ‘Good boy … excellent … that’s awesome
... very good boy'. Adrian is pleased and shakes his arms. Adrian starts to play the left-hand descending and makes the connection that the first left-hand note to blend is B (as opposed to A in the right-hand ascending). I ask him to try again saying that it’s usually harder with the left hand. I say, ‘Your elbow’s going up and down considerably’. He tries again, ‘Pretty good … In order to keep the elbow from not dropping, you have to keep these muscles in the upper arms from not switching off’. He plays, I stand and say, ‘We go again? You’re getting, almost there’. As he plays I gesture around his upper arm and elbow saying, ‘My teacher used to say keep air under your arm (How?), like there’s a fan … it’s blowing your arm up (Adrian – ‘Did she actually put a fan?’) No, it’s just a metaphor (Oh)’. I ask him if he knows what a metaphor is – ‘Yeah, like you sleep in a lion’s den but you don’t actually do it’. I agree, and remind Adrian that we want that note (B) to be the same volume as the other notes. He plays left-hand descending and I encourage him (with gesture) to hold his elbow out. I say that Khoa (Oh really?) is now really good at scales compared to two years ago – ‘He’s learned to do it, so you can do it too’. Adrian asks me if this if this is Khoa’s sixth year and tells me it’s his fourth (‘I know, you’re just done amazing’) Jane tells Neil to be more aware of his elbow position when playing scales. Adrian clarifies with Jane that it’s his fourth year. Neil says it’s his fifth year. I say that both boys have done well. I say that this is Andrew’s second (third) year. Adrian makes the connection that in the Haydn Concerto, they are ‘just scales’. I say that’s right and ask him if he has been studying his general knowledge. He asks me, ‘What do you mean studying?’ I go on to ask him questions regarding Jinker Ride, which he seems to know. I ask him to memorise the analyses and he says that he can memorise 1000 words. Jane explains that he needs to spend some time to read during the term break. I then go on to explain that the examiner will ask questions regarding the musical period of each piece. I ask him what period the invention comes from and he says Romantic (‘Really?’) I ask him the dates for the Baroque period, and ask Jane if I have given the handout on musical styles and periods. Adrian mentions we are in the modern period right now and asks me what period Jinker Ride is from. He agrees when I suggest 20th Century/Modern. I write down a reminder to get the handout of styles and periods. Adrian asks me how long the modern period will last (until we make up another one!) We talk about Mozart’s father, and Adrian tells me that Mozart had five names. We review Classical period dates and chronological order of the periods. I go through each piece and it’s period, mentioning program music for Little
Bird, List ABC and D for each period, and also for extra lists. He seems to know a lot of composers’ names and I help him with the periods for each. I mention that there were a lot of ‘Bachs’. I mention that they don’t need to know anything about the composers until seventh grade, but I outline what they do need to know. Adrian starts getting silly, referring to birds only being in the modern period and I give him a friendly warning. We then do some fifth grade aural – clapping rhythm. Adrian sits with his back hunched and says, ‘This is hard’. I scold Neil and Adrian for being silly and laughing. I break it into halves, and then all but he has trouble again. I suggest that he hear the melody rather than just rhythm (hear it like an echo – don’t intellectualise it, audiate it). They ask me what that means … He does better here and I suggest that he imagine the rhythm bouncing off the wall, like an echo. We do another (get ready to echo it) … He does OK with me, but finds it hard by himself. I say that it has to have the same speed, like you’re looking in a mirror. Jane – ‘Mark, besides clapping, can he hum?’ Adrian says he is no good at humming. I say he has to clap or tap. Jane says he has the same problem when listening to the aural CD (Adrian – they’re quite long). I say that most kids find them quite hard. Jane says that on the CD, the man says you can hum. I say, ‘OK, he can hum’. I suggest he could hum and clap. I give him another example and he does fine when it’s split in half. I say that this is only a small part of the exam, and it doesn’t mean he’s going to get a D if it’s not perfect. I ask him to keep trying his best. He asks me if you get one wrong, will you get marks off (‘yes, but if you get one wrong don’t panic … it doesn’t mean you will go from an A to a B’). Neil asks about A- but I clarify they don’t give minus. I suggest that both boys not worry about the result, and just focus on trying their best. ‘That’s all you can do is try your best … Once you start worry about everything that’s when you’ll get that unfortunate anxiety problem that you have (OK) … when you start worrying … don’t worry, just do your best. If your best is not quite good enough, it doesn’t mean that you’re a failure (Adrian bobs and says oh, yay) … You’re still a good boy … my favourite student … OK second favourite after Neil … OK equal favourites (Neil says yay)’. Jane tries to get Adrian’s attention and throws the sight-reading book on the chair (do your sight-reading). Adrian hands it back to her and I ask him some intervals. He names the notes, but I say sing the notes in tune. He checks when I say it was a perfect fourth. He quizzes me regarding ‘perfect’ and I say that fourths, fifths and 8ves are perfect, and the others are Major. He asks me about ‘firsts’ and I say that it’s called a unison. I teach him about minor seconds. He starts
going on about perfect octaves up the piano and I ask him if we’re getting off topic
(yes). I ask him to listen. I play a Major sixth and ask him to sing up through the
Major scale (how many notes were there?). A perfect fifth follows but he is a bit flat
on the top note here too; correct answer. He answers the next one Major third. He asks
me about perfect intervals again … (same in Major and minor scales). We then move
to singing the top notes, but he can’t pitch the notes at all! He does better when I play
only the top notes and correct each one. He is pleased when I say, ‘Good boy’. I ask
him to sing the bottom notes, but he can’t start. I suggest that he not think of note
names, but to separate (using gesture) the two and sing the bottom three (A bit
confusing?) I do pairs of notes instead of three in a row and he does better, though
still initially telling me the letter names. He has trouble moving from individual pairs
to consecutive pairs. We keep practising, but the more self-conscious he becomes the
worse the tuning becomes, even for individual pairs! We then try the 3 pairs
consecutively, but he starts singing the top notes. I ask him if he is in the choir at
school. When he says no I say that he should be because his singing is not that great. I
say sorry and Adrian looks at Jane. I say that it doesn’t mean he’s a failure (Oh good)
… it just means that he needs to work on it. I say, ‘Please don’t cry (I’m not!)’ I ask
him to come over and I give him a hug. Neil says that he’s blushing. I say that all
excellent boys blush. He returns to his seat, looks and Jane and I say, ‘You’re still an
excellent boy … I’m very proud of you, did you know that?’ He nods, Jane comes
over and he hugs her. She reminds him to try his best and prepare himself – ‘there’s
still plenty of time’. She hugs and pats him for quite a while, speaking softly to him.
Neil says that he still has 336 hours (2 weeks). He is crying when they stop hugging
and I sit with my arms folded. I look a bit guilty. He sits down at the piano again and I
ask him to sing the middle note of the chord. I suggest the sing from top to bottom,
which he does, then the middle note, which he does. Jane reminds him that he doesn’t
have to look at the keys or identify the notes, just the sound. I tell Adrian that it’s not
uncommon for kids with perfect pitch to have some troubles with this part of the test
(Oh). I say that making mistakes is not a sign of failure – ‘you can learn how to do it’. I
say that I admire him, and that I sometimes get upset when I can’t do something
straight away too (I refer to when I ran out of class in year 5). I reiterate, ‘I understand
that you want to try your best and want to be a good boy’. I tell him that we are very
proud of him and that this is only a very small part of the test. Jane comforts him. I
ask him to sing the three notes of the chord, then the middle note (tick!) He asks for
Water. Jane asks how he might practise the task, and I suggest that he practise singing the higher and lower of two notes first. I ask him to pitch the top note of a Major third, but he still tries to find it (without success) until he eventually just ‘sings’ it. I ask him to note play or name, but to just pitch the bottom note – ‘You did it!’ We then move to a perfect fifth – top and bottom – correct! I remind him that it’s not uncommon and doing multiple examples if really the only way to improve. ‘I wasn’t testing you, I was really just practising with you, and I’m sorry if I didn’t make that clear’. He seems a bit surprised. I apologise for the ‘singing in the choir’ comment – it probably was a bit harsh, and rude (yes). I tell him that I think that he is awesome, but nonetheless, his feelings have been hurt. He asks to move on to sight-reading, but for some reason, the DVD is not working from here to the end of the recording (18 minutes remaining).

Lesson 19: 12 July 2014

Reviewed 2 and 4 January 2016

- The lesson starts with Adrian saying that he has completed 12 pages on the concerto and Jane says to give ‘Mark’ a surprise. I give Neil a copy of the Beethoven piece and give both boys a short talk on Beethoven’s sonatas. There is conversation about ice-cream. Jane gets the music ready for him and he adjusts the chair. She prompts him to sit properly and start. Jane asks him to show me the whole thing – ‘just do it’. He plays from the beginning from memory and I occasionally provide the orchestral accompaniment. The tempo is quite settled, with only minimal deviation of the basic pulse. He stops suddenly, expecting me to ‘go to there’. I play and ask him, ‘Aren’t you supposed to play …’ He says he can’t do that and I say, ‘What didn’t you say so, you silly billy’. I stand beside him and show how the right hand sounds here. Oliver comes in and Adrian waves. Neil says ‘hi’. Adrian reads the score and plays the right hand again. I suggest some fingering for the top notes and I give him the pencil, asking him to write it in. I ‘explain’ the rhythm, and then count it while clicking the crotchet beat. Adrian tries and then I write it on his score. He asks me how long to trill for. I say, ‘two beats, but let’s just get this sorted (first)’. I play the fragment again and Adrian copies while I click. ‘Good boy, now make sure your elbow is aligned with the notes (I adjust his elbow and he plays) … so you’re in a diagonal position with your arm … That’s it (I adjust his wrist), otherwise everything will sort of freeze’. I ask him to play on the tip of the thumb and on the end of the key in order to
encourage pronation and a wide elbow. I say good boy before explaining how to play the trill (good boy). I then sit down at the second piano and put the two halves of the fragment together and he copies and both continue to ‘experiment’. I mention that his trill sounds magnificent and he is pleased (Yeah). ‘I want you to just generally … you need to remember to (body gesture and sound effect), lift the whole apparatus up so that your thumb’s on a diagonal’. I demonstrate the ascending semiquaver thirds, and Adrian tries before I ask the boys if they have watched three-dimensional movies. Adrian says he watched the Lego movie in 2D. I say, ‘Well in a three-dimensional movie, it has depth, so you only see the screen, but you (also) see behind the screen, so I not only want you to see what’s in front of you, but imagine someone else seeing it from the side’. I go on to summarise, ‘Try to think of it in three dimensional terms, not just your own perception, but what someone else might see’. When I ask him if he understands, he says, ‘Yeah, but I’ve never seen three dimensional’. I do a critical comparison, one version ‘flat’ and the other. ‘What does it look like if someone else saw it (I demonstrate) … it will give you a more real sound’. Adrian tries, but I think he is distracted, as the notes are still too new to explore the spatial relationship ‘around’ the notes. Nonetheless, I push on, asking him to play (just) the ascending scale with an upward gesture on the top note, which he copies quite well. I say, ‘Good boy, now can you put a little bit of Adrian’s soul behind every note? It’s not my piece; it’s your piece (I play and he copies) … you know how you’re a cheerful boy? (Adrian smiles) … put some of that cheer behind each and every note’ (I use gesture as I speak here). I smile and say, ‘That’s it’ and Adrian turns and smiles at Jane. ‘Then you won’t have to wait for me to tell you, oh, can you make it more expressive. Try to make everything you play true to you … what, what, what would you do?’ I ask him if he understands and he nods. ‘Those are the kind of kids who do the best in … they become the best musicians … they listen to the teacher, but they’re also able to put something … not just work hard, but they are able as they’re playing, to listen and put a little bit of themselves behind everything (he nods). You know how we talk about expression (he nods), so it’s not just expression, but it’s self-expression. So see how I’m talking to you, I’m not usually like this, I’m quite a sort of quiet person, but when I teach, I try to make it sort of like … expressive, so that you might catch onto that. So see how I’m putting myself behind what I’m saying, rather than … (In a deadpan voice) I really think that you should try to be more self-expressive’. Adrian looks at Jane and laughs. ‘That would be good … (I laugh). So as I’m talking,
I’m being expressive, and I want you to do that in your playing as well. I think that you understand what I mean, but sometimes I don’t hear that in your playing though (Oh) So it’s OK (that’s good) … it’s not a criticism, it’s not like oh my god I’m hopeless (he turns to Jane and smiles), it’s not that, I’m trying to make you rise higher’. With regard to the solo entry, I ask him if he is ‘going to go like this (I play) or are you going to go (play with greater involvement of the arms and upper body)’. I ask him, ‘Can you put a bit of make-up on, like a clown? Make it a little bit more like … Hi!’ (Adrian smiles, and then begins playing). While he is playing, I walk around using expressive gesture and vocalisation to encourage him. When he finishes the section I say, ‘Now that’s exactly what I’m looking for, good boy!’ Adrian says, ‘Yeah’ and Oliver says, ‘Totally different’. I agree, ‘Totally different … it sounds like a different piece’. I go on, ‘Now most people will not do that (I stare at Neil) they won’t want to … they’ll do it, like, they’ll do it to an extent, they’ll go oh so I’ve got to get louder and softer woo-hoo (head gesture), but the kids who win competitions, who become excellent musicians, who become excellent teachers, or excellent players generally are the ones that can put a bit of themselves behind everything (I pause, Adrian nods and says yep) … You know what I mean? So, see how I’m standing up? (Both boys say yep) Like I’m really getting into it (body movement) … so I want you to be like that too. I don’t want you to be like me, I want you to be like Adrian (Oh, yeah) … Like, you know that bubbly kid … that sort of (I dramatise) … Hi! (He asks me what bubbly kid and I say you – Oh) … You know that sweet, bubbly, clever boy that you are (Yeah). Do you remember in the interview you said that you were special (Yeah) … well you show me how special you are (He says, ‘a lot’) … you show me through your playing, not through your hairstyle (Oliver laughs), or your clothing (I laugh) … show me through your playing how special you really are (Yep), OK, Yep? (Yep)’. I go on to suggest that we need not exaggerate (I demonstrate and Adrian laughs). ‘You still have the highs and the lows, and you still need (demonstrates) really perfect scales’. I suggest that his scale is not perfect, as he is rushing the last few notes (I demonstrate rushing). Adrian tries and I say, ‘Good, now can you do that, but put your own … (I gesture). He does beautifully, and I can notice slightly greater pelvic tilt and more tonal subtlety, even though I say, ‘Hang on, you’ve gone quiet again’. He tries again a couple of times before I say, ‘Show me Adrian, show me a smile (he smiles at me) … now you put that into every note (he plays)’. I say and gesture, ‘That’s it! Very good!’ I ask him to take my hand as we ‘walk and talk’ –
‘We’re still listening to each other, but we’re still moving, we’re making things real, so when we play the piano (Yep, we’re making things real), making things real … we’re going to try our best, but we’re going to be real people’. Neil is laughing and Adrian says, ‘we’re real people ‘cause we’re humans. We sit down and I ask Adrian, ‘put that into … (I play the ascending scale) … now put that into your scale’. As he plays, I am standing next to him, leaning in and out with my body to indicate crescendo and decrescendo. I say, ‘Show me your smile … show me your anger … show me everything about you through your playing (Yep), You know? (Yep)’ We go on to review how to make the minor seventh figure loud/soft (occurs frequently in the piece). I ask Adrian which note would be louder (he plays the first note louder), and I ask him what gesture he used. He demonstrates, saying, ‘Drop and stretch’ which I sit down and do too, saying ‘Drop and roll’. He corrects me saying, ‘Drop and stretch’. He suggests, ‘How about drop, roll and stretch?’ and I agree. I review with him the idea of dropping into the keys without notes (‘It’s like, how are you buddy’) before adding the notes back in. ‘Just because it’s a piano doesn’t mean you have to be all like… (cautious gesture)’. I say, ‘Just be normal’ and then demonstrate the passage hands together, suggesting that the drop and roll gesture will help the music roll forwards (Yep). I ask clap and ask Adrian if he has heard of a duple feel (Yep) and I ask him what it means (double). I ask him if the piece is in 4/4 or 2/2 and he answers 4/4. I suggest that we play it in 2/2. I demonstrate 2/2 by only playing then main beats and then 4/4 with every beat. While not entirely accurate, Adrian tries to imitate the way I played 2/2. I say good boy and then ask him to add all notes back in, retaining the duple lilt. As he plays, I stand up, saying, ‘Show me how cute you are … how special are you?’ I start to add the tutti, but interrupt, refer to the perfect cadence, asking him to ‘show the listener … hey you guys, we’re in D Major, don’t forget!’ I do a critical comparison, showing him how he initially played the cadence, before saying, ‘Try to go … you know … show us the chord, (he plays again) – good!’ I sit down, suggesting that I will join in this time, and we play together. I say, ‘the orchestra is not going to go (I play quietly) … they’re going to go (I play louder and more energetically)’. As he plays the next ascending scale, I say, ‘Now when you get up the top (I demonstrate), let go of all your muscles and there’ll be tonal ring (I stand and gesture) … that’s it’. Adrian says, ‘Return a ring?’ I say, ‘No, the tone will ring’ and Adrian turns to Jane and laughs. I demonstrate the passage with tight forearm muscles before showing and saying, ‘Let go of the muscles’. Adrian plays with
beautiful freedom. I ask him to do it with tight muscles to see if he can hear any
difference, which he does. I say, ‘It sounded almost the same didn’t it … maybe I’m
just imagining it’. There is definitely a difference though, but Neil says he can’t hear
any difference as Adrian dramatises being ‘tight’. ‘I know that if you’re tight there,
you going to be tight somewhere else … it will make the next notes come out really
stiff”. I suggest and dramatise, ‘You want it to sound (bright), but not ha ha ha … too
annoying (Yep)’. I go on to suggest that both boys retain the slight hyperactivity
because it’s an asset – ‘I want you to be energetic, without being silly. You still be
serious, but like, wear lots of make-up … Hi! Like, sort of be a clown, but not like,
rung around and be annoying. A true musician is someone who can be self-expressive,
but serious at the same time. (Adrian – That’s hard) Do you understand?’ They both
say ‘no’. I say, ‘Well I’m a serious person, I’m here doing a good job (Adrian – most
of the time; laughs. Mark – What do you mean?) I take my job seriously, but at the
same time I like to have fun … but I don’t let the lesson degenerate into a (party)
party … we’ve still got a job to do, OK, so that’s what I want you to have a think
about (Yep). I ask him not to play his piece … (I play without inflection). ‘Make sure
it rings and it’s exciting (Yep, like that)’. He is bobbing up and down excitedly. I
demonstrate and ask him to move to page eight (he says that’s page two). He plays
and then I ask him what he thinks about that – ‘If you were teaching me and I played
like that, what would you say?’ He says, ‘medium’. I say, ‘Well, what are you going
to do about it … Mr Chan, how can I improve that part please?’ Neil says partial
practise it, but Adrian seems stumped. I ask him what the problem is – ‘you said it
was medium … is it beautiful and even, or are there a few lumps and bumps?’ He
says, ‘I’m not quite sure actually’. He seems surprised when I suggest there are a few
lumps and bumps. I then say, ‘Instead of yours’ sounding like this (I demonstrate),
yours’ sounds like this (I demonstrate). It’s still quite good (Yeah), like 90%, but I
want 100%’. He says that I said that you would never get 100%, so I say, ‘99.9%’.
Adrian smiles and says ‘good’. I ask him if there is any part of those few bars that he
is feeling uncomfortable. He taps his finger on his chin while I play slowly. He plays
the right-hand first bar or so and I say that that bit sounds quite good actually. He
suggests that he feels not as confident when he gets down to the bottom (of the scale).
I agree, saying (and playing) that he starts to get a bit wonky when the scale turns
back on itself. I suggest that in his mind he could be thinking, ‘OK I need to partial
practise this part so it’s not wonky’. I start to do two-note slurs for each pair of notes
before I ask him what (partial practice) techniques he has learnt over the last 3 years. He begins with two-note slurs before playing the five-note segment. I say, ‘Now make sure your arm’s fluid’ and he plays again, ‘That’s it’. The difference is subtle, but there is greater overall gestural activity of the arm than before. ‘The reason you are having problems with the lumps and bumps is because your arm is tightening up at certain points in this part’. He asks, ‘Which part?’ I say, ‘This part’ before playing the right hand turn and scale descent. ‘There’s some tightness in your forearm and wrist in that part, so these exercises are designed to loosen you up, bit by bit, you know that, hey?’ He says ‘Yes, maybe’. I say, ‘It’s not just for partial practice (yeah) so that you’re doing what Mark told you (yeah), there’s a reason for it (both boys say yeah)’. We then start practising each five-note segment (come on), i.e. each beat and landing on the first note of the next beat. It takes him a few attempts before he catches on. Thereafter, I play each segment, and he imitates me. To encourage his spatial and gestural awareness, I say, ‘Good, now think of the three-dimensional idea … not just what you can see, but what can someone else see, how am I sitting, how is my arm sitting, how’s it sound?’ Adrian adjusts himself and he tries the first five-note segment again, but I demonstrate and say that I can hear overlapping. We continue with two-note slurs, but very quick this time, and that seems to help his finger clarity. I ask him how it (might) look from where Oliver is standing – ‘Dad?’ Oliver and Neil laugh. I ask him to be serious, not silly. I say, ‘If Dad was looking at that, how would he see …’ Adrian plays a couple more times (Oliver – That’s better. Mark – It is better isn’t it). Adrian does a fist pump and Neil suggests that Oliver say that it was terrible instead. We move on to that next five-note segment, which Adrian calls ‘part 2 of the bar’. After he plays, I ask him to reflect, ‘Is that clear? Are my feet still? Am I getting any rigidity in the wrist?’ He then shows me each five-note segment, illustrating the lateral elliptical movement inherent within each. I say that he has good alignment – ‘that’s called alignment … you know when you go and get a wheel alignment at the mechanic (gestures) so that your wheels don’t wear out too soon? (Adrian – I don’t know that, Dad? You do) Make sure your arm is behind each finger, and that you’re not getting tight’. Adrian says yeah and then shows me what to do and what not to do (no twisting). We go on, with him imitating my five-note ‘gestures’. I ask him to look at the music to help – ‘it’s the third beat of that bar (bar 73)’. He finds it. I come over and rub his ears, saying, ‘Now listen, and feel, and … that sounds good’. I ask him if it feels comfortable (yep!) He moves to the final five-note gesture of that bar, and I
remind him of his feet and the idea of a three-dimensional image. I chain the whole bar together and he imitates. I say, ‘three-dimensional image?’ and he plays again. We turn to Oliver for feedback. I say, ‘Getting a bit better, but what about, instead of doing all of it, what could we do?’ Adrian says 2, meaning chaining two five-note gestures together. It takes him a few attempts, but when he has it, he says, ‘That’s 2’. I say, ‘Does that sound right?’ I demonstrate and say that he is over-extending the third finger (He fixes it). ‘Are you aligning? (He tries again with greater elbow adjustment) … So try not to think what’s in front of you (gestures), try to think of it from all sides … what does it sound like? What does it look like? What does it feel like?’ I mention that I have gone through these ideas with this part of the piece before. Adrian has a think but says that he doesn’t remember. I ask him to practise this part of the piece a bit more. I ask him not to cry and become obsessive (I won’t). Jane stands up and points out that the score says ‘drills’. I put stickers on the score and point out what has been written – ‘Exercises for clarity, rhythm, brightness, confidence, alignment, a-group technique’. I say, ‘You do it Mister!’ Neil and Oliver laugh. I repeat it in a silly voice and give him a cuddle. Adrian smiles, saying, ‘I know!’ I ask him if I have made my point (yeah). I tell him that I still think he’s wonderful. ‘Show me how special you really are’ and he says, ‘Yeah, that’s this week’. I sit down at his piano, reference the score and say that he’s doing a terrific job, but that it concerns me that he sounds a little bit tired during the broken chord section (Yeah). I say that it sounds like he is stiffening up a bit (Yeah) and I ask him what he’s going to do about it – ‘what’s the magic word?’ Adrian says, ‘clock’ but I say, ‘alignment’, which really is the same concept. ‘If you alignment is not right, you’ll get too tired playing this sort of a piece … your rotary, (Adrian points to the score) clock, elliptical movement (I gesture a circular movement) or whatever you want to call it, is crucial to a piece like this (He asks me what crucial means – you can’t play it without it – Oh). The reason you’re slowing down, and it’s sounding tired, even though you are trying your best, is because the movements are not right (Oh), OK? (OK)’ I asked him what ‘cool’ things he will take away from the lesson and he says, ‘group technique’, and I suggest ‘three-dimensional technique’. I play the right-hand passage that we were working on, asking him if it looks and sounds right. Of the second example, he says that’s better and I say that’s because I’m using the right movement. ‘If you don’t have the right movement, you won’t be able to show everyone how special you are’. I mention that it’s one thing to have expressive intent, but an efficient technique will allow you to
more easily demonstrate how self-confident you are, otherwise (I demonstrate) that bit will sound lumpy and that bit will sound tired. I ask him to ‘check out’ the activity of my elbow as I’m playing the broken chords. He says, ‘But wouldn’t you get tired going up and down?’ I say, ‘No, the big muscles (I touch my upper arm) are designed to take the load … if you stretch the muscles in the forearm and the finger, you’ll get tired … Think of weight lifters … they use their whole body, not their fingers (dramatises) … they’re too small’. I explain that they use the bigger muscles in their upper arms and back, not their fingers’. I play the passage hands together again, and ask Adrian to throw my arm up (easily the first time and not so easily the second time – ‘Do you feel that resistance? (Yep) That’s because I’m stretching (to cover the notes) and look what happens (I ask him to feel my forearm when the fingers are stretched and when they are not) … When you use rotary movement, you don’t have to stretch or push’. He makes a few more investigations and seems to understand the concept – ‘That’s the reason you’re having a few problems there (Yeah)’. I summarise that segment of the lesson – balancing self-expression with gestural alignment and technical efficiency. I ask him what else he is going to do for me. He says he practises every day. Jane says that he needs to be more aware of the alignment concept. Adrian says that he did ‘the aural’ and he’s up to Grade 5. I say that I will go copy Grade 3, 4 and 5 aural tests and I set him a (Grade 3) sight-reading to peruse for 1 minute while I’m away. Oliver asks Adrian to be serious, and I say that perhaps he is being silly because he’s feeling anxious. Neil is starting to become a little annoying here. He does well – I say, ‘9/10 but you forgot your F# … look at the key signature’. I ask him to try again. I give him a pat on the back, ‘Well Done buddy’. I ask him to move on the first example from Grade 4. He asks me if the examiner will ask the meaning of any terms and signs within the excerpt (no). I sharpen my pencil as he peruses. I mention that Ray Chen is in town next week (as school boy he grew up in Brisbane), playing with the AYO. I suggest that it would be a good concert for the boys to attend. I say that people do grow up and become musicians and teachers. Adrian asks me how he became world famous. I say that he is not only really good at playing the violin, but he is able to be self-expressive and is very good with partial practising. ‘He’s really good with the mechanics of playing, like alignment (I pretend to play violin), but there’s something extra there … he puts himself behind everything … but there’s no point wasting energy on being expressive if you’ve got a problem with your scales’. I mention that he has been working hard since he was 4, and made a
commitment when he was 12 to become a violinist and went to America when he was 16. ‘It doesn’t happen very often, but it does happen’. Adrian plays the example hands together. It isn’t so good, but I say that he has really improved (Yay) and that it won’t be more difficult than that in the test. He asks me if the examiner will take the book away after one minute (no). I set him ‘Waltz’ and then exit the room. He takes his first attempt, but stops halfway through. He restarts and manages reasonably well, around 80% fluency. He says, ‘Yay’ and Jane says, ‘Good boy’. He goes again and it’s better still (Yay). I walk in during the third attempt, and I tell him that I think his sense of rhythm has really improved (‘amazing’). I say that I copied all Aural Tests from Grade 3 – 6. Jane looks on as we talk about duple and triple time. I ask him if there is something else I can help you with, Jane says it’s good he can be more serious. We then do some practice with intervals (fifth). Before finishing, I say to Adrian, ‘You need to be more serious with the alignment (yep) and the rotary movements (yep) … you need to be less serious with the parts that you know, and just let your personality in (yeah they’re fun). Have fun with the parts that you know, but make sure you’re not fumbling around with notes, OK?’ I ask Jane if he’s been doing his scales and Adrian shouts, ‘Yes! I have! I was doing them last night!’ Jane says that he has been practising the harmonic and melodics as directed. I ask him if he has finished the Haydn Concerto (Yes, except for the cadenza). Jane says that sometimes he focuses too much on speed and not shaping the sound. I ask him if he wants to learn the cadenza. He says he’s already started so I say, ‘Go for it!’ I say that I don’t want any slacking off this week, as this is an extra lesson. Through gesture, I ask for a combination of having fun and serious commitment.

*Lesson 20: 20 July 2014*

Reviewed 5 January 2015

- The lesson begins with Jane asking me to help Adrian with the counting for the subdivision of a tricky right hand rhythm within a sight-reading excerpt. Adrian asks me what *tenuto* means (tenuto). I explain that the most important choice in sight-reading is beat and rhythm, with mostly correct notes. Adrian waves at the camera as I sit down and demonstrate an excerpt in cut common time. Adrian ‘shows’ me that the symbol for cut common time is the same for common time excerpt with the vertical line. I explain that I wasn’t good at sight-reading when I was Neil’s age because I didn’t know the bass clef, the lesson to Adrian being that you can improve ‘anything’
if the desire is there. ‘I really wanted to get good at sight-reading, so I practised it, just
like you (Oh)’. I do a comparison, first with correct notes but quickly with terrible rhythm, then slowly with a few wrong notes. I then do 100% rhythm with ‘some’ wrong notes; we all laugh. Jane asks him to show me … but Adrian says he wants to show me the trill part. He plays it hands together, but I explain that he is playing the left hand in the wrong clef; we laugh. I ask him to take the highlighter and ‘dab’ the treble clef, before he corrects the notation. I lean over and demonstrate hands together. I ask him not to ‘hold’ the leaning the note. I ask him to use crescendo/decrescendo in the left hand, he tries, and then I demonstrate. As he tries again, I conduct using expressive gesture and ‘lift him up’ and ‘tilt him forward’ as he uses crescendo/decrescendo in the left hand. I lean over and demonstrate the right-hand ascending semiquavers, asking him to take his time to get all the notes – ‘You’ve sort of got the same problem that Neil was having before (What?) … Don’t panic, I’m not criticising you (Yep) … I’m trying to help you’. Before I can even start, he gestures and says, ‘downward thumb’. As I demonstrate, I say, ‘Downward thumb, with a turned in elbow and arm’. He says, ‘What do you mean?’ I swap hands so that he can see better – he comes over to the second piano. As I demonstrate I say, ‘Rather than that sort of thumb, (use) that sort of thumb’. He points to his own thumb and asks me ‘this part’ and I say, ‘yeah, the very tip of your thumb’. He seems a bit confused how that could be possible, so I clarify, ‘the side corner tip – do it!’. He goes back to his piano, sits down and plays. I say, ‘That’s it, now go …’, and I start to demonstrate five-note gestural fragments with the right hand. He imitates me as I ask him to bring his elbow … Jane clarifies for me, ‘Bring your elbow out’. I say, ‘that’s it, now go’, and I start to demonstrate nine-note gestural fragments with the right hand. He tries, tentatively, and I say (with gesture), ‘No, I can feel restriction in your elbow and forearm there’. He tries again, this time the whole ascending right hand, it is better and I say, ‘That’s it, what did you do differently there, because it’s a different sound’. Adrian shows me that he was using the tip of his thumb. I say, ‘OK, let go, you know … when you press down (with the wrist), and the muscles up here (demonstrates forearm) will get stiff (Yeah) … You can actually feel it, come over here and I’ll show you’. I ask him to press on my forearm, before I show him ‘the thumb that you were doing’. I ask, ‘Do you feel the muscle’ as he shouts, ‘Oh yeah! Awesome!’ and waves his arm. I continue, ‘Do you feel it go zzzz? (dramatises) … and when you do that, you’re actually strangling the fingers’. He continues, ‘Yeah,
but it’s not so obvious to feel that’. I respond, ‘No, well it’s not, because like we’re not sort of, we’re not sort of going around doing that (I stand and demonstrate, feeling my forearm)’. Jane says to Adrian, ‘You get tired very easily, hey?’ I say, ‘Get tired? With this piece? (Yeah) … Yeah, you’ve just go to watch it (wiggles fingers), these pieces are … it’s getting big now … if you’re not careful, you’ll end up with RSI or something’. As Adrian says, ‘Yeah, some people compose something that’s like 20 pages’, Jane tells me, ‘Yeah, sometimes after he practise he said that oh, so tired’. I say, ‘OK, if you’re getting tired it means that something’s wrong’ and Adrian says, ‘Yeah there are people compose like 20 pages’. I say, ‘Come on over, you shouldn’t be getting tired’ and Jane says, ‘Adrian listen, and Mark will show you how to turn on the right muscle’. I sit down at his piano and play the ascending alternating thirds passage with a wide elbow, a diagonal thumb, and the upper arm switched on, saying, ‘See – that’s so easy for me … Not (plays while keeping the top of the hand flat), that actually feels hard, because I’m not using the muscles in alignment’. Adrian sits down and tries, and Jane reminds him to keep his elbow out. I say, ‘Yeah good’ and he says, ‘Like that?’ While standing beside him, I demonstrate five-note gestural fragments again, but this time using a slight pronation on the last note (thumb), asking him to check for … (I gesture an inward pronation). Adrian imitates and I say, ‘Good, now if you’re going to do all of it (I sing and gesture the passage), make sure than you’re in that shape (gesture) as you (gesture) – (Yep)’. Adrian plays the whole passage and I say, ‘Yeah, that’s good’. I then demonstrate and ask him to play six-note gestural fragments (adding one more note to the previous five-note fragment). He is a bit confused (What is it?) I show him again, this time saying, ‘turn’ as I pronate my forearm inwards on the last note of the six-note gestural fragment. He imitates me and it seems to help encourage him to keep his elbow out and his upper arm muscles activated. I say, ‘Good, now do that motion when you put them (the gestural fragments) together. He tries, and I ask him not to go so fast. He tries again and stumbles, turning to me for support. I say, ‘That’s better’, he smiles and then tries for a third time. After the fourth attempt I ask him (while gesturing) to try to take a mental picture of what he looks like ‘in space’. He asks me to clarify what I mean by ‘space’, which I do, using gesture to ‘enclose’ the area immediately around him (Oh yeah). I say, ‘This is not where the piano playing happens (indicating a small area where the hands touch the keys) … The piano playing happens all over you (gestures) … What you do with your arms is going to make the sound (he plays again) … Yeah,
that’s good, but you came down (demonstrates) on that one (Oh). He tries a couple more times and I encourage him to use the tip of the thumb rather than ‘coming down’ on the thumb. I stand beside him and demonstrate again, ‘Right on the corner there, don’t twist inwards’. He plays again, and I clap, saying, ‘Good! That’s better … Yes … very good’. I come over, take his hand and explain that when playing the BD, ‘Instead of it being front on, turn it side on, pronate inwards’. He does well – ‘That’s it’. I then demonstrate how to create a crescendo during final five-note fragment, asking him to use a double rotary movement, saying, ‘lean back this way to get the sound’. He imitates me and is very quick to ‘absorb’ such detail. I demonstrate, ‘You’re trying to get louder there’ and he copies, interestingly adding in a slight forward tilt of the trunk without any prompting. I do a single clap, and excitedly say, ‘Fantastic!’ He starts bobbing and throws his arms in the air. I say, ‘OK, so we didn’t do it by pressing, we did it by rotating in the opposite direction, and then you get this lovely sort of … (I play the passage hands together while Adrian is still waving one hand and then the other, wanting to ask a question or say something). When I stop, I say, ‘Mmm?’ and he says, ‘I wish everything good in my life was videoed’. I pause before asking him why. He says, ‘I don’t know, so I can see it’. I tell him he did a great job before Jane comes over, asking him if he needs to write anything down (to help him remember). I suggest that he takes a video in his mind, ‘Oh, well Mark clearly said that was terrific so what did I do, I can do that again (Adrian – I can do that at home and video it) … and Mark will go (clap) … like that again’. Jane comes over and asks him again if he needs to write something down, which I echo. He writes in ‘pronation’ (I ask Jane if she got the form the Queensland Piano Competition. She says yes and will ask a few questions at the end of the lesson) … ‘tip of thumb’ … ‘double rotation to build volume’ (Jane writes this one for him). I sit down at the second piano and demonstrate, but the view is obscured by Jane and Adrian. I review the concept saying, ‘Instead of using fingers (to build volume – I demonstrate) … I use my whole arm to rotate’. Jane sits back down and Adrian plays a few more times, as I say, ‘Yeah, that’s the idea … Good, it’s quite easy (for you) now … (I nod as Jane says, ‘Instead of pressing the thumb to get a louder sound’). As he gets faster and faster, I caution him against doing so and so does Jane. I then demonstrate five-note gestural fragments, asking him to ‘plan it out a bit longer’. He imitates me and I say, ‘You do orchestra don’t you?’ (Yeah) I suggest that he do a bit more sectional work – ‘a bit more analysis of how the arm sits’. I ask him what else he would like to ask me.
He looks at Jane and I say, ‘Keep going?’ Jane claps her hands and says, ‘Don’t waste time Adrian’. He seems a bit reticent to keep going (?) perhaps because it’s still new. He restarts and says that he did it an octave higher. After he plays a page or so, I say, ‘That’s quite good, but your scale’s no good here (I point to the score), (Oh) … can you try it again?’ He restarts (that’s good) and then plays the scale part (that was better that time). He gets excited, throwing his arms up, saying ‘Oh Yay!’ and I ask, ‘What did you do differently that time?’ He says, ‘Um … just hold onto the other notes?’ and I say and gesture, ‘It just sounded more fleeting (yeah) … instead of struggling (yeah), it sounded like you were skating, rather than like, you know, jogging’. As I turn the pages back, I remind him that the same kind of thing applies to the beginning of the movement that we were doing last week. I ask him, ‘Did you do (practise) that? (Yeah) Let’s have a listen’. Jane reminds Adrian about alignment (What? Yeah) but he seems distracted and itchy today. Jane says he has an asthma problem. He shows me and Jane urges him to carry on. He plays the E7-A fragment and I ask him not to rush at the end. He plays again and I ask him to ‘show me the shape with your arm’. He plays again before I ask him if he really wants to go … (I play without tonal shape) … Why not go (I then play the fragment ending with decrescendo) I vocalise the last notes rushing then say, ‘Don’t rush’. He tries again, and I say, ‘Don’t bang the last note’. He tries again and I say, ‘Can you make it quieter at the end?’ He tries again, ‘Quiet?’ He tries again, ‘Yeah, close’. I sit down at the second piano and coach him an upward gesture on the A chord. He imitates me a couple of times, ‘Oh, that’s lovely’. I then play the whole segment (he copies) and then I break the segment into ascending and descending (he copies) ‘Good boy’. He plays the whole fragment again. I then play the ascending scale, asking him to ‘come out there’ referring to his elbow, and he copies – ‘lovely’. He then copies me descending and then copies the whole segment (That’s nice). I ask him to keep going, and I then add the tutti, but the next part isn’t as polished as I would have expected. I say, ‘all right’ and he tells me that he has started learning my part. I pretend to scold him – he and Jane laugh. I demonstrate the previous part, asking him to copy. Jane reminds him to keep his elbow out. He plays better this time and I say, ‘Oh, that’s really improved (since last week), what did you do … that’s great … what you did you do at home?’ He puts his index finger up saying, ‘Let it Go!’ and I start playing Frozen and he smiles at Jane. ‘Oh, you mean let your arm be loose (yeah) … so loose arm and aligned body behind the notes’. I liken it (and expressively dramatise) to
conducting where you would conduct the phrase with a single gesture, rather than individual notes (Jane laughs). Adrian says and dramatises, ‘You would stiffen your muscles like this’. He turns and smiles at Jane. I say, ‘Playing the piano is like conducting (expressive gesture), and that’s what you do with your arm. It becomes a single gesture, not like a series … not like a bunch of notes’. Jane says, ‘Not like a robot’. Adrian says (and demonstrates in the air), ‘Yeah when you let your arm go, you can go like very fast, but when you stiffen up, you have to go … like that’. I say, ‘Of course you can (Yeah, yeah) … That’s the whole idea of piano playing, not make it like relaxing, like (I sit and ‘demonstrate’), but making sure that everything is working optimally … So you need some tension (Adrian – But not too much), but not too much (Adrian – Because if you have zero tension, everything fall apart) … Yeah’.

I extend (and demonstrate) this idea further into the broken chord section. I ask him to go from Bar 140 … 138 actually. I yawn and then he starts playing hands together from bar 138 – go for it! I say, ‘It’s pretty good’ and he says, ‘I find it hard stretching an octave’. He shows me the right hand and I say, ‘It does sound like you’re stretching, when really you don’t need to’. I ask him to come over and look at where my fifth finger is, over the C. He says that I should stretch to the D, but I say, ‘Yeah, but I don’t need to, all I’m going to do is go from here (demonstrates) and my elbow is going to make ‘stretch’. He says ‘Oh’ and walks back to his piano. I demonstrate and he feeds the concept back to me. I say, ‘Yeah, of course … Otherwise if you’re constantly going like that and you’re over-flexing (extending) the muscles, you’re going to get tired (OK)’. I ask him to review the right hand, playing each pair of notes while making gradual adjustments, which we do together. I ask him not to over-extend the thumb when playing the fifth finger. I say that he is turning the thumb muscle on as he plays the fifth finger when it’s not necessary. I start to demonstrate with the right hand, but then swap to the left hand to give Adrian a better view. I ask him to ‘look where my thumb ends up’. It literally comes off the keys as I shift towards the fifth finger. He quizzes me if the thumb ‘stays’ there, but I demonstrate how it comes back into position when it’s needed. I go on to liken the technique to the left hand of Neil’s piece Grasshopper’s Wedding. Jane seems to understand what I mean here. Adrian asks me, ‘Like this?’ before clarifying each step with me. I demonstrate the D-F#-D again, asking him to bring his knuckles up a bit, but he asks me what knuckles are! (Jane – Adrian, like an arch shape). He continues to experiment as I come over and check, realising that is still quite a stretch between F#
and D (second and fifth fingers). I manipulate him (go from there and just roll around) his elbow, saying, ‘As you play the fifth finger, try to let go of the muscles inside of your wrist’. He tries, firming up the knuckle in the process (Good Boy, then rock back again). He experiments a couple more times (Good!) before I shake out his wrist (That’s it, good), after which he ‘cheers’ himself with his arms. He notices the same type of principle will apply to the D minor chord, and I suggest (and demonstrate) that he will need a greater under (U) shape. He experiments a few times and I say, ‘It sounds like you’ve been going … Even though you’ve been doing some movement (at home), essentially you’re turning on all of the muscles, all of the time, when really (demonstrates) it’s, turn this one on, this one on, that one off, etc. I say, ‘So you’re constantly switching the load of the muscles between one or the other, so they’re not all working at the same time (Oh). (I start playing) … See I’m not actually stretching the full octave, even though I can stretch a 10th (what’s a 10th), I’m not actually stretching a whole octave the entire time’. He asks me if I can ‘roll’ to a 10th, which I do (That’s cool!). I then start playing the left hand of Chopin’s *Etude in F minor* Op. 10 – ‘What are you going to do when you play that piece? He asks me what the piece is called and the smiles at Jane. I explain that it’s not possible to stretch those notes, so you have to use rotary movement (gestures), but if you’ve got stiff muscles, you can’t (I demonstrate, though the view is obscured by Adrian). He asks if he can play it, but I say that it’s the wrong piece for him at this time (because of his hand size), but he can learn similar concepts in the Haydn. I suggest that he needs to revise some of the movements and he agrees. ‘Anytime you are getting tired and stiff, it means something’s not right, you shouldn’t be getting tired and stiff’. Adrian says, ‘For 12 pages?’ and I say, ‘Well, you build looseness into the piece (I play and Adrian says Oh, OK) … You do that loose, and then you do this loose (I play) and then you do those two together loose’. Jane finishes writing something on the score (Adrian tells me it says, ‘Don’t turn on all muscles at the same time’). I ask him if I can hear some technical work to see how it’s going. He starts playing right-hand staccato thirds but then helps Jane finish what she is writing He writes in ‘remember to be loose’ himself. I say that he knows that, as I’ve been telling him that for years. He says that he knows, but might forget because he only has a 10TB memory. I ask him to play E Major hands together forte, but he gets confused because I have been saying ‘loudly’. I go on to explain the examiner will say ‘forte’ (Oh, really?) I ask him again, and he plays but it’s very slow still. As I put the metronome on, I say, ‘They’re too slow
mate’ (Oh) and play the required tempo. He asks me what speed I have set (minim = 84) and asks if that’s the minimum? I ask him to look in his technical workbook and study the metronome speeds when he is at home practising. He looks in the book and asks me what staccato is slower, but Jane says, ‘Come on, do it again’. He returns and plays E Major hands together again, but I say it’s still too slow. He plays again ask I click and gesture (that’s better). I say good boy and ask him to play C# harmonic minor right-hand piano (I demonstrate forte and then piano, explaining there needs to be an audible difference between the two). We play in unison, but he starts playing faster. I add a low tonic note, which works really well (he comes over and asks me what’s that). I suggest that perhaps Jane or Neil could do that for him before asking him to play C melodic minor left hand loudly. I play ascending and then the tonic bass. He tries, but says he can’t do it that fast yet (Well you’ll have to keep practising). I ask him (and demonstrate) to play in octave segments at tempo (‘Smaller amounts but fast’). He plays in octave segments ascending and then descending, commenting that it’s weird how the notes are different on the way down. We then move to two octave segments while I provide a steady bass. I say that that is how to get it faster, and he suggests that the next step would be 3 octaves. I ask him to play G harmonic minor hands together with crescendo/decrescendo. He sits and thinks – I tell him that he must get better at knowing them quickly, because the examiners hate it when kids take ages, because they run late and miss their lunch break. I do a role-play and he asks me if they will take points off you. I say no. He’s forgotten and sits and thinks (I exit to get a drink), then goes to have a look at the book. He comes back and tries again, but still can’t remember. I come back in and ask him if he’s crying – ‘No crying, you’re still doing good’. He tells himself what the notes are as I recount a story from the other day, where an old lady ran me 20 minutes late because she was so slow. I dramatise the situation to help Adrian understand that he needs to be more prompt with the responses (bear that in mind). I help him with the notes descending left hand and the fingering ascending. I suggest that he makes a note in his book that he needs to practise G harmonic minor, which he does. I ask him E-flat Major hands together with crescendo/decrescendo. I review the process while demonstrating. I ask him to do it in octave segments with dynamics like I did. We play in unison as I coach him, then without stopping as I coach him. Then I ask him to play faster while I provide the bass (he does well). I ask him to stand up and jump up and down 5 times (he does), and then I ask him to play faster. As he plays I say, ‘You’re an athlete!’
he finishes I hold his arms up and shout, ‘Gold for Australia!’ Jane laughs and Adrian seems pleased. I dramatise being an athlete at the start of the race and not dawdling and Adrian laughs. I say that we’ve come up to finishing, and Adrian says, ‘Well we did good’ and I agree. I ask him to play B Major staccato right hand (good, that’s a lovely technique). I ask him to play B Major in contrary motion (too slow) and he speeds up (good). Staccato double thirds left hand – ‘that’s nice, maybe go a bit slower and deeper … come one throw the arms like a shot-putter’. E-flat Major with the left hand is very slow, so I put the metronome and he refers to the book. I suggest that if he can’t handle the required speed right now, practise in octave segments (I demonstrate). As we finish, I ask him to focus on getting the technical work ‘up to scratch’. I say that he is about a B level with the technical work, but if he wants an A or an A+, ‘you’d better get moving’. He says he wants an A++. Oliver asks the boys to say thank you, which they do and Adrian says, ‘Everything that he did good today was videoed’.

Lesson 21: 27 July 2014

Reviewed 6 January 2015

- The lesson starts with Adrian commenting that he has to use the ‘wooden’ second piano, due to a broken key. I mention to Adrian that his exam is probably in about four weeks (Adrian – ‘That’s a whole month!’) I say, ‘Still plenty of time, but not time to (wriggle around) muck around’. I ask the boys what they’ve been doing today – watching Commonwealth Games and waking up late because of a work party at Bribie Island. Adrian mentions that he has only done the first line of the cadenza and Jane suggests that he show me the alignment part that we’ve been working on in previous weeks. He says he doesn’t ‘get that’ and I say they are demisemiquavers, before demonstrating hands together. He tries the hands together slowly as I watch and coach him with the fingering (come inside the blacks right hand). I refer to the names of the left hand scales as he plays, also right-hand scales starting on different notes. I ask him if he wants to write in any fingering and he takes the pencil as I walk over and smile at Neil (You’ve been doing good lately – Yeah). Adrian asks me to clarify something regarding the way that the tutti part is written. He also asks why does the cadenza has no bar lines, and why is the sharp no carried over when the clef is changed. We laugh as I say in a funny voice, ‘Just play a G#! OK?’ I ask him what he likes about piano playing. He points to Neil and answers, ‘Same as him’ (Neil
answered, ‘It’s fun’, earlier in the lesson. I say, ‘Oh, that’s good’). I take the music, saying, ‘Can I have a go?’ and sit down at the first piano. Adrian asks me why it’s called a cadenza (I say it’s German). I play the hands together mostly fluent, saying it’s hard to play with a missing key. Adrian smiles and suggests we superglue it back on; both boys laugh. I point out that the first part of the cadenza is ‘just’ a broken A7 chord, and he shows me another instance of the A7 chord later in the cadenza. I help fix up a couple of notes there too. I go on to coach him with the rhythm – I sit down, playing and counting the quaver subdivisions. As he practises, I ask Jane if she got my email. She tells me she’s not very well. I can hear that he is still rushing the ascending scale so I say try again, and sit down at the first piano, playing it with him in unison while counting the rhythmic subdivisions. He can hear that it doesn’t ‘work out’, so he asks me to show him again, which I do while counting the main beats only. We play again in unison as I count, and he is correct this time (Good boy). I ask him to either play a trill or the ‘ossia’, which I demonstrate. He says he doesn’t want to play the ‘ossia’, so I say that perhaps he can play it in the future, when he eventually plays in Townsville at the Concerto competition. He is playing the broken chord section very well this week – ‘Adrian! What’s happened?’ Jane and Neil are discussing how they could travel to Townsville as Adrian continues to play. Mid-bar, I come over gently take his right forearm off the piano and it’s amazing how loose it looks on camera. I say, ‘Feels easy doesn’t it? Good boy’ and he continues to play. I mention to Jane that he has really improved this section and she agrees. It really is quite a marked improvement and it looks very easy for him. Thereafter, there is brief conversation regarding how much food they all ate at the party the day before. Adrian (and Neil – 30 spring rolls) tells me he had 13 or 14 meatballs, 5 whiting fillets, two cans of coke, lots of lollies, a packet of M&M’s and some cake. The boys are shouting competitively by now. I ask why I wasn’t invited (Adrian – because you knew nobody) and Jane laughs. Adrian sits down and starts playing again while I look at the score, trying to find where he is. After a while, he stops and I say, ‘Wow, that sounds awesome, far out’. He starts playing the section that starts with right hand D Major broken chords and I ask him what bar that is. We start playing in ensemble from there – it’s good, but he is having trouble maintain the tempo when he comes to the next section where the left hand has broken chords. Nonetheless, we carry on and he is better from thereafter, though I sense the tempo is increasing. We play until the cadenza, at which point Adrian starts jumping up and down, cheering, and of course I
do too. He says, ‘We did half the piece!’ I say, ‘You must be feeling so proud’. It really is wonderful to watch. Neil says he is feeling proud too – ‘I’m proud of my brother’. Jane and Neil are talking about what a great compliment that is (‘You are so kind to him, good boy Neil’). I say to Adrian, ‘Listen, that’s awesome mate, well done’, before beginning to play the left hand of the section he was having trouble with – ‘You need faster and looser rotation (there)’. Adrian plays the left hand and I say that’s better, before standing next to him and doing a three-note gestural fragments (he imitates) and then adding a note to make a four-note gestural fragment (he imitates) and then he copies after I do an eight-note gestural fragment. I say, ‘That’s better, the secret to anything like that is not to get stuck on the note (gestures) … keep moving over them’ and he paraphrases, ‘So keep moving over them because sometimes you get stuck’. I explain that that’s the whole idea of those drills (that we just did), where you play the note as you shift (I demonstrate). Adrian imitates me as we go back to two notes, and then three (now you just catch it – good boy), then four. I say, ‘So feel like the movement (gestures) is sort of generate from your back and out through your arms (he plays the full bar, joining all gestural fragments together) … Good Adrian, well done, OK?’ He shows me in the score where he would apply the same idea. As I sit down, I explain that it’s fairly easy to get the left hand working well, but when it comes to adding hands together, ‘people usually go …’ I demonstrate clumsily and heavy and then lightly, mentioning that he can leave out the right-hand octaves if necessary (just do the top notes). It’s interesting to watch him ‘playing’ on the piano stool as I do in real time. I mention that it might be a good ‘in between’ step at the very least. Adrian sits down and plays and does find the single notes easier. He also tries the octaves. I explain that the better option would be less notes, but an easier delivery. I dramatise, saying, ‘The tighter the muscles becomes, the slower it becomes’. Adrian starts playing again and I ask him if it feels better. He says, ‘Yes’. He starts playing the next section, having a little trouble controlling the pace. I sit down and demonstrate, asking him to let his upper arm ‘wobble’ a little too. I ask him to gently rest his hand just above my left elbow in order to feel how the upper arm rotates a little in sympathy as the hand is playing. He smiles and says, ‘Oh’. I show him what it feels like when ‘someone doesn’t rotate properly’, i.e. they use fingers in isolation, without the support of the rest of the arm. I say, ‘See how it’s very still?’ Adrian points out that it sounds different too, and I agree. He sits down at the second piano and plays that same fragment of the left hand, to which I say, ‘It’s
better’. As I stand beside him, I ask him to copy a nine-note gestural fragment, but he is rotating too quickly, thereby compacting the time between notes seven, eight and nine. He continues to experiment and then I ask him to reduce the number of notes again – ‘Practise fast, but in smaller sections’. He tries again. I explain that he is eliminating a whole rotation, causing the eighth note of the nine-note fragment not to sound. He smiles and mentions something to Neil (inaudible) before I ask him to copy me after I play and five-note gestural fragment, throwing my arm to the right, in the direction of travel. He continues to imitate me as we repeat the sequence again and again. I ask him to pause on the eighth note before rotating back to the left for the ninth note, which he does. He avoids pausing between notes eight and nine, but I explain that the rotation between notes seven and eight is too quick. He tries again, this time with success. The following time he stumbles between notes seven and eight again. I say, ‘Did you hear that?’ He holds up his right hand index finger, saying, ‘Yep’. We all laugh. Adrian smiles as I draw attention to ‘Professor Chan’ becoming more aware of how to achieve a successful outcome independently. Jane says, ‘So cute hey?’ I say, ‘I got that! Don’t tell me!’ It really is very endearing. I suggest that Adrian could be a professor of music when he grows up. As he keeps trying, he playfully says ‘good/yes’ or ‘no/wrong’ depending on his success rate. After a short while, I start to join in. Thereafter I say, ‘You need to do some partial practice and chaining there. You would chain each group to the next … do you know what I mean by that?’ Adrian says, ‘Yeah, got that’. I say, ‘You sure?’ Both boys say, ‘Got that!’ in unison while sticking their index finger up. It’s a funny moment. Jane suggests that he put an asterisk on the score, but Adrian turns to her and says, ‘Got it Mum’. I give Adrian a pencil and suggest that he cross out the bottom notes of the right-hand octaves covered earlier in the lesson. Jane asks me to clarify if he should drop out the bottom note of the octave to reduce the stiffness and I agree. While Adrian is writing, I sit down at the first piano and show Neil and Jane that same technique would apply to the left hand of Neil’s piece *Grasshoppers’ Wedding*. I start playing the left hand of the Haydn as a comparison before showing (and slightly dramatising) Neil how most people might play it; both boys laugh. As I say, ‘It starts to slow down the more stiff you get’, Adrian starts playing the left hand of his piece as I play the left hand of Neil’s piece. I then start playing the left hand of the Chopin *Etude in F Minor* (as I did last week) and I ask Adrian to put his hand on my arm, just above the elbow so he could feel how active my whole arm is, not just the fingers; ‘it’s really athletic’.
Adrian shouts, ‘That’s Radioactive!’ (?) Jane asks him to stop shouting. I ask them if they have been studying their general knowledge (yes) and I ask to hear the Swan Lake duet. Neil asks when they will ‘do’ Swan Lake (31 August) and I say that they will also play at City Hall. Neil says that Adrian hasn’t been practising Swan Lake. Jane asks him to ‘just do it’ and remember the expression. Adrian plays the primo part with beautiful expressive phrasing. I take out the music, sit at the second piano and ask him to start again because I want to ‘give you some tips’. I ask him to aim for ‘an oboe’ sound with the first note of the right hand, playing it with a follow-through movement of the whole arm. He sits down, says, ‘Oh, like this’, and plays the first note E with the right hand. I gesture while saying, ‘Yeah, hear that ring in the sound?’ He says, ‘You do this’ and shows me the gestural movement on the top of the lid. I gesture and say, ‘Yeah, you bring the elbow up, you’re such a clever kid’. He does a fist pump, saying, ‘I’m clever’. I then show him what happens to the sound when the key is played without the follow-through movement. Adrian likens that movement to a ‘straight rectangle’, probably meaning that it doesn’t curve around like the first one. I suggest that perhaps it’s my imagination that there are two different tone qualities, but it is very clear on camera that the sounds are indeed quite different. He plays the right hand again with beautiful gestural flow, but the fingers are overlapping. After he corrects that, I ask him (and demonstrate) if he can play with a bit more subtlety in the tips of the fingers. He asks me what that means. Rather than using words, I ask him to copy me, as he gently touch his face with his fingertips – ‘gently, like a feather … now put that into the keys’. He plays beautifully, and I say, ‘That’s it, it’s a different quality’. I turn to Jane and ask, ‘Can you hear that?’ and she says yes. I say and gesture, ‘It’s just got more colour in the sound … rather than getting louder, it sounds more human’. Adrian says ‘Watercolour!’ I ask him if he can apply the same idea to the end of the phrase – he tries a few times, before I ask him to copy me in playing a three-note gestural fragment, before adding the next note saying, ‘roll back to there’ and then the full five-note gestural fragment saying, ‘roll up slowly’ (on the last note) – ‘That’s it’. I then take him through the process again because he ‘dipped out’ on the F. He gives himself a small fist pump when I tell him it’s better. He copies me again, but I say it’s too loud on the C; he smiles. I play it again and he copies very well this time. I say, ‘It’s like trying to mix the perfect cake, (I gesture as I speak) … you have to get the icing just right’. He says, ‘Oh yeah, if you don’t have any caramel or chocolate sprinkles’. I do an interesting comparison of how two different sounding
phrases would translate if their dynamic swells were ‘sung’. I say, ‘it’s got the inflection’ and Adrian says, ‘It sounds ouchy’. I point out that if one were to sing the phrase with a sudden surge in the dynamic level, it would sound unusual, and so we would avoid that when playing the piano too. I suggest that we go from the beginning, showing him that he has a 4 beat rest and how the two parts will intersect (Oh). Jane adjusts his music. On the first attempt with me he augments the rhythm so I play and count for him before restarting. We play the duet together from the beginning as Neil conducts in the background. Adrian does quite well, though his rhythm in the middle section is not correct yet and he speeds up during the final page. I interrupt, showing him how his part should sound while counting the beat subdivisions expressively. I ask him to start from bar 27, which he does, albeit without employing expressive tonal the slurs. I say, ‘Are you really going to play like that though?’ referring to the clipped sound, caused by a quick ascent of the second half of the two-note chord slur. Jane says ‘Adrian, make it more expressive’. I demonstrate and he tries again, this time with a better sense of shape on the two-note slur. I say, ‘Yeah, that’s better, but can you go like this though …’ as I let both hands free-fall into the keys. He smiles and copies me. I say, ‘And now go …’ and I free-fall, but I land on the actual notes this time. He copies me and I ask him to drop faster. He copies me and then I say, ‘Now let your limbs go free on impact’. He does well with this, so I demonstrate again, this time saying on the way up, ‘It’s just a gentle lift’. He imitates (‘That’s good’) before I then ask him to slur the next three notes, ‘Now there, you’ll need to do legato’. Basically I am helping him review the gestural movement for a two-note slur followed by a four-note slur, albeit with chords instead of single notes. I direct him to use 2-1 on G#-B, before walking over to show him, ‘That way you can get the top legato’. He plays the phrase very well, and I ask him to write the revised fingering in. Adrian starts shouting, looking for his pencil and eventually finding it. I say that Neil asks too many questions and Adrian shouts too much. As he writes, I sing and gesticulate the melody saying, ‘So we don’t want (sings) … We want (sings)’ I say, ‘It’s supposed to be a ballet’, and I contrast the two phrases again, this time singing and ‘dancing’ the phrases with my whole body, not just the arms. Oliver comes in and I mention that I heard he had a big night. Adrian said that Oliver drank beer. We then move to the left hand and I ask him to use 4-2 on B-D, and he asks me why (so you can get legato on C#-E). He says he thought we were doing the right hand and I say you were too busy talking about beer. In the score I write indications for ‘down, up,
then roll to the right’, before gesticulating them, but he suggests I say, ‘down, up, then over’, instead. As I stand beside him, I sing and play the phrase rhythmically true this time, ‘down, up, roll to the right’. I ask him to try – he says, ‘down, up, roll to the right’ before starting. I remind him to start on the second finger before helping him to move the chair further to the right. He says, ‘Like this?’ and he plays the phrase. I say, ‘Good’, but suggest that he join the first two notes legato too, which he does. However, as I sit at the first piano to demonstrate ‘the effect’, he begins segmenting the phrase again. I demonstrate again, asking him to lift off the two-note slur gently, ‘otherwise is sounds like a hiccup’. He tries, and I demonstrate again, reminding him to do the second four-note phrase legato. He does better this time. I say, ‘that’s it, now when you get to that one (the first note of the second phrase) don’t go (plays stiffly) and freeze … (plays with rounded elbow gesture) … let go’ He does well! I ask him if I have talked to him about the McGurk effect (no) so I suggest that they look it up on YouTube, going on to briefly demonstrate and explain (Neil seems to have heard the concept before). I suggest that even though we aren’t vocalising in this context, we can use a similar idea in the way that the seeing the gestural activity of the arms can influence how the phrases might sound to the listener. I say, ‘The way you see something can influence how it sounds’ and I demonstrate how using jerky movements makes the phrases sound jerky. I go on to show him how fluid movements make the phrases sound fluid, and I play the passage in slow motion, describing the gestural activity in real time. Adrian nods his head and says, ‘OK’. I ask him to try as I demonstrate again. I play the first two-note slur, pausing briefly to say, ‘loosen’, and he says, ‘roll through’ as I continue. He tries well, though not adding the slur between the upbeat E and the F#, so I demonstrate again, saying, ‘roll towards that note’ as I employ double rotary movement. He’s a bit confused, so I say, ‘Roll to the left (I play E) … then double rotation to the right (I play F#)’. I ask him why we would use double rotation to the right. While his response is unclear, it is clear when he contrasts the two options that he understands that the double rotary movement create volume with an unforced sound. I paraphrase, saying, ‘Otherwise you get this sort of stiff sound’ and he says, ‘Roll more!’ As I illustrate using body movement and gesture, I go on to say, ‘So, if you rotate to the opposite (side) you get more direction, more momentum when you roll in the direction’ It seems a bit unclear, but Adrian seems to understand, as he says, ‘And you get a better sound’. I say (and play), ‘Yeah, you don’t get a pressed sound’. While Adrian continues to experiment, I ask Jane if she
can what I mean and she says, ‘Yeah, that’s true’. I start to illustrate the gestural activity of the arms with my whole body before going to his piano and talking him through it: ‘Play in here (E), rotate left, rotate right (F#), come up slowly so it doesn’t hiccup (E), go down quickly (C#), relax, roll to the right (DEF#). Jane clarifies, ‘so it’s a double rotation’ and Adrian starts jumping with excitement. I say, ‘It’s very sporty’ and Jane asks Adrian if he needs to write down double rotation in the score. I go over and talk Adrian through it again, but this time he says it with me. I ask him to try again, but he starts playing on the edge of the white notes, making it hard to use legato and therefore, double rotation. I explain that if he does that, he ‘won’t be able to roll’, so I adjust his hands before he tries again. He does the first phrase well, but I then say that he will need to come up higher as he finishes the two-note slur so that he has ‘more distance to drop’, and therefore able to create more volume. He plays well. I say, ‘Excellent, see how that works?’ as Adrian smiles and waves his arms up and down. He says, ‘I did very well on my concerto’ (?) and I say, ‘Expression is very functional (Adrian – It is, yes), it’s got little to do with music … it’s more about what movements you might do (Yeah) … Of course it is sort of spiritual (Yeah got that), but there’s no point going (I dramatise being expressive while banging)’ Adrian says, ‘Yeah, got that because there’s no point’. I ask him to watch as I sit down. Oliver and Jane ask him to watch and concentrate respectively. I play the phrase twice, asking him, ‘You see that?’ I ask him to move out of the way so his parents can see. I play the phrases again, first with expressive gesture and then without, pointing out the difference in sound quality. Adrian corrects me – ‘Do you care that there’s a D there?’ I say it doesn’t matter because you won’t hear it anyway. I say, ‘That gives you a bit of a head’s up, because we’re going to start rehearsals soon’ and Jane asks him if he needs to write down double rotation as a reminder. I agree and he goes and finds the pencil. Jane asks me, ‘Mark, how about the speed? Does he play too fast?’ I say that he does on the last page and I sing the passage in time. Jane asks Adrian if he needs to show me some melodic and harmonic minor scales – I say, ‘Yes’. He sits down and ‘warms-up’ as I get the technical workbook. I sit down and ask him to move the seat back, because, ‘I can’t hear the left hand’. Jane gets up to shift it for him and he says, ‘I can do it Mum! No, No’. I say, ‘Let him do it’. I tell him, ‘That’s too far Adrian, come on be reasonable, you want to be sitting on the front quarter to third, so that your body can tilt forward gently from the hips … head up, that’s better’. Oliver says, ‘Be serious’. He plays C harmonic minor, but I say that it sounds too slow. I ask him
if he has memorised all the metronome speeds and he lists them off – ‘I can always count on you to memorise stuff’ (Oliver laughs). I put the metronome on; he says 84 or higher, but I say it’s better if you play at 84 and maintain clarity in the left hand (‘play deeper in the left hand’). I stand up, saying, ‘The speed is fine, but you’ve forgotten all your technique’. I demonstrate, saying, ‘You’re doing a lot of movement with your body, but what all the pronation to help with your thumb passing?’ We swap places and I ask for a nice clear sound. He plays ascending and I say that’s a better sound. He plays ascending again, but I interrupt him, saying that some notes are inaudible and others are bumpy – ‘Stop moving around and use your arms’. I show him what I’m looking for first at the piano and then by ‘playing’ his shoulder, saying, ‘This is what you’re doing’. I’m not sure he got much out of it, but he did seem to improve the touch when ascending. As he descends, I ask him for a high elbow. I ask him to listen and look very carefully: ‘Lift the elbow while you pronate the thumb under … pronation is when you roll the forearm inwards’. I demonstrate what he is doing (Adrian – Jumping!) saying, ‘And I can bumps in the tone because of that’. I ask him to try again from the top to the bottom, which he does – ‘That’s a little bit better, now make sure your third and fourth fingers don’t overlap’. He plays descending again, and I walk over, reminding him that, ‘this upper arm muscle must stay switched on’. He says, ‘Like this? Feel now – like this?’ I check his upper arm saying, ‘You need to eat more, I can barely feel anything’ and he laughs. I ask him (and demonstrate) not to drop ‘everything’ after the thumb passing left-hand descending. I remind him to play on the very tip of his thumb – ‘If you play on the very tip of your thumb the elbow …’ He says that he always goes like that (showing me a pressed wrist and a flat thumb) and I say, ‘No, don’t do that, because that causes the bump’. He plays descending again and I say, ‘That’s a little bit better, but 3 and 4 are Siamese twin fingers (Adrian – I don’t like 3 and 4 because I can’t control) … so you need to make sure they don’t overlap’. I ask him to try again, guiding his elbow, saying, ‘That’s good with the fingers now, but you’ve gone dropping on the thumb, instead of the diagonal’. I guide his elbow, saying ‘Don’t stiffen your wrist’. He asks me ‘here’ for the thumb and I agree, ‘right on the tip … if you do that, this (the elbow) will come out, and as your turn, don’t switch off the muscles’. He is doing better, but I interrupt and say, ‘When you want to roll under the 4, you’ll need to pronate more than when you want to roll under the 3’. He plays again, and I encourage him to keep the upper arm and elbow activated, ‘That’s better’. I say that
he has clearly speed them up, but the actual sound isn’t as good as when you do them slowly. Adrian proudly tells me that he practised all his harmonics, melodies and arpeggios just this morning. I remind him that his exam is coming up (Adrian – in one month) and these scales are not that good (I have time, I have time) … Well do you? Do you want an A or an A+ or a B+? He says, A++ and I say well you won’t get an A++ with those scales like that. Jane says, ‘The scales are very important, be more serious’. Adrian asks me if that’s my technical book. Jane asks me if the speed is too slow. I say that he has concentrated on getting the scales faster, but in the process, he has forgotten about all the small adjustments that help to unify the sound. I sit down and demonstrate C harmonic minor twice more, first even and then bumpy. I ask him to look at my upper body and feel my upper arm (‘It didn’t really turn off’) and then I show him what he is doing (‘Oh, turning off’). I say, ‘It’s turning on and off and on and off and that’s why you’re getting bumps. A good scale will be at the required speed, but it will also integrate elements of posture and muscles, so that the sound is not all lumpy’. Adrian nods and asks me if I can trill with 3 and 4 really fast, and seems impressed with my effort. He says that they are ‘the same joint’, but I say that doesn’t mean they can’t be trained, but they will perhaps never be quite as good as 2 and 3’. He says, ‘Thanks Mark’, and I say, ‘You’re welcome’.

Lesson 22: 10 August 2014

Reviewed 8 January 2015

- The lesson starts with Adrian and Neil playing the Swan Lake duet together; Jane watches on (in view). It sounds quite good, though Adrian isn’t quite together, particularly on the final page, as Neil points out. I say, ‘That’s pretty good guys, well done … now that I’ve heard it, can we go through it again and I will give you some direction’ (Yes). I ask them to start again, telling them they have a nice tone and a good tempo (Adrian tells me its MM = 90). I mention that I’m going to see Swan Lake in a couple of weeks. Adrian asks me if it’s a performance (?) The first section goes well, but Adrian stops playing and turns to looks at me. Neil mentions that Adrian is holding a note too long and that is causing him not to be able to sound his note, so I suggest to Adrian leaves out that particular note. Neil seems to think that it applies to him to, so I have to tell him to still play his D. Jane moves another piano stool for Neil to sit on so that he has more room and he adjusts the height. There is a bit of conversation regarding the iPad being set in Chinese. I mention that I have had
yum cha twice this week and that Wendy received the third prize in the Junior Championship at the Gold Coast Eisteddfod. Adrian asks me how Andrew went and seemed pleased that he did well. He asks me, ‘What do you win?’ When I tell him a trophy – ‘Oh cool’. Jane says, ‘Adrian, you need to work hard’. I say, ‘Just be inspired’. Adrian asks me about the triplets in Neil’s part and Neil and I both work to explain it to him. We then start rehearsing the middle section, helping Adrian with the upbeat. It takes about 3 or 4 attempts but we get there. I stand beside them, counting and conducting as they continue to the end. Adrian looks at me, and smiles – ‘Yeah, good guys … that’s much better’. At Neil’s instigation, we discuss how both boys might bring their hands off the keys at the same time, suggesting (and then demonstrating) that Adrian extend the length of his final note. I ask (and then demonstrate) Neil to be a bit stronger on the last note. I tell the boys about the two possible endings for the ballet, and suggest that their ‘version’ will be the happy one (That’s good guys). I ask Adrian to be a bit stronger ‘over here’ (because he has the main part) and he tells me it’s hard to stay strong. Using mostly demonstration and not many words, I ask him to free fall quicker from a greater height (with subsequent follow-through movement) when playing the stronger chords. He tries the right hand and I say, ‘Yeah, make sure you lift and drop’ but I can see that there is not much follow-through motion here. He points to the score, telling me that it’s hard to play the last notes of phrase loud, but I say, ‘That’s OK, it’s in the middle of the bar anyway’. I go on to demonstrate where the apex of the phrase is, by singing and playing, ‘The main one, then a bit less’ (Oh). Adrian seems a bit confused where to play strong with a subsequent part, and Neil points to the score suggesting, ‘Strong-weak-strong-weak’. I agree, coaching and vocalising with down-up gestures. Adrian asks me what he should do when having the two E’s and I show him, playing the second E softer. He tries and does well with the overall concept, but I can see that he is not releasing his wrist on impact. He points to the score and asks, ‘Same with there?’ (Yeah). He plays that particular spot, before I play, asking him if he can ‘play with more crystal in the sound … can you bring that note out?’ (referring to the ring in the top note). I see Jane in the background ‘playing’. I ask him to play with not as much thumb (if you can) and more top, ‘Good boy’. He points and asks, ‘How about here?’ I suggest that he aim for a soft thumb muscle, but a firm tip of the fifth finger. After he tries, I take his hand and summarise that when voicing, you have a softening of the muscles on one side and a firming on the other, all within the down-up gesture.
of loud-soft. I mention that I can sense a change of attitude – ‘You’re working really nicely together, instead of mucking around’. I put out that while Adrian has the main part, Neil comes in with a lovely cello melody. I ask them to pick it up from bar 19, asking them to count themselves in. They play really well together, and I coach them (using gesture) with the ensemble as they share the melodic material. I ask Adrian to use ‘lots of bright top’. Adrian stands, smiles and claps as I say, ‘Yeah, that’s good, I’m getting shivers’. Neil smiles and Adrian says that his school says they shouldn’t clap themselves (?) I ask the boys if they heard … I start expressive gesturing, conducting and singing the melodic interplay, ‘So you’re talking to each other’. Adrian says, ‘But it’s not an invention’ (No, it’s not), presumably referring to a previous lesson on his Bach Invention. I sit down at the second piano and suggest that Adrian aim for a more crystal sound at bar 19, ‘more ping in the sound’. He tries, and I say, ‘Not as much in the left, more in the right’. Interesting, he seems to have greater flexibility of the wrist and more follow-through movement than earlier. I mention that that is called voicing, and I demonstrate what it sounds like when both hands are of equal level and when the right hand is louder. He says, ‘That is what I call red-stone’. I ask him what he means. He seems reluctant to say at first, but then he says it’s a jewel. I say, ‘Oh, a red-stone sound … so it’s very bright and rich’ before playing again. Adrian then mentions ‘emerald’ before Jane becomes annoyed and Neil says to stop talking about Minecraft (?) I say that I like that idea, and he further mentions that emerald is a rounded sound … and sapphire. I say, ‘Well let’s move on’ and ask the boys to play from bar 19. I count the boys in, saying, ‘1 2 3 and drop’. Adrian uses a preparatory movement on the fourth beat and drops into the keys beautifully on the next beat. The tone is good and voicing works well here. When they are finished, I say, ‘OK, good guys, that didn’t give me a shiver though, because you were both playing separately and not together … it sounded like you were getting too fast … it just sounded like you weren’t listening to each other anymore, that was my impression. Can you try again?’ Neil smiles and Adrian says, ‘Of course’. In retrospect, I thought it sounded quite good. I say, ‘Try and listen to each other’s parts and blend together’. (Adrian – Oh, OK). I notice that Jane is recording on the iPad and I say, ‘Let’s go again, bar 19’. Adrian takes his time and points to the score. I say, ‘Go for the red-eye sound, and you (Neil), support him … don’t take over, just support his melody’. The boys start from bar 19 and play to the end. When they finish I say, ‘That was actually better (?) … I did feel that as though you (Neil) were going a
bit too slow at times … don’t be offended, I still think you were good’ and I ask Neil to stand up so, ‘I can show you what I want you to do’. I play with Adrian, demonstrating (and gesturing) crescendo and decrescendo to support Adrian’s melody and also to shape the triplets (otherwise it stops it from flowing). I’m really asking for a duple feel here, softening the triplets but still keeping in time. I ask Adrian to start again with me. We play together quite well and I say, ‘Show the audience’, but as Adrian turns the page, the music fall on to the keys; we all laugh. I stand up and we swap places. Jane says something in Neil’s ear and I say, ‘Just because I give you criticism doesn’t mean you’re hopeless. If you don’t do any practice though, that’s a different story … I can tell you’ve done your best’. All the while, Adrian is pointing to the score and ‘coaching’ himself, saying, ‘Oh, that’s his last beat’. I ask them to start from bar 19, saying to Adrian, ‘Have you got your oboe ready?’ He seems confused, so Neil and I remind him that in the orchestra, that would be the instrument playing. Though he says, ‘Oh’, I still don’t think he gets it because when I say, ‘So you’ve got to get that sort of sound’, he then says, ‘So it blends in with the oboe’ (?) Neil asks if the piano is like 21 instruments (or something) and I agree, saying, ‘It’s like a whole orchestra, so you try and get a different colour in each register’. Adrian says, ‘21?’ while I go on to say (and sing) that Neil has the cello melody against ‘his’ oboe, but when you’ve got the … (I sing the triplets) you don’t go (I sing over articulating the triplets). Both boys laugh and Adrian says, ‘That’s squeaking’. I say, ‘It’s like a blanket of sound that the melody sits on top of’. I ask them to start playing from bar 19, coaching them, pushing Neil forwards and generally using gesture, vocalisation and directing the balance between parts – it does sound good now. When they finish, I say, ‘I got shivers again, which means the sound is very sophisticated … it sounds like it’s ‘fitting’ (I fit my hands together). When I get goosebumps like that, I can tell it’s good. (Neil – Yay/Adrian – Really?) Jane agrees that it sounds very different. I say that it sounds blended rather than each part ‘fighting with each other’ and I suggest that if listen to the recording when they get home, they’ll see what I mean. I say, ‘That’s good guys’, and Adrian starts showing me that he can’t yet stretch an octave (?) I ask them if they if they can start again now; ‘It’s important to have a good ending, a good middle and a good beginning’ (Adrian – that’s all of it). They start again but I interrupt, saying that I would like to work on Adrian’s tonal shaping. I demonstrate the right-hand melodic line, pointing out that the C’s are softer. I then play it again, saying, ‘If you go … (I overplay the C’s) it sort of … it
makes it jagged instead of ... when you’re singing you wouldn’t go (I start singing and compare 2 examples”). Adrian says, ‘Oh flowing’. I say, ‘Yeah, so not every note needs to be loud’ and I mention to play the C’s ‘underneath’ (I think I see high/low gestures here too, but the view is obstructed by Adrian standing, though I can see a reflection in the piano). I ask him to try (OK); he does it. Then I ask him to roll ... (I play the last bit of the phrase). He tries and I ask him not to ... (I play it stilted and then more gestural). I show him again, starting soft, then loud on C, then softer (I talk him through it). He plays again, but starts too loud on the A. We continue to experiment back and forth, (‘your A is loud ... make your C louder than your A’... refining the tonal shape. I ask him what gesture he used ‘to do that’. He shows me with his hand (‘like this’) and I say, ‘a rotary movement’. Neil says that Adrian is using his thumb on the A. I say and demonstrate, ‘Yeah, that’s OK, but if you go down on your thumb, you’ll have a heavy sound, but if you go up on the thumb and then down on the C ... you see what I mean, you can have a light sound on the C, depends on which way you move it’. Adrian says he finds it easier to play the thumb on the A, and I say, ‘That’s fine, just use an upward movement for the thumb, and then roll across for the C’. He says, ‘Instead of going ...’ and he rolls quickly to the thumb and then ‘corrects’ himself, using a slower, upward movement towards the thumb (softer) and then a quicker downward movement towards the thumb (louder). I agree, saying, ‘Exactly, and that’s how you get a louder sound there’. I ask him to try again, first demonstrating and talking him through the movements for last six notes of the phrase – ‘Up roll and then roll through’. He does it well – ‘That was better; that was better than before’ (I think that I felt the C wasn’t as loud as it could be here, though it sounds quite good in retrospect). I review the up movement on the A and the downward movement on the C (‘come up here and then drop your way through’). He tries, but then I demonstrate again – ‘Come down on this note (E), and then come up here (A), and roll fast there (C)’. He does it well, so I ask the boys to add the parts together again – ‘Good guys’. Neil says ‘from the beginning? (Yep)’ They play again, but Neil starts too slowly and Adrian’s first phrase could have been better (I shake no and nod yes, before asking him to try again at the end of the second phrase – ‘that’s better’). I stop them at bar 21 and Adrian asks me how to ‘roll’ at the end of the phrase when the hands are played together. I demonstrate, saying, ‘The same way’. On the second time, I say and play, ‘Up down and then roll through’. I say (and demonstrate), ‘As you come to that C though, you’re not actually letting go ... let go
of your muscles in the forearm’. He tries again, and then I help him, taking control of
his forearm, guiding the direction and shaking his forearm loose on the E (‘Let
gooooooo, and then start rolling). Adrian touches his upper arm and says that he
thought that was his forearm. I say, ‘No, this is your forearm’, he says, ‘Well what’s
this called?’ and I say, ‘Upper arm’. (Oh, this is your forearm). I ask him to try again.
He does, but is still not letting go of the wrist on impact with the E. He plays again
and I shake his forearm as he plays the E, saying, ‘Let go of everything below the
elbow (he points to his elbow saying that’s here) … yeah, let go of all those muscles,
and then turn then back on (shows) as you come up to roll’. I say, ‘That’s it, try
again’. He says, ‘That means your upper arm muscles are always on’, but I say, ‘Well
sometimes it comes off as well, but … (Oh)’ He tries again, and I say, ‘Now let
everything go here, and turn it all back on as you roll … Good boy, you experiment’.
He asks me what to do between F and C. I experiment, saying, ‘There would be a
slight pivot to the right, in order to …’ He asks me if he should go down as he plays
the thumb of F and I say, ‘That’s a good idea … that’s lovely mate’. He plays and
says, ‘Down and then back up’. Neil reminds him ‘when you’re going down, don’t go
down too fast’. I say, ‘Yeah, if you go down too fast, you’ll get a bangy sound …
that’s nice … you’re really learning’ (Neil – yeah). Adrian stands and waves his arms,
and I say, ‘It sounds more real, rather than … I get louder, I get softer … it actually
sounds like something real (I start singing the last part of the phrase expressively) …
If a swan was singing, please don’t kill me (I sing ‘please don’t kill me’) … like he’s
begging … you don’t go (I sang la-da-da-da in a flat voice – oh whatever/gunshot/sorry) … Make it real’. Both boys laugh. I say that we can still have
fun in the lessons, but it’s good to see you (both) being a bit more serious. I
demonstrate and ask Neil to bring out his bass line, singing and using expressive
gesture in the process (‘That’s lovely Neil … really nice’). I ask them to start again,
pointing out that ‘when we get there’ I want to coach (I demonstrate) Adrian with his
timing (‘It’s just a bit out there’). Adrian says, ‘Oh’. Adrian asks me how to not slur A
to B at the beginning of the middle section and I say, ‘Oh, don’t worry, just slur it,
honestly’. He plays the two notes again and I say, ‘I’d slur it’. They start playing from
the beginning again, (I exit) but stop because Adrian put in ‘the D’ (stop elbowing
me). I come back in and ask how it’s going (good), I start conducting (not too slow)
and point out that they’re not together. I put a hand on each shoulder, sing and tap
them both (‘You’ve got to be both together there’) They start again and I say, ‘Still
feel the music but listen as well … much better guys, now bass’. I continue to coach
them using expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation (bright, golden
sound), but I don’t think it is quite as good as before. Nonetheless, I say, ‘That’s good
… I’ll hear it again another time, that’s awesome. Neil mentions the pedal on their
piano squeaks, and I suggest trying some oil. I say to Jane, ‘That’s good’ and she says
that she started to push them. Neil disagrees, saying, ‘No, we started to push
ourselves’. Jane asks me if it’s the right speed and I agree with MM = 90. Adrian
shows me his metronome, saying that he prefers to put it into 4/4 time. I suggest that
minim = 45 might be a good option, explaining that it will then be felt in 2’s instead
of 4’s. I ask Adrian is getting excited about his exam. He tells me that yesterday he
did all of his scales. I ask them if they were good, and could I hear a couple. He says
that he sped them up and tried his best, practising octave by octave. I suggest that he
could aim for an A+, (Oh cool) maybe this time, maybe next time; ‘you want to aim
for the best result you can’. I ask him to play E Major right hand softly; he does. I ask
him to use a bit more sound and he says that I asked for soft (‘I know, but …’) I say,
‘Definitely improved, and definitely improved … remember it’s not like a (I show a
hop) … it’s a swingy swingy … everything’s adjusting and swinging (I gesticulate my
arm)’. I demonstrate and remind him to roll, pivot and keep the upper arm muscles
switched on – ‘yeah that’s better’. He shows me how the change between D# to E
must be simultaneous (‘Yeah, and you adjust with your elbow as well … yeah, good
boy … no sudden movements, all very sort of small movements … when you do
sudden movements, you get a sudden sound’). I mention that he is better during the
upper registers, and suggest (and how) that he ‘get up on his haunches’. He suggests
that if there was a 1000 metre long piano, you could do the scale all the way up. I
smile and nod. I ask him to play G# harmonic minor hands together loudly – he does
well, just a little slip (don’t worry). I ask for G harmonic minor hands together using
crescendo/decrescendo. He briefly coaches himself with the dynamics and give him
the thumbs up; ‘good boy’. I suggest that he could have more variation in the tone,
and then demonstrate. He does better, so I point out the left hand is a bit ‘angular’. I
remind him to pronate; he tries. I remind him that it will be a different shape when
going under the fourth finger as opposed to the third finger; he agrees. I say, ‘so you
sort of have to adjust the arm to accommodate that … (He says it’s more) … it’s more
pronated and more rolling’. I tell him the tempo is excellent and that the dynamic was
better that time, but he might need to roll a bit more in the left hand, just like in his
pieces (I start playing the hands together with the phrase end of *Swan Lake* before going back into the left-hand scale descending). I say that he can probably see my arm making slight adjustments. He checks if he has to do staccato for contrary motion (no). I ask him to play E-flat chromatic left hand loudly – ‘that’s fine’. B Major staccato hands together – it’s very quick, saying that the right hand is exquisite, but the left hand is a little bit tight. He asks me what exquisite means (expensive; excellent – Oh). I demonstrate hands together with the left hand ‘too sort of locked’ and then again saying, ‘Now watch’, (Adrian says it’s more free; up and down; he makes free up and down gestures and then demonstrates stiff). I say that it will sound tight otherwise, and Adrian says, ‘It’s not as much shivers’ (I say, ‘Yeah, it’s not sort of … shimmering’). Adrian plays staccato descending and I say, ‘Good, awesome’. He says, ‘Make it move more’, and Jane says, ‘It sounds much better’. I mention usually people play the left hand tighter in staccato. He asks me if it’s common – ‘Very common’. Jane says, ‘There’s no rotation hey?’ I say, ‘You’ve got to learn to pronate, rotate, and adjust the upper arm and it’s quite hard to do. Most kids, they’re not very good at scales’. I ask him to play B Major in contrary motion – he plays. I say that they’re commonly not fast enough, but in your case, they’re too fast and they laugh. I put the metronome on and demonstrate; he plays. I say, ‘The other thing is that people tend not to blend (I demonstrate) … try to disguise where the turns are’. He plays very well – ‘That’s better, excellent … now you probably saw that I shifted forward with my body as I got to the extremities (he explains that’s so you can put your elbow out more rather than having straight arms) … (nods) … so that you can align your elbows, that’s right. When you align your elbows, you have greater control of the tone. That’s the other common thing that people do – they’re too slow and they’re not uniform across all registers’. I demonstrate, but say that it’s still easy for me because I have long arms, but kids … it generally ends up looking like this (I play) … and they get all lump at the outside’. I ask him to play staccato thirds in the left hand – they’ve improved since I heard them last. I ask him to play the right hand – he asks me where he should start, and I suggest that it depends where he’s sitting (‘Try not to cross your body’). I say that there doesn’t appear to be much ‘give’ in the wrist – I ask him to have a bit more ‘give’ in the wrist and ‘put your elbow out more’. He does so and says, ‘and you get your wrist more … (loose)’ and I agree. As he approaches the top register, I say, ‘Up on your haunches, good boy. That’s it, I like how you’re following my lead (we both rise up and down from the hip bones), and
you’re sort of aligning your body with the notes, rather … I’ll just sit here and … (I act lazy and play random notes) … Piano playing is very athletic … you have to sort of be (gestures with arms) right into it to be good at it’. I ask him to play E Major arpeggio hands together. He plays and then I say that I usually suggest shifting the chair back when playing arpeggios. He asks why – ‘Because you’ll have better contact with the floor, and you’ll have more room to play’. He says and shows me, ‘and pronate’. I agree, saying, ‘and more pronation ability – arpeggios require even more sophisticated movements (than scales). He asks me if arpeggios are broken chords (Yes). He plays hands together very well – I tell him it’s good, saying these are usually too slow as well, and I take out the metronome. I check and tell him he’s fine with that; he plays again. I say, ‘Usually what happens with these … (Adrian says overlap? Don’t play using the tip of the thumb?) … They usually dig into their thumb (I play), instead of rolling (he plays) … yeah that’s it’. I ask him not to drop his elbow quite so much. I ask him to watch me elbow, saying that there is a small adjustment (I play) but not this (I play). He verbalises and shows himself what to do. I say, ‘So you keep your upper arm switched mostly on, not off and on completely’. He asks me to check his arm as he turns to show me (Yeah). He even does a critical comparison! He tries again, and while not 100% he is trying. I ask him to move his upper body across too. I ask them if they are going to the Ekka this year (too much money). I ask him to play B-flat minor arpeggio left hand. He does quite well and asks me if he should start lower. I say yes, and do a demonstration, reminding him not to switch the arm completely off (‘No you’re letting the upper arm switch off there’). He tries again (that’s better) and again (yes, good boy). Adrian shows and tells me, ‘It’s not like a sudden drop’. I say, ‘Not a sudden drop, just a slight adjustment’. I close the book, saying, ‘Well, if they’re all that good, I’d be feeling very confident, well done, excellent’. Adrian cheers and waves his arms. I ask to hear his concerto and Jane reminds him of his feet position. I mention that Adrian could come for a lesson tomorrow, and we agree that they come to the house from 2.30 – 4.00pm. He starts playing and I play the second piano with him, pausing briefly to check for a wrong note. I stop him and ask him to move faster through the broken chords and compare the tempo to the beginning. I interrupt again, saying that the A minor part is too fast. He starts nodding, conducting and turns to smile at Jane as I play the first tutti break. I conduct and clap in duple time in the interludes. He is doing well, but the tricky left-hand semiquaver section is still untidy; we carry on. He is rushing through the easy
bit, but does well thereafter, except he slows down when playing the octaves. Nonetheless, we get to the cadenza (he tells me he has done 2 lines) and he asks me about pedalling the octaves and plays again (sounds fine). He throws his arms out to the side, emitting a big smile and a soft cheer. I ask him to give me a hug, saying, ‘It’s a big piece for a little kid … well done’. He starts asking me about the trills, but the camera fall over! Jane tripped over the chord. The film restarts, and I go through the left-hand trill with Adrian, then demonstrate hands together. We discuss where he should finish for the exam. I say, ‘Very good boy, it’s awesome’. I suggest that if I were him, I would be putting the metronome on and checking the speeds for each section. I mention that both boys could be having longer lessons now. I put the metronome on 135 – 140 for performance speed. He plays a little of the opening and then I ask him to play the left hand and then right hand of the broken chord section and he agrees with the tempo, pointing out that it would be the same for the later broken chord section too. I ask him not to go home and go crazy fast, but ‘partial practise certain sections and bring the tempo up’. I point out that the left hand is too heavy in the semiquaver section. He sits down and plays 1 bar, and I say now faster. I ask him to start imitating me 1 bar at a time, ending on the first note of the new bar. He is a bit heavy with the second bar – ‘you don’t need to go’ (I play heavy) and he says, ‘Is it like (throws his left hand to the left) off, hey?’ I play it using his suggested gesture and he copies. I say, ‘That’s it, and then the same …’ and I continue on to demonstrate the next couple of bars. I point out, ‘by the way, you were having trouble connecting those two bars (I demonstrate) … you did something weird around there, did you realise that? (Yeah)’ He tries, saying he mixes up the right-hand fingering a little there. I ask him to play the section hands together, from bar 164. He plays, and I point out that he is skipping out a left-hand semiquaver. I show him how that causes the right hand to come in too early. I show him how to partial practise bar 165 – he copies a couple of times, saying, ‘same time’. I agree, and help him partial practise the next bar, correcting his left hand C# as he finishes. He is confused, so I ask him to come over and look at the score with me – ‘You’re playing an E in the left hand instead of C’. I show him, then point to the score while he plays the left hand for those couple of bars, saying, ‘Yeah, OK? You’ve got to fix that up for me’. I show him bar 173 – I say, ‘It’s not in time there’, he agrees it’s too fast. I say that his weakest spot (in the piece) is bar 164 – 175 – ‘You need to practise more there … get the metronome out, don’t do it fast, do it slowly and then build it back up to 135. That’s
what I’d be doing if it were me’. I show him on the sliding scale where he was and where is now. I say, ‘it’s not an easy piece … t’s not a Grade 5 piece, more like Grade 8… you’ve done a really good job, well done mate’. Adrian cheers into the camera.

Lesson 23: 11 August 2014

Reviewed 11 January 2015

- Initial conversation with Jane regarding the importance of hard work as well as talent. I talk with Adrian about the ‘olden days’ when teachers and students either lived together or close by, so lessons every day or at least regularly was commonplace; he seems surprised. Jane suggests to Adrian that he could play his competition pieces, Invention and Jinker Ride first so that I could help him ‘shape the sound’. I mention that I haven’t heard them for ‘ages’ and I heard the Haydn Concerto yesterday. He seems really keen to play the Concerto though, so I mention that after his exam, I will give him another challenging concerto to learn – he mentions that it can’t be a slow one, as he likes the fast ones. I say that after his Grade 5 exam is completed, I’m going to give him a bit of a push, ‘to see how good you really could be’. Adrian starts playing Invention in A minor, but he starts pushing the tempo faster and faster. After tapping my foot for a while, I stop him, letting him know it’s going well. When I tell him that he is starting at one speed and then gradually increasing it bar by bar, he smiles and tells me it’s hard to keep it … I ask him what he finds hard (‘tempo’) and I remind him that getting more intense is not equivalent to getting faster. I ask him to play the first couple of bars with intensity (he does) and then I ask him to start playing further down the page. He has a bit of difficulty starting, but does quite well. I stop him saying, ‘OK, good boy, now you can hear it’s a bit messy through there’, referring to the hands coming apart. I say, ‘I’m not trying to criticise you, just trying to help’. I start play the left hand, mentioning that ‘there isn’t much shape in the left hand there’. He starts playing the left hand alone and has trouble with fluency here, referring to the score when he gets stuck. I point out the F# and then demonstrate and eight-note gestural fragment for him to copy, which he does. He then plays the next eight-note fragment – ‘good boy’. I remind him (and play) the last six notes of the main them from Swan Lake, playing it in the treble with the right hand, suggesting, ‘Remember yesterday we were doing … (I play) That’s the same sort of thing that you need to do here’. He plays the first eight-note fragment again (good) and then the next eight notes, but I stop him, asking him to ‘blend the thumb in’.

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While referring to the score, he keeps trying until he gets it (good), but then when he attempts to move on to the next fragment, I say, ‘Spend a few minutes just doing that one and try and improve it like you did with the Swan Lake’. He does so … ‘And really listen to …’. He plays again … ‘Does it sound like (I start singing with expressive tonal shape and hand gesture) … or does it sound (I sing without gesture and a flat dynamic level)’. He tries again and I gesture, saying, ‘OK, that’s getting there’. After he tries again, I demonstrate a three-note gestural fragment and he copies me a few times. I then add another note (4 notes) and he copies. I say, ‘Your thumb didn’t match’ before adding another note to make a five-note gestural fragment; he copies me a couple of times. While gesticulating with the left hand, I say, ‘Now what gesture, what body movement were you using, because that’s how you’ll create the sound’. Adrian waves his left hand about and says, ‘Umm’ before trying again a couple of times. I say, ‘Don’t play buttons, play phrases’ and then sing and play the phrase again. ‘Feel a softness in your arms’. He tries again, but I say that the first three notes of the fragment were of the same volume. I remind him how the opening right-hand motive sounded, implying that he would do the same here. He plays the left hand fragment again, better this time (Good) and I ask him to play the opening of the right hand, saying, ‘Now see you got really good shaping through there’. He plays the right hand again and then transfers to the left hand – ‘Good, that’s what I’m looking for’. I move on to the next two fragments individually, saying ‘And then …’ He then copies and I say, ‘Good … Now, like I was saying to Neil, it’s sort of like touching someone (I touch his upper back), you don’t go like (I press firmly and then gently) … and all variations in between’. I then play the first five-note fragment of the left hand again – he copies (Good, that’s it). I ask him if he can feel or hear any difference. He plays again, saying, ‘yes – more flowing’. I say, ‘That’s what’s missing in your invention mate (Oh) … It starts off really well at a good speed, and then towards the middle (points to the score), it starts to get too fast and you’re not really making music anymore, you’re just pushing the right buttons’. Jane says, ‘It’s not shiny hey?’ I agree, saying, ‘There’s no more shine in the sound’. Jane adds, ‘At the beginning I could feel the shininess, but then suddenly the shininess just vanished, it disappeared’. I come in, ‘It just goes, and he starts struggling with the notes’ (Yeah yeah, didn’t shape very well). Adrian has been playing with the egg timer, but then starts playing again, ‘I think … (He plays again) … oh that’s it (gestures), what have you done in your arm there?’ Hey says, ‘Loose’. I say and sigh, ‘OK, good, continue
in that way then, that’s good’. He continues to play the next couple of lines towards
the modulation to E minor in fragments – while he is still not 100% sure of the notes,
the shaping is already showing signs of improvement. With the cadence, I suggest
(and demonstrate) not playing all bass notes the same volume. After he tries, ‘Yeah,
do those three notes (B-B-E) and make them all different (he tries) … That’s it, don’t
just play them all the same’. I then sing those bass notes and follow on with the
descending arpeggio figure. He experiments a few times (good boy) and I then come
and demonstrate, aiming to highlight a unification of tone quality without over-
emphasis on the thumb when passing under. He tries again, without change, so I
mention that this is where arpeggio technique comes in. ‘What do you do with your
arms in the arpeggio? (‘That’s an E minor … that’s it’) … How do you blend the
sound in an arpeggio?’ He experiments moving his left arm and then says, ‘Pronate?’
I agree, ‘Yeah, so pronate and lift your arm up (gestures) and then tuck your thumb
under’. Adrian says, ‘Because if you don’t, this (points to E) won’t blend in’. I say,
‘That’s right … So apply that’ and then play the arpeggio again. He tries again,
missing a couple of notes – he looks at me, ‘Pretty good actually’. He tries a couple
more times and shows improvement. I say, ‘Good … Now it’s blended, we want a …
(I start singing and gesticulating with expressive shape) … we want a little bit louder’.
He tries again, and I say, ‘That’s it … that was completely missing in your playing
before’. He smiles and says, ‘Oh’. I go on, ‘Plus, you had coordination problems
here’. I twice demonstrate the four-note fragment with hands together just before the
cadence. ‘Now I’m not saying this to criticise you, I’m trying to help you, so you get a
sticker (I get a sticker and put it on the score where I would like him to partial
practise). He takes it a note prior with the right hand and experiments, looking to me
(Good). I then step in, playing it and saying, ‘So you roll to the right, and then roll
back to the left’. He plays, mentioning that he likes using the third finger. I say,
‘Yeah’ and I again demonstrate the five-note gestural fragment that I want him to
copy. As he starts to play, I take his right forearm with both hands and move it in the
direction of travel, saying, ‘So the spatial information is … (I twice move his arm and
sing the notes) … it’s like being on a rollercoaster’. He tries, but is having trouble
joining the leap (D# - E) accurately, so I suggest not doing it legato. He tries the nine-
ote note gestural fragment and is accurate this time. I say, ‘Now would you do it louder or
softer (the F), would you go (I sing in critical comparison with the F soft and then
louder than the E). He copies the louder one, and then I demonstrate again, saying,
‘But when you get there (the top F), make sure you are … you know (I move my arm loosely)’. He experiments a couple of times – ‘That’s it, did you switch off the muscles around your wrist? (Yeah) … I could tell, I can hear it in the sound (gesticulates) … That’s what you got to explore a bit more … So it’s sort of like you need to revisit the piece (How do you revisit something?) … Listen, you’re not going to win playing it like that (OK, I know, but how do you revisit?) … Don’t worry, I don’t want you to win, but I’m just saying (Yeah, how do you revisit?) … Well, we just did revisit (Oh) … We’re revisiting (isn’t it revision?) … Yeah, we’re revisioning (Not revisioning) … Well, maybe we should say we’re rediscovering? (Yes!) … Then it’s not so boring, it’s like oh revision, that means I’m … So we’re rediscovering (He starts playing part of the right hand) … So Adrian, I want you to be very clear, you are not to play the hands together, especially from here (points to score) to the end. I want to see some good revisioning, discovering, rediscovering, OK? I think if you do that, you’ll probably find that the tempo will fall into place quite easily (Oh?) … I think your tempo problem comes from the fact that you’re feeling a little bit insecure with the piece (How am I insecure?) … You’re getting faster to cover up the fact that you’re not comfortable with the notes (Oh! I get it now). I say to Jane, ‘I think that’s what’s wrong … he doesn’t know it well enough to be expressive so he gets (gesticulates) faster instead. (Jane – it could be) … I think that’s what the problem is’. I turn to Adrian, ‘What do you think? (Um, maybe). He seems distracted by the egg timers, so I take them away, saying, ‘This is costing money, if you’re not concentrating, you’re just wasting money (OK), it’s like putting $50 in the shredder, gone (OK). So don’t, we can have a good time, but …’ Jane says, ‘Be more serious’. I go on, ‘I don’t have $50 to put in the shredder, do you? Seems like a waste of money to me (I do have $50)… You’re being silly (OK)’. Jane says, ‘Adrian, when Mark asks you to put the character through the concerto, and then you go home and try to figure out how to shape the good sound – same in Invention, you just have to think about the details (Yeah) and how to colour the sound, the quality of the sound … You think about it, OK?’ He nods and I say, ‘How about that? I believe in you mate (Yeah!) you know that’. Adrian asks me if we move on now. I say, ‘Um, if you feel like you’ve gotten enough direction and can go home and work on it’. Jane comes and points to the score, ‘Separate hands and shape the good sound, OK? How about you show Mark Jinker Ride and Mark will give you some advice on how to shape the sound. Don’t just focus on the speed and forget the details’. I agree and say to Oliver,
'I think he’s understanding me, it’s hard to tell sometimes’. I say to Adrian, ‘And I hope there’s been no swearing at home?’ Adrian smiles, and looks a little embarrassed. I ask Adrian if he likes *Jinker Ride* (Yeah). I say that it suits him, because it’s funny and happy, just like him. He plays *Jinker Ride* with plenty of energy, but it really is too fast and he uses far too much pedal. He also makes many mistakes towards the end. Adrian turns to me, smiles and I say that it’s good enough to use as an extra list for the exam, but ‘it’s not that good (Oh). After we agree that the score says to play MM = 144 and I turn the metronome on, Jane asks if it’s too fast. I say, ‘It’s miles too fast (Oh), and there’s too much pedal (he looks confused), and it sounds a bit bangy to be honest (what do you mean too much pedal)’. Jane asks him to listen. I say, ‘You’ve got the right idea with the energy … your rotary freedom in the left hand is awesome (he smiles) … there’s far too much pedal, it’s too fast and it sounds like a bit of a mess (Oh) … And I’m just being polite’ (?) Adrian says, ‘OK, what pedal do I take off? (Well) … Let’s find out (What about you go home and, and) … Test it out (Test it out)’. I say, ‘For starters, can you make music and not just play fast? (Yes) … OK then, off you go’. I ask him to play the left hand from the beginning, and I turn the metronome on. He starts playing the first couple of bars before I interrupt, saying it’s too fast. As I sing A B A B with the metronome, I can see him mirroring with his hands, but then he starts too slow. I turn the metronome off and let him carry on, but it becomes apparent that he is no longer sure of the left-hand notes when playing hands separately. I help him with a stray C# and ask him not to use the pedal for now. I tell him that he is playing the A B ostinato ‘all the same’ and he points out that the score says ‘simile’. Looking at it now, I think that perhaps he thought that was referring to the dynamic level. Nonetheless, I try to demonstrate vocally (‘sometimes louder, sometimes softer) and with gesture and sense of shape and purpose to the ostinato, but I soon become frustrated when he plays over the top of me – LISTEN! ‘You’re playing it all the same, because you’re obsessed with speed at the moment, OK. There’s no colour in your sound anymore’. He nods and says OK. I mention, ‘You used to play this one so (much better) … it’s such a cute little piece, but it’s just …’ I play the first two bars with hands together, then pause, saying, ‘Then a little bit more’ as I play the left hand for the next bar. He tries the left hand, and I ask him (and sing) if he is going to play all the A’s the same volume, or is he going to go (I sing with a sense of crescendo/decrescendo for the A’s). He tries and I say, ‘No, but if you land on the A’s with the same weight, they’re all going to come out the
same (volume). Adrian starts experimenting with falling into the A’s and I say, ‘That’s it’. He says, ‘So you do some louder than others and some softer than others’. I agree, saying, ‘Yeah, and that’s what creates the interest in the piece’. Jane says, ‘If the A’s are the same, it gets a bit boring’ and I agree. Adrian notices that the same idea would apply to the B – some B’s louder and some B’s softer. I say, ‘Mmm, but within that, the B is softer than the A (I sing to demonstrate), but within that, some A’s are louder than other A’s and some B’s are softer than other B’s (Adrian nods). Plus you (need to) slow down, get rid of the pedal and make music’. Adrian nods and Jane says, ‘Instead of just the speed’. He tries some of the left hand – ‘that’s quite good’. He tries again – ‘that’s a little bit better … that’s still too fast in my opinion’. He slows down and tries again, and I ask him to then add the other hand back in – ‘It’s got a different feel, it’s much more sparkly’. Adrian correctly points out that the right hand has the melody. I agree, and ask him to play the right hand. I say, ‘Good, lovely … so you’ve got lots of shape there’. He plays it again, but seems to be overplaying beat 2 and 4 now so I ask him by way of vocal demonstration, which ‘version’ he would do. He tries, not so successfully, but then points to the first 4 right hand quavers in the score, saying, ‘You do that one loud slur (quavers 1 and 2) and then soft staccato (quavers 3 and 4)’. I say, ‘Excellent, now you’re thinking like a musician, instead of a button pusher (Adrian nods)’ I ask him to try again (he does well) before saying, ‘You’ve done that 4 times, are they all going to be the same?’ He points to the score saying, ‘First one soft, louder, louder …’ I agree, saying, ‘You do what you said, but each one (beat) magnifies as you go along’. He tries with a sudden increase in overall volume, and I say, ‘Yeah, probably not that much, but that’s the idea’. I demonstrate vocally what I would like him to achieve. He plays again, much better and I say, ‘Ah, there we go, we’ve got the subtlety back in the sound that you used to be really good at (OK)’. As I go to open the door, I ask him to play the next phrase as Jane points out the ‘poco crescendo’. He plays well and I say, ‘that’s it … how come you made that one slightly louder than the first one?’ He replies, ‘Because it says poco crescendo’, but I suggest, ‘because it’s higher … you’re getting more excited there’. Adrian says, ‘And then this one it gets even louder’ (That’s right!) I start vocalising and he starts playing. I suggest with my voice E#-F# with crescendo or all the same volume? He seems to understand what I mean and does well. I say, ‘Good! That’s how you used to play it’. It’s really interesting, because as he plays it again, he maintains all tonal shape, but increases the tempo too! I advise him not to
get faster and sing the E#-F# motive again. I suggest that he take us on a train ride –
‘it’s a fresh public holiday in Moreton Bay and we’re on the train, we’re enjoying the
air … oh it’s so nice to be on the train, oh, how fun’. Adrian says, ‘Not two hours on
it’. I say, ‘Yours’ sounds like a supersonic train from Japan (Adrian smiles and says,
‘Cool!’), and I can’t enjoy anything’. Jane says, ‘At the beginning, you play too fast …
can you write down to build up the excitement by yourself?’ Jane asks me what
metronome speed I would recommend, and after checking and saying 140, she asks
Adrian to write it down in the score too. I also say, ‘no pedal … we can put the pedal
back in once we’ve got the hands sorted out’. I mention that we are rediscovering
these two pieces. He asks me to check what he has written. Jane says to also
remember that the A sounds should not all sound the same, otherwise it will be too
boring. I close the lesson with discussion regarding these two (older) pieces – if
Adrian wants to do them for the competition, he will need to rediscover them, so that
they sound ‘fresh’ again. He suggests, ‘Regrow them’. I say, ‘I did see that you were
getting a little bit sensitive and I thought, uh-oh … If I go too hard, he’s going to get
upset, so I backed off a bit, so I see that you’re trying your best, OK, but I’m sort of
putting my foot down because I don’t want you to go home and just bash out the notes …
you need to rediscover the music behind the notes (yep), because that’s what an
adjudicator or an audience listens for (OK), not how fast you can play. You’re already
playing it fast (good), it’s 140, how fast do you want it?’ Jane says, ‘Too fast, way too
fast. Now you need to slow down and shape the sound’. Adrian mentions that it’s just
like his arpeggios that were too fast. I caution him against over-generalising
everything I say and give both boys a hug.

Lesson 24: 17 August 2014

Reviewed 12 January 2015

- The lesson starts with a rehearsal of the Swan Lake duet – it seems a little bottom
heavy and Adrian increases tempo on the last page; both boys wave as they finish. We
start to watch the iPad recording that was just taken, and it’s quite obvious that the
tempi of the first and last pages don’t match. As we watch, I ask Adrian to use bigger
gestures on the last page in order to broaden the tempo. I ask the boys what they think
about having the soft pedal on for the entire piece – Adrian says, ‘too soft’ and I
agree. I suggest to Neil that he take the soft pedal off when the main theme returns.
As Neil marks the score, Adrian and I watch the recording again – I comment on the
lovely sound, the success of the ensemble, the removal of the soft pedal, and Adrian’s tempo increase. I ask him to exaggerate the ‘ups and the downs’ a bit more; he asks me, ‘and more movement higher?’ and I agree, though not too high – ‘You don’t want to end up in outer space’. I ask him to stay in the air a bit longer before dropping, and I do a quick critical comparison to show how smaller movements will likely increase the tempo. While we are out of camera shot, it is clear that we are experimenting with the gestural information away from the instrument. Adrian continues to ask for feedback (‘like this?’) as we rehearse the speed of the up and down movements that will determine the overall tempo, but also the expressive tonal shape of the phrasing. I suggest that we have another go – both boys return to the piano and start playing. This time the tempo is much more settled during the final page, and while not 100% synchronised, Adrian does seem to ‘fill out’ the bar with greater awareness, mainly due to increased gestural width. When finished, Adrian smiles and waves his arms, I say, ‘Thanks guys’ and Neil asks, ‘Was that better?’ I say that in some ways it was and in other ways it wasn’t, and I ask them to watch the recording in order for me to explain. I say that the tempo at the end was much better, and Adrian clarifies that the width of this gestural movement was the reason. I rewind a spot to reiterate ‘how awesome’ the ‘stretchy’ interchange between phrases in the first section was (‘Hear you are stretching together there?’), and how such use of rubato might be applied to other parts of the piece. As we continue to listen, I point out that Adrian is rushing the last few notes of Section A instead of stretching them (‘your rhythm’s wrong there … hear that?’ Adrian – Oh). Neil says, ‘He did a bit of a rush’, and Adrian says, ‘So I have to drag it back’. We listen again, and I say, ‘Hear you rushed it’ and Adrian says, ‘C, (I rushed) the C’. We listen again and I say, ‘So fill out the whole beat’. As we continue to listen to the B section, I say, ‘Hear that?’ referring to the lack of space between phrases. I rewind it for them to listen, saying, ‘Give us some space’. I pause the recording, singing with rubato, ‘And finish off’ – Adrian says, ‘Oh’. I then do a critical comparison, singing the end of the phrase without stretching, and Neil says, ‘Oh’. We listen again, with me singing with rubato over the top to demonstrate. Adrian says, ‘Oh, too fast’ and I agree, suggesting that both boys pull back. As the recording continues to play, I demonstrate with expressive vocalisation (and gesture though unseen – I can hear that I am patting my thighs), how they might create a more dramatic realisation of the music with additional time stretching. I say, ‘It’s just a little bit too … the same tempo the whole way through’ and Adrian replies, ‘It needs
to be stretched more’. I point out Adrian’s wrong note (A Major chord instead of A minor) and I rewind to show him – ‘Oh’. As we go further, I point out to Neil that during the final page, he could stretch out his melodic line, especially as it ascends (I sing with the recording – ‘That’s too much in time Neil’ – I hear it). I say, ‘Try to breathe, and just drag it out a bit’ and Neil says, ‘So that’s wrong?’ I say, ‘You’re still doing good, it’s still 9/10’ and Adrian says, ‘That’s good’. As we listen to the final bars, I point out that the boys are not precisely together. I say to Adrian that he is hitting the bottom of the keys after Neil, due to coming up too far, or not coming down fast enough (‘Oh’). I rewind the recording, we listen and both boys can hear the parts are not synchronised (‘ga-dang’). I reiterate that it’s still good, but those little points will separate a good duet from an excellent one. Adrian reminds me that you can never give 10/10, and we all correct him, ‘You can’ (?) He seems a bit confused. I suggest that they play together again. Using expressive gesture and vocalisation I coach them, saying ‘Yeah, that was heaps better; well done guys’ as they finish. Adrian stands up, throwing his arms in the air and cheering; Neil smiles contentedly (‘heaps better, good’). The boys come and watch the recording. I mention that the next challenge will be to still maintain the expressive intensity without me coaching from the side. I give them a few tips regarding additional stretching of phrase ends and I ask Neil to delay the final chord. He seems confused, thinking I mean to play both hands loud, so I do a vocal critical comparison to demonstrate the time stretching I am asking for. Neil says, ‘Oh, OK’, Adrian says, ‘Hold it back!’ and I agree, saying, ‘Hold it back; ritardando … or ritenuto, that’s immediately slower or held back’. As Neil finds a pencil to write it in the score, I do another (vocal) critical comparison between ritardando and ritenuto. Adrian says, ‘Immediately; suddenly’ and I agree. I ask the boys if they would like a chocolate and Jane says, ‘What do you need to say to your teacher?’ While the boys eat their chocolates, I say, ‘That really does sound good that Swan Lake’. Jane comments, ‘It’s really useful to make the recording (Me – Oh it’s very useful), especially for Neil … when he practise, and then he could understand more about the rhythm and care about his partner … I think it’s much better … because it’s visual, it’s a visual thing, so it help him to understand’, and I agree, saying ‘It’s very important … because then you’re your own teacher’. Adrian says, ‘Mum says we did good, this week’. Adrian has brought his own metronome this week to use in the lesson. I ask Adrian to put our rubbish in the bin. I mention that all duets are coming all well. I ask Adrian is he is excited about his upcoming
exam, but he is intent on setting the metronome speed; Jane ‘reminds’ him MM = 116 for the *Invention*. He starts to adjust the height of the chair, but I help him swap it with the other one. Jane says, ‘Do your best, all right?’ and Adrian starts playing. He wanes slightly in and out of strict tempo, but it is much more stable than the previous lesson; the expressive intent is also pleasing. When he finishes, I say, ‘OK good, well that’s tons better; you’ve got the tempo quite even now (Adrian – And that part!)’. I ask him, why he is missing notes (I don’t know … slipping?) I say, ‘Can you dig in a bit more? (OK) Touch the bottom of the keys, it sounds like you’re not sort of… you’re rolling on the keys (I play on his shoulder) but not really activating much of your fingers, which can be a danger with a gestural way of playing, because it ends up being very ‘shapey’ but there’s no clarity of the fingers (I am very gestural here)… have another go’. He starts playing, but I interrupt to coach him with ‘filling out’ the first bar, heading towards the third beat with more deliberate crescendo. When I am demonstrating, it’s quite obvious that I want him to lean in towards the third beat of the bar with his upper body, though I don’t actually articulate that intention. After he copies me a few times, he begins to employ the overall forward tilt that I’m after, so I start to help him refine the tonal shape of the theme even more. I articulate that I want him not to over-emphasise the second beat, but to work towards the third and I show him by way of critical comparison what I would like him to do (I play the right hand, saying ‘And then to *there* and then back off’). He plays (‘a little bit better’) and I point out that B is the loudest note of the phrase. He tries again, but he is still playing with mostly a flat dynamic level, so I try using gesture and saying (with expressive crescendo) ‘1 2 3 4’. He tries a couple of times with some improvement before I say, ‘Yeah, so make the first three notes build up to the fourth one’. I then play twice more, each time vocalising ‘1 2 3 4’ (E A C B) with expressive crescendo. He tries again, and I point out that he is playing A at the same volume as B (Oh). I demonstrate again and he tries (‘that’s a bit better’). I then play E A, and he copies. I then play E A C B, and he copies. I play E A C B, repeating the B a couple of times to convey it being the loudest note, and he copies. I then play A C B and he copies. I then play E A C B and he copies; we then move to the left hand – ‘You’d do the same thing here’. He plays it with a fairly flat dynamic level, so I coach him using expressive gesture and vocalisation – ‘No, don’t start on … A (I sing loudly) … it’s, creeping to the B’. He plays and I say, ‘Good … All phrases go towards the *middle*, rather than the start or the beginning of each phrase’. I sing and gesture, ‘Creeping to
the middle and then back’. He plays the first half of the phrase (good boy) before completing the phrase himself. I say, ‘Good, that’s it’ and he smiles. He tries again, but I say, ‘No, it doesn’t sound in time’. I sing again, using expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation – ‘You’ve got to sort of creep in’. He plays again, more uniform in rhythm than before, but I say, ‘No, it’s too notey’. He tries again, but I say, ‘No, start with the beat’. He tries again – ‘Too loud too soon’ and I sit down and demonstrate hands together. He keeps trying, but I eventually say and demonstrate, ‘The piece doesn’t start here (I play from beat one)… it starts here (I play from beat 3). He says, ‘Oh that’s louder’ and I say, ‘The first few notes are just like an introduction’. He points to the score and continues, ‘And then like on the B …’, and I say (and gesture), ‘On the B yeah, that’s where the phrase sort of starts’. He plays again, and I say, ‘That’s it, good’. He plays again, and I say, ‘Good boy, now you have to play the whole thing (piece) like that’. Adrian says, ‘Same with the left hand’ and I agree, ‘Same with the left hand’, but he is confused, thinking to play the first three notes of the left hand (he plays). I interrupt and say, ‘No, when the left hand has the subject (I sing)… You don’t start the subject loud (I sing), because that’s too choppy, it’s …’ – I then gesticulate and sing the subject with expressive vocal shape and body movement, leaning towards him at the mid-point of the phrase. Adrian plays the right hand and I say, ‘Good, now whenever you have the left hand, that’s what you would do’. I point to the score and demonstrate the left hand in C Major. He tries and I say, ‘Too fast though’. He tries again – ‘Good boy’. I ask him to start again, and he checks if I mean from the beginning (Yep). Before he starts, I mention that the first few notes are an introduction to the piece. He plays the piece again, and I coach him using expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation. He gets half way through the piece and then stumbles, but I say, ‘Oh that’s lovely – I’m starting to get chills, that’s good’. He asks me, ‘What do you mean chills?’ I say, ‘When I get chills I know it’s coming right (Adrian – Oh). Because it sounds … you’ve got the right … it sounds very expressive (Adrian gestures, saying, ‘And rolling’). It sounds like a piece of music, rather than a kid playing an exam piece (Ah) … It sounds like a professional playing, rather than …’. Adrian smiles and Jane says, ‘It sounds more lyrical, and while I’m listening (Adrian is smiling and ‘cheering’ with his arms) it seems that you are telling a story, or showing me something … draws my attention’. I agree, saying ‘Yeah, that’s what you want, you want your playing to sort of … when people listen to it they go, Oh God that sounds … What is it about that playing? I just … They
can’t tell what it is, they just know it’s really beautiful (Oh), and it’s because of those (I sing expressively, ‘fir-st few notes’ – so you don’t go, ‘Da da da da da’) … It’s like (I sing expressively) … Once upon a time it was really far’ (I continue to whisper as if telling a story). Adrian seems really engaged and Jane asks him if he needs to write down how to build a phrase. He finds a pencil and asks me if he should write, ‘building up?’ and I nod in agreement. I say to Jane that Adrian has done a good job to stabilise the piece by using the metronome, so that we are able to ‘do something with it’, i.e. He is more readily able to implement expressive ideas without the notes, rhythm or tempo become a distraction. Jane pats Adrian on the back and compliments him for ‘meeting your teacher’s expectation’ (Adrian seems pleased). I mention that most people increase tempo as they implement tonal shape (He says, ‘Because the sound is getting louder’), but the best players are able to tell the story without getting faster and I can’t really hear what’s happening anymore (I accelerate as I say this sentence) – Adrian says, ‘Oh’. I ask him to start from the C Major modulation, asking him to ‘show the listener that it’s changing from A minor to C Major there’. He plays beautifully as I coach in the background, referring to the hands talking to each other. I stop him when at the bottom of the page where the music modulates to E minor, saying, ‘That’s actually quite good, but here …’ as I start to demonstrate the left-hand descending sequences. I begin to say, ‘There’s more opportunity …’ but then move to coach (using expressive gesture, movement and vocalisation) him with starting with a sense of momentum and ‘riding the beat’. As he stops I say, ‘That’s better than last week, but it’s still not really right around there’ (the rhythm is not stable). He tries again but stops suddenly – I say, ‘Too slow’ and then start singing with expressive shape and gesticulating as before. I coach him in a similar way as he plays again – ‘Lovely, good boy’. As he plays again, I start to add the right hand too. I go on to say that the trick is to maintain the left-hand shape while adding the expressive right hand back in (I demonstrate, asking him to ‘show us’ the expressivity of the descending tenuto top notes). He starts to play the right hand, but I say, ‘Too notey’ and then demonstrate using expressive gesture, vocalisation and body movement what I would like him to achieve. I coach him in a similar way as he plays the right hand again. He does really well, though I ask him to provide greater shape to the semiquavers as well as the tenuto quavers, though I use demonstration rather than words to convey that request. He takes his time (around 6 seconds) and starts again, though I don’t ‘coach’ quite as much as before, apart from the last eight notes of the section, where I ‘wail’
expressively. He smiles and gestures as I wail again, this time using hand gestures, as if pleading for mercy. He plays the right hand again, and I encourage him to ‘roll’ through the semiquavers, which essentially continually change direction. Interestingly, he holds his arm up and shows me a rotary movement of the forearm. I take his right forearm with both hands and ‘show’ him the gestural movement in real time while singing expressively with the metronome – ‘That’s how you’ll get sound without pressing’. He tries again, but I stop him, cautioning against rushing or coming in too early in an attempt to build expressive intensity. Thereafter he plays the sequential passage beautifully as I encourage him (using expressive body movement, gesture and vocalisation), to find the direction that the harmony takes – ‘And then to there … And then to there … And then to there and then where then we go to there! That’s lovely) He plays the notes again, and I suggest (by using expressive gesture and critical comparison) that he avoid any ‘noteyness’. Adrian says, ‘Slide’. I agree, playing and saying, ‘Yeah, so you gesture – so you go towards Neil and then back to me’, i.e. play the notes using directional movement. He plays again, and I ask him to do the same thing, but faster. Further, as he rolls towards the top notes, I ask him, ‘Turn off the fingers and turn on the arm, otherwise you’ll get this ge-ge-ge-ge sort of sound (I gesture with over-extended fingers)’. I suggest that Bach is lyrical and quite Romantic. Adrian says, ‘It’s Baroque’ and I agree, ‘Even though it’s from the Baroque period, it’s very romantic’. I probably should have said ‘expressive’, though I do clarify the difference being that you don’t pull around the tempo like you would with Swan Lake. Adrian, Jane and Neil all concur, and I say, ‘No stretching; you do it all with tonal shape’. Jane says, ‘Strict?’ and I say, ‘It is very strict, but not like … (I demonstrate deadpan)’. She says, ‘Not like a robot’ and Adrian says, ‘You have to play expressively’. I then say that Adrian could apply those same ideas to the next page. Adrian tries the right hand before realising where the crescendo should build to, ‘Is that the middle, the E, so …’ We both start to experiment with shaping the right hand for a while, before I turn to the left hand, suggesting that it may well be the main part here, but this could be due to us needing a break from the right hand! I play the first left-hand phrase on page two, he copies, but then I suggest (and play) that he should ‘go’ towards the G. He tries again, without success, so I ask him (and demonstrate) not to land on the E so fast. He does well, so I ask him to play ‘in time though’ as I conduct and gesture the beat with my lower body. He does well, but I say that he landed on the E too fast and that meant that he had to push the following G in
order to enact a crescendo. He plays again, and I say, ‘Good, now roll on to the G without pushing’. He plays again, and I say, ‘Good boy, and now you add the other hand into that’. He then plays the left hand again and I say, ‘That’s perfect’. He smiles and asks, ‘You said perfect?’ and I say, ‘Yeah, it’s really good (Oh)’. He takes his time, and then plays the hands together (not great) and I say, ‘Good’. He plays hands together well, and the left hand is beautiful, so I ask him to try to blend the right-hand semiquavers (using critical comparison with my voice). After he tries the right hand again, I ask him, ‘What are you doing differently there, that’s better’. He gestures and answers, ‘No pushing’. I say, ‘No pushing, you’re just flowing? OK’ He plays hands together again, but I say that it’s too ‘notey’. He plays again, and I say, ‘Yes! It’s very subtle. All you’ve got to do is listen for that and try to mimic the movements. What people usually do is go, ‘Oh great it’s perfect!’ (waves arms) and they don’t really recognise what makes it perfect’. Adrian says, ‘Oh’ and Jane asks me what subtle means – ‘A very slight difference (Adrian – Oh slight, so it’s hard to hear)... it’s hard to hear unless you’re sort of really listening for it’. I ask him to play that segment again, saying ‘See if you can make it sort of roll’. He tries a couple of times – ‘Sort of, it’s getting slower though – keep riding the beat’. As I conduct, he plays again – ‘Good except for (sings last few notes right hand stiffly)’. He plays again, and I ask him not to overplay the right hand C# (!) He tries again, and I demonstrate the former point (C#) on the second piano. Adrian correctly recognises, ‘Because the E has to be louder (than the C#)’. He plays again – ‘Very good boy, and then the left hand takes over, that’s it (he plays left hand) ... Yeah! Don’t smudge though’. I sing the descending left hand motif, he plays and I say, ‘That’s it, roll off the notes’. He correctly recognises and gestures to the left – ‘Cause we’re going down’. I copy his gesture and say, ‘Yeah, so you roll off; gesture to the left’. He starts the left-hand passage again, going a little further, but I say, ‘Misplaced A flat’. He says, ‘Where?’ and I show him using critical comparison what I mean (avoid overplaying the A flat). He tries again, but overplays the A flat again (Oh), so I point out that in the previous bar, the main note was G (the third left-hand note of the bar), so that means F will be the main note here – ‘You go towards that note and back again’. I say, ‘Lovely, good boy, wrong note but lovely’. He smiles and tries again – I give him the ‘thumbs up’, but point out that the last note should be a B natural (‘What? Oh). He corrects it and we experiment further. He then asks me if he should use second finger or his thumb on the A flat before the B natural. I say that it wouldn’t matter as long he can reach –
he correctly identifies that he would need to roll between the notes. I say that the thumb is probably harder to control (play softly) and I encourage him to try both versions, which he does. ‘If you use your thumb, that’s fine, as long as it doesn’t bump like that’. He seems to like the thumb and it does seem to be a better connection than the second finger. He continues to integrate fingering and tonal shape – ‘Excellent’. I then ask if he can ‘creep in’ as he adds the two ideas together. He does well, but I say, ‘not enough sound’ (on the lower notes), so he tries again. This time he plays the ‘creeping’ notes a bit bangy, and I say, ‘No, yuck’, before imitating them vocally with a sudden sideways jolt of the head on the last note. He laughs and copies me. He tries a few more times and does well – ‘Good Boy’ – he starts bobbing and shaking his arms. I tell him that he is at this point in time, superior to his friend Andrew, in that he can sit, listen and analyse, and be his own teacher. Adrian smiles and says, ‘and expressive’. I suggest, ‘With expression, you don’t have to sort of sit there and imagine a fluffy kitty, and you’re in love, with chocolates and flowers – it’s much more scientific than that. If you can sort of listen to your own sound, and then apply those ideas to the rest of the piece, as I know you will, (Yes Mark) I think you’ll end up with a really sophisticated Invention’. Jane asks me, ‘So you mean creeping, like building up the phrase?’ and I asks Adrian if he needs to write any of this down. I suggest that he circle the notes that represent the focal point of the phrase (‘the ones that are going to be louder’). I exit the room to go to the bathroom. Jane compliments Adrian on his ability to play in time (due to his practice during the week) that has enabled him to focus on making a more stylish sound. She asks him to practise a little more on the second page, which Adrian does, noting ‘the thumb’. He continues with the subsequent ideas, and receives praise from Jane for continuing to ‘experiment building up the phrase’. He shows Jane how he uses his thumb, at which point I come back. I encourage him, saying that’s fine and that most people roll too fast towards the thumb. Adrian points out that ‘they’ make a bump. Jane correctly points out that you would use just the tip of the thumb and we both agree. I sit down and the second piano and demonstrate that the faster you roll onto it (the thumb)... ‘But if you’re already high and you just roll onto it a little bit (Adrian – then you won’t make a big sound)...and that’s why often when we want to go softer, we roll forwards and up, because it creates less leverage on the note (Adrian shows me ‘instead of’ with a low wrist), yeah and then you’ve got less energy, which transfers to less weight (gestures) that hits the string’. Adrian nods and I say, ‘So it’s all very scientific – you can
actually analyse it and go ‘oh, so if I do this, I’ll get this, and the best players are able
to analyse their piece, practise, and analyse while they practise, and then perform it,
and … do all of that automatically, because they’ve rehearsed it, and then they just
sort of, put the golden shine on the top of it (I’m gesturing and Adrian is nodding)…
you know, ‘Oh I wish I’d practised more’ (Adrian laughs) … it’s
sort of too late, OK? (Yep)’ I suggest that next time we can continue further with the
second page, but maybe polish what we did in today’s lesson (Jane agrees). I suggest
that we move on and hear *Jinker Ride*, Adrian smiles. There is brief talk regarding the
tempo for the *Invention*, but I suggest that speed is not important, as long as it’s
consistent (Adrian agrees) and there is tonal shape throughout. Jane asks me about
Glenn Gould (extremely fast) and I say that he is renowned for playing atypically. He
sets the metronome for *Jinker Ride* and then starts, and then restarts. He plays with
plenty of colour, but still finds it hard to maintain tempo, I start adding bass into the F
Major section, which definitely helps him. Without saying anything, I ask him to copy
the last few bars; I then look at the score, pointing out that there is no indication to
slow down during the closing bars. I demonstrate that that would it would sound…
both Jane and Adrian are standing beside me. Adrian asks me what ‘poco’ means and
so I talk them through the dynamic indications here (Oh). I say, ‘That’s actually a lot
better than it was, so well done (Adrian – Yeah) … Yeah, really good. You’ve got
much more shape in both hands now’. I go on to say that I can hear (I play the left
hand stepping seconds), and I can hear (I play the right-hand melody); I can hear a lot.
Regarding the descending sequential quavers, I play them and he correctly identifies
that I am lifting up too fast, causing a bump. I agree, asking him to reverse it, i.e. lift
up slower and fall down quicker. Adrian takes a seat and we start the process of
experimentation – When we play together, he does very well, but then we he tries by
himself, he plays too slowly. I ask him to fall down faster, in effect ‘turning the
muscles off quicker’. I tries, and does well, though begins to play too fast 😊 I ask him
to aim for somewhere in the middle and he does much better this time.  I summarise,
‘So you’ve got to switch them off and throw your arm fast enough so that you land on
the beat’, and then demonstrate the concept using a descending sequence of quavers.
Adrian says, ‘You can’t go too fast and you can’t go too slow’. I agree, saying, ‘It’s
quite hard’ before demonstrating again. I ask him to try again. He does very well here,
and so I move on to caution him (using critical comparison) against increasing the
tempo when increasing volume on the E#-F# two-note slurs. I liken it to the concept
we used in Swan Lake – ‘You’ve got to fill the beat out with gesture, not do gestures fast’. He plays again, much better so I summarise the concept using single E#'s, then adding the F#'s while saying, ‘land off land off land off land off’, followed by, ‘off on off on off on off on off’. I then encourage him to do the same, while creeping in with the dynamics. He does very well with this, so I ask him to add the left hand. I help him find the left-hand notes and then he tries, but then I suggest that it is Neil’s turn for a lesson. He asks me, ‘Did I do good this week?’ He is very happy and says, ‘Yay’ when I nod and say, ‘Oh yeah’. I ask him how his aural tests are going – he says that he did the Grade 5 examples on the CD this morning. Jane lets me know that he has some trouble with the harmony and with the higher/lower notes, though he is very close. I reiterate with the Jinker Ride, we might review the pedal next week. I go through intervals with him; Neil joins him in singing. Perfect fourth – correct. I ask to sing the top notes (correct) and the bottom notes (I coach him a little here). I compliment on his great improvement. I has also improved with singing the chords notes descending. He says he finds those a little hard – I ask him to give me one. He does, and I show him how I find that top note and then sing down (and reverse if asked ascending). He says he finds singing up easier. I close the lesson saying that he has done a great job, reminding him of his short-term and long-term goals (2 years ahead). Jane reiterates to Neil that the goal is not to win a competition, but to meet the teacher’s expectation.

Lesson 25: 24 August 2014

Reviewed 13 and 15 January 2015

- The lesson starts with a rehearsal of the Swan Lake duet; it’s quite obvious as I watch the boys’ body language that Adrian is definitely more ‘interested’ in being expressive than Neil. Adrian takes care to listen and shape his playing, whereas Neil seems interested in getting it ‘right’. When the piece finishes, I ask Neil why he ‘banged’ the last note; he seems disappointed and asks me, ‘How loud do you want me to do it?’ I ask him to make the note more rounded, rather than just ‘crash’ on it. Jane asks him to be more serious. I say that the ensemble is very good now – Neil says yay, but Adrian looks less than impressed. I mention that Adrian would need to play louder in the opening (more ring in the fingertips), due to the fact that Neil has the soft pedal down. He answers, ‘But it’s hard… to play loud’ and stares at me. Jane prods him and says, ‘Do your best… you need to put more momentum’. I say, ‘Well I
didn’t say it was easy, I’m just saying that’s what you need to do (OK), whether you do it is your business, don’t just say it’s hard, OK’. I say to Neil that he is putting the soft pedal down when it isn’t required. He says that he told me to put it down on the last page (?) but I apologise and say that I’d forgotten if I did or didn’t ask. I then ask him not to play the repeated D’s towards the end all the same volume. He tries, but doesn’t seem to ‘hear’ and plays them again, mostly the same. I demonstrate using expressive vocalisation and gesture and he tries again. I ask him to start a bit softer and then grow; he tries again and shows improvement. I suggest that the fifth note A could be his loudest note, rather than (I sing with a monotone, and say it’s not very colourful when you do that). Neil writes on the score. I compliment him on his use of the pedal and his lovely, ‘watery’ sound. I then remind Adrian to play louder so he can ‘cut through’ when the soft pedal is down (Adrian nods and says, ‘Mmm-hmm’; ‘I don’t really want Neil to play softer, because he’s already soft, you just need to play a bit stronger – he’s playing soft so maybe you could play mezzo forte’. Adrian plays the right hand with slightly more exaggerated free fall and subsequent gestural detail and says, ‘So that stands out’ and I agree. I ask the boys if they knew the cor anglais plays the theme in the orchestral version – Neil says, ‘Who?’ I qualify, saying the oboe’s cousin, which has a very nasally tone which can be clearly heard. I ask if they have ever heard the original (no) so we listen on the computer, and I point out the clarity of the melodic line above the ‘harp-like’ quality of the accompaniment. I ask the boys if they know what key it’s in and Adrian correctly answers ‘B minor’. Adrian asks me what instrument plays the melodic line during the second half – I say probably horns and trombones (brass) so a strong tone is required. I demonstrate at the second piano how you (he) would use greater finger clarity for the ‘oboe’ part and more overall arm activity for the ‘brass’ part. I ‘conduct’ the orchestra and Adrian smiles. The boys sit down and play again – it’s remarkable how focused Adrian’s melody is now. However, when I ask him to provide more sound, he tends to increase the tempo. As they finish, I ask them whether they are playing exactly together with the final chords. I comment that overall the ensemble is quite good, but there are times when they need to listen to each other more carefully – ‘That time the sound was better, but it sounds like you guys are starting to rush and not listen anymore. I suggest that we start again, and ask Neil to take the soft pedal off half way through the middle section for a more gradual build up towards the beginning of the last section. I tell Neil that he has the right idea with projecting the melodic material within the
secondo on the last page (he plays that fragment), but ‘it’s too much and you are pushing the sound; can you roll on it?’ He tries, but I say that he is jabbing the notes. He tries again, but I suggest he use body movement to cushion the sound, otherwise it sounds like you are slamming the keys’. Before they start again, I mention that it’s definitely getting better – It’s really close to 85% excellent now, and Adrian smiles; ‘You’re not doing a bad job (Adrian – OK); just, can you not speed up too much?’ I mention that boys just heard the recording – ‘it’s a slow piece’. I sing the melodic line of the material, encouraging the boys to ‘let it swell’ and Jane says, ‘Listen to each other’. I further demonstrate vocally what it sounds like too fast, ‘racing on’ and then again with a sense of space when delivering the phrases expressively. They start again, with a lovely balance, but I pull them up because Neil is blurring the pedal – ‘Listen to his (Adrian’s) melody; is his melody nice and clear?’ I ask them to try again, coaching them to ‘take your time’ through the middle section, making it ‘bigger but not faster’. This time the last page is slightly unsynchronised, but overall it is certainly improving. When they finish, Adrian waves at the camera and I tell them that I thought it was much better that time, though I did start coaching them from bar 28. I sing, ‘He’s expanding’ and you (Adrian) must expand with him. I interrupt them during the last section, saying to Adrian, ‘That’s awesome, can you do the same thing, but play louder where you were just expanding?’ Adrian tells me that he wants to build up there, but he is referring to a later section. I point to where I am referring to on the score and he asks me if he should play louder. I say, ‘Yeah you’re too soft there for him’. He tries, and I agree that he could drop with greater velocity there. Adrian asks me, ‘Does he have the soft pedal there?’ and I go on to demonstrate (using expressive gesture and vocalisation) that it would be good if he were to ‘take over’ the melody from Neil’s rising bass melody – ‘So he has a bit, and then he expands, and then you expand with him and then take over’ (Oh). I ask them to try again – it really works well and Adrian smiles proudly as they finish; Neil chews his nail 😇. After coaching him to be ‘nice and bright’, I suggest to Adrian, ‘Yeah, you’ve got the sunshine (Oh)... Bring the sunshine into those chords (OK)... Make them really yellow, not sort of like a green, like... oh so lovely... YELLOW! It’s like the colour of the sun! It’s like, so cool! Well, warm (Yeah)’ I tell them that it worked much better that time. Adrian asks me, ‘Can I still expand there?’ I say, ‘Yeah, I liked that idea’ and he says, ‘Cause the chords get higher’. I caution him – while you can still create crescendo, be sure that the parts are precisely synchronised: ‘You were
playing a bit after him before, but now you are right with him (Adrian waves his arms, saying ‘yay’), so listen to his beat, and match it’. To be fair, I encourage Neil to be aware of Adrian here too – ‘By the same token, you expand, and always listen to him’ (Yep). I ask them to start from the beginning again, but not before I compliment them on achieving a very high standard (Neil says, ‘Yay’ and Adrian waves excitedly). ‘These are just sort of colourful things now, not like, oh I think in bar 7 you have an F#. You know, you’ve gone way beyond that’ (Adrian smiles proudly). The begin to play, but I stop there before the reprise of the theme, saying to Neil that his triplets are too loud and are not pedalled well, making Adrian’s melody blurry (OK). I ask them to try again – I say to Neil, ‘You fit with him in the first part, and he can fit with you later. You listen to his melody and don’t let it get all blurry, like, don’t cover him; he’s got the melody. Let’s try again’. They start play – ‘Lovely matching guys’; the return of the theme is particularly beautiful, as is the melodic interchange of the final page. As they finish, I comment that Neil’s foot is still resting on the soft pedal, and that’s enough to activate and change the colour of the sound. I go on to say, ‘Look, you’re still doing good (Yay)’ as Jane walks over and corrects Neil’s posture. I give them a 90% score – Neil and Jane seem happy. I compliment on Neil’s ability to ‘fit’ with Adrian, but caution him to avoid getting slower during the middle section. He asks me, ‘What bar was that?’ and I point it out on the score. I sit down and using demonstration and gesture, I show Neil how Adrian’s part starts to ‘take off’ and that he should avoid ‘holding him back’. I demonstrate how Neil’s part could sound, and further suggest where both boys could pull back slightly in order for the phrases to breathe. Adrian asks me, ‘I could pull back on the A?’ – I try and agree, pointing to the same part in Neil’s score. Following Jane’s suggestion, I ask Neil to write it into his part. Both boys take pencils and write it into their parts – Adrian is quick to finish, so I help Neil, indicating that Adrian will take a breath ‘here’ and he will need to be listening for that. I sit down and using critical comparison and gesture, I demonstrate to Neil how Adrian’s part will sound without and then with a breath. I say that that is called ‘rubato’ in the Romantic style, and Neil writes it into the score, following Jane’s suggestion. Oliver comes in – I say hello and Adrian waves. I ask them to play it again, Adrian waves again and then the boys start. I interrupt them (‘sorry to interrupt’) during the first page, saying that Neil’s pedal ‘is no good’ as it’s blurring Adrian’s melody. He says that he can’t hear anything wrong, so I suggest that he listen even closer; ‘I can tell you’re trying to fit with him though, so I’m not
criticising you, it’s just a tiny bit blurry. Your foot is probably going up and the right
time, but is it going all the way up? Is it going all the way down? Try again’. (It’s
much better this time). As they play the middle section, I coach (using gesture and
body movement) the boys (particularly Neil) to move forward with the phrase, and
then pull back at the phrase ends. It works particularly well here 😊 I also draw on the
‘Sunshine’ analogy during the closing bars and I use gesture to coach them to lift their
hands simultaneously as the piece ends. As they finish, I say, ‘Yay! Good guys; that
was good’. The boys smile, Adrian waves his arms, Neil says, ‘Yay’, Jane claps and
Oliver says, ‘Well Done’. I briefly remind Neil to go with Adrian’s melody within the
‘watery’ second section and suggest (using gesture and expressive vocalisation) that
they practise pulling back on the final chords. Adrian says, ‘Me?’ and I say, ‘Both of
you’. Using critical comparison, I demonstrate, saying, ‘It gives it more impact if you
slow down a tiny, tiny bit’. Jane says, ‘Stretch a little bit’, Adrian says, ‘a tiny bit’ and
I say, ‘Stretch a tiny bit’. Jane asks Adrian if he needs to write it down. I suggest that
they write in ‘poco rall’ – Neil is quick to finish. Jane asks if they have any more
questions they wish to ask me. I say to him, ‘You look pretty proud of yourself
(Yeah); very excited’. Adrian asks what he is supposed to be writing – Jane and I help
him with the spelling. To summarise, I compliment Adrian on his ‘awesome’ Oboe
opening, his ‘strings’ (he asks me what ‘instruments’ Neil is playing – he’s strings
and brass), his use of rubato in allowing the phrases to breathe, and they way that the
boys passed the melodic material (I use gesture and vocalisation to demonstrate)
between each other in the final section (‘Very good, really good, very musical’) –
‘Yay’. Jane claps and says, ‘Good job’, I say, ‘I thought you guys would be good at
it’. Oliver laughs, Adrian smiles contentedly and Jane says, ‘Oh, thank you; I think
it’s very useful to use the recording; I think it’s really helpful for him to understand
the rhythm’. She refers to the boys working with the recording of the alternative part to
theirs – Neil tells me proudly that he has been working with it. I say, ‘You’re a good
boy’. Adrian takes a seat to begin his lesson as we have conversation regarding
Hillbrook Anglican College’s ‘sibling’ policy. I joke, saying, ‘What if the sibling is a
ratbag? Adrian, the ratbag’ and everyone laughs. Oliver jokes that he has to work
harder now due to the private school fees. I ask the boys if they appreciate what their
parents do for them (Neil says yes), suggesting that they come to each lesson prepared
so as not to waste money. Adrian is flapping excitedly. I make a joke about shredding
money (the boys laugh) and Oliver says, ‘all right, come on’. I say, ‘Off you go’,
Jane records using the iPad and Adrian plays the Bach *Invention* as I take a seat at the second piano. Overall, it has improved – ‘Good boy, now move your chair back so that your feet are flat on the floor and you can tilt forwards from the hips’. He shows and asks me about where he should sit, and I agree, ‘Yeah, on the first third then you can generate a bit more tone from the hips’ (Adrian and Jane both nod). I say that generally it’s quite musical – Adrian says, ‘Did I improve?’ and I agree, but then go on to say that the left hand is not as clear as it ought to be (‘You’re missing some of the notes in the left hand’ – ‘Oh’). He points to the score and I indicate that he could be more aggressive there in particular (‘that’s way too soft’), and as the whole, ‘it’s a bit sweet; try to be a little bit more aggressive on the second page’. He starts playing the left hand of the second page – I interrupt and demonstrate the rich harmonic colour while saying, ‘Yeah, especially those low notes, it’s like what’s going to happen …’ We both experiment with the notes, before Adrian shows and explains, ‘You roll to the right, and then back to the left’ (in order to generate momentum for a louder D#) and I say, ‘Good boy’. I take him back a couple of bars and encourage him (using gesture, body movement and expressive vocalisation) to roll through the notes, thinking in minims rather than individual quavers. He tries, but I interrupt, saying, ‘No, they’re all too much the same sound’ and I demonstrate that point vocally and with gesture; he tries again. I stand beside him and demonstrate, saying, ‘Drop and roll’. He tries again, and shows improvement, but I point out that his second note G# is louder than the first note E – ‘If you do that, the whole thing will stop (I use gesture to illustrate) … Make the main beats loudest (I then use expressive gesture and vocalisation to illustrate again)’. He tries again; ‘that’s it … good, now add the other hand back in’. He does quite well, so I clarify through vocalisation and gesture, ‘Aim to-wards the main beats Adrian’. He tries but the result is a bit stilted and I gesticulate this. He tries again, and I coach him using gesture and body movement while vocalising, ‘And then to there…’, which works particularly well this time. I say, ‘Good, that’s it, that’s what the whole piece needs, it’s …’ and Adrian interrupts saying, ‘Yeah, be a bit more rough’. I agree, saying ‘Yeah, I think you need to be a bit more rough, but not with the in between beats, so for example … (I play the opening) … Try not to make everything sound the same’. He plays again, and I say, ‘OK good, now that’s slower than what you finished the piece though, so you wanna just …’. Adrian starts again, but I interrupt saying it’s too segmented, and I encourage him through body movement and gesture to aim to roll through the semiquavers (‘Try to
think of the overall beat’). He plays from the beginning and I clap, use gesture, body movement and vocalisation (e.g. ‘and roll to there’/‘fill out the beats’) to encourage a forward-flowing sense of purpose. He is gathering momentum during the top of the second page, so I stop him and show him how this might be happening, e.g. with the left-hand semiquaver pick up notes. Using clapping, gesture, body movement and beat counting, I encourage him to fill out the entire two beats, pulling him up as he rushes ever so slightly with the left-hand pick up notes. After a few tries, he loses his place but I say, ‘Good boy’. Interestingly, I say, ‘I feel exhausted’ (for moving around so much!) as he tries again. I say, ‘No’ and do a critical comparison of his attempt with a rhythmically accurate attempt. I coach him with the semiquavers pick-up notes, singing, ‘And where’s the beat’ while he plays the left hand again. He clarifies the fingering with me before trying again. I say, ‘That’s better, all right look’ and we move on. I suggest that he play the left-hand descending E minor arpeggio louder – I sit down and demonstrate, first the left hand, then continuing with hands together. I suggest that he be more playful – ‘Let’s hear every sound’. He plays the left-hand arpeggio, but it’s too slow so I clap, sing and gesture a quicker version. He tries a couple of times, ‘Good’, and I play and sing, ‘That’s a melody … every note is related to each other’. He plays again – ‘I say, good, so it’s not just an E minor arpeggio, great, done; every note lands onto there …’. Adrian correctly identifies ‘E minor’ and I say, ‘Yeah, so it’s gone to the dominant minor’. I say, ‘Good, also in the left hand around here… (I start playing the C Major modulation passage) … Much more like, joyful! Like more sound, it’s C Major there’. He keeps playing as I encourage him to ‘take over’ and play with more sound when he plays the left-hand semiquaver theme. I say, ‘Good boy’ and then point out (and play) the melodic sequences occurring thrice, and how he could (I play chords), ‘Show the listener, it’s like, we’ve got C Major – Am7 – D7 – Gmaj7 – C– B7 – E minor – try to think of the overall picture of the harmony and the colours as well’. He looks a little despondent, but when I make eye contact and tell him he is still doing well, he smiles and says, ‘Yeah’. He tries again, but I interrupt – he asks me if he’s rushing, and I say, ‘No you’re not rushing, you’re just not connecting it legato there’ (Oh). He tries again, but it still sounds disconnected, so I have a look at it, realising that he is not preparing the thumb on the sharp early enough. I suggest that he change the thumb on the sharp to the second finger, which he tries. We try double rotary movement, but I ask him if we had changed it from the second finger to the thumb due to the wider stretch (Yeah), so I
suggest that if he can use the thumb without a choppy sound, it would be good – I
gesticulate and say, ‘Get that sense of growth; it’s rolling forwards’. I show him
which notes need a better legato connection and he says, ‘But not overlap’. I say, ‘As
soon as you let the legato go, most of the melodic shine goes with it’. He continues to
try to connect all notes as I demonstrate intermittently. He is clearly having some
issues with in and out adjustment here, and it’s surprising that I don’t pick up on that.
We probably needed to segment the half bar much more here, though when I
demonstrate a crescendo with the overall arpeggiated quaver outline, he seems to
catch on. He suggests that he would do the same thing ‘there’, but rather than
acknowledging that, I say, ‘That’s what’s wrong with your left hand, it becomes very
pale at times’. As he tries the next (similar) idea, it is clear to me now that he just isn’t
confident enough with the notes to really ‘roll’ between them freely, which of course
inhibits his ability to connect them freely with melodic shape. While I do show him
the overall melodic outline in the same manner as before, what he really needs here is
some guided partial practising, *with* the overall melodic outline built in – perhaps I
was skipping these fundamental ‘in between’ steps to save time? Though he tries the
whole gestural fragment multiple times, and eventually has success, I wonder how
confident he really feels? Nonetheless, using gesture and vocalisation, I ask him, ‘Can
you see what’s happening? It’s getting louder (Adrian nods and confirms the notes
that I’m referring to). Yeah, overall those are the ones that are getting louder to create
the shape, and then you fit the others in around that’ – I demonstrate the expressive
shape of the phrase using gesture and vocalisation. He tries again, and I ask him to
play more legato; he tries again with better legato, so I ask him, ‘What are you doing
in your hand to make it more legato? (Adrian – Rolling) … OK, well do that again,
awesome’. He plays again – Awesome. I go on to say, ‘OK? So that’s really what’s
missing in the playing, it doesn’t sound very melodious in the left hand (OK), because
of not enough legato and not enough shaping’. Adrian nods and I ask him to start
again. I say, ‘Tricky little piece isn’t it? He nods and says, ‘It’s two pages, but it’s lots
of skills). I say, ‘You’re still doing a good job – it’s still a 90% job, I’m just trying to
get you up to 98%; still doing good’. He starts again – I come over and help him (all
while using expressive gesture, body movement and vocalisation) to project the left-
hand semiquavers; make the C Major section ‘sunny’; very happy within the
sequences; ‘and how are you’ for the pick-up semiquavers; more sound; don’t get
faster – it really is very good! As he finishes, I say, ‘Oh, that’s lovely! That’s a really
good sound; I’m just a little concerned that you’re changing the tempo when you’re getting more intense. Adrian says, ‘A little bit’ and I say, ‘A little bit, but it’s still noticeable though. Any examiner or judge would notice that (Oh) … The public wouldn’t, they’d go oh wow you’re wonderful, but a judge would notice that (OK). The whole idea is to keep the tempo the same – be expressive, but don’t push and pull the tempo like you would in Swan Lake. Adrian confirms with me that Baroque pieces can’t be stretched – I confirm and agree; maybe a tiny bit at the end, but you don’t … (Adrian – do it like Swan Lake). Using demonstration, I remind him that he needs to start and end at the same tempo, and he agrees. I say, ‘You’re rolling through the left hand much better now’. I direct his attention towards the top of page two, asking (playing right hand) him to use more sound, and he asks me which part ‘takes over’. I suggest (and play left hand) that it will be more left hand through there. I ask him, ‘Are you taking all this in, or do you want to write it down?’ He tells me he will do both and finds a pencil, writing it into his score. I ask him if he records and watches himself playing (Both boys say yes). I ask him if he notices if he’s getting faster or slower, or if there are any holes in the sound (Yeah, sometimes). I ask him to start again as I play the first few bars; I also remind him about the uniformity of tempo, MM = 70 crotchet. He wants to write the tempo on sticker, but I ask him to try it first; he tries to put the metronome on, but I say, ‘No, you don’t need that, you’ve got to learn to hear it for yourself’. He starts playing, but I interrupt, ‘No, that’s not the same tempo that you did at the end’. I turn the metronome on and conduct, asking his to play a bit of the end. He plays as I conduct with the metronome, and then I ask him to match it with the first page. He starts, I turn the metronome on and tell him, ‘No, that’s slower than what you were doing’. He starts again, I check (it’s good) so we keep going – I mainly coach him with ‘show me the shape of the notes; show me C Major; and G, and F#; both hands joyful; really moody; you’re getting faster again’. I say, ‘I’m working really hard here for you; it’s going in isn’t it?’ He says, ‘Yep, it’s going in my head and there’s still 10 TB of memory available’. Jane says, ‘It sounds so beautiful’. I remind him that the ‘danger’ with this piece is that if you increase the tempo at the beginning to match the end, you are then likely to increase the end too. I ask him not to play any faster than MM = 70 crotchet, and Adrian says, ‘That’s the limit’. I point out that when both hands are playing the semiquaver theme on the second page, both hands are getting faster instead of using volume to create intensity. He agrees and repeats, ‘OK use volume’. I ask him to play from the top of the second
page – at first he plays too passively, and I say, ‘No that’s too… No! Don’t kill me! (dramatise)’. Jane says, ‘More aggressive’. He plays louder, but it sounds very ‘notey’ and I say while using jagged arm gestures, ‘No, that’s da da da… Roll through the beats’. He continues to play, but starts to gather tempo due to the semiquaver pick up notes being rushed. He tries again, this time more uniform in time, but – ‘No, it sounds like you’re just rattling off notes there, I can’t hear any melody (Oh)’. He starts playing at the top of page two with hands together, but I pull him up as it sounds like he is now stretching the time within the left hand in order to create shape. I use gesture, and a forward ‘dance step’ while saying, ‘It moves to there’ in order to encourage him to fall into the beats. It doesn’t seem to help so I sit down at the second piano and play the left hand. There is some talk about whether ‘we’ were getting louder or softer towards the last note of the left-hand phrase. I say, ‘Sorry, but can we change it?’ He says, ‘Yes’ and doesn’t seem too worried – it sounds good either way to be honest. He points to the score and confirms what note the phrase shape moves to, then he plays the left hand, and I comment that I think the ‘newer’ way sounds more musical. He does quite well, but suddenly surges in tempo on the last phrase. I ask him to create more volume on the final note by using double rotation. He and I experiment a couple of times, with him saying, ‘So it turns out to be louder, but not bangy’. He tries again, but I caution him against picking up tempo during the short pick up notes. He continues to try amidst constant scrutiny and eventually I say, ‘Good, that’s better’. I suggest that he continue to practise the hands separately there. He points to score and confirms that the semiquavers on each page need to be the same tempo. I say, ‘Yeah, that’s exactly right’ and go on to tell him that he has a wrong note in the right hand, top of the second page. He plays the right hand alone and I check it – we find that he is playing a C instead of A. He asks me what finger to use, I experiment and then advise 2-4-2; he writes it in himself.

Lesson 26: 5 September 2014

Lesson 27: 7 September 2014

Lesson 26, reviewed 16 January 2015

- The lesson starts with Adrian being distracted by the Simpsons Lego figure that I gave him – he seems a bit more immature in his demeanour than usual. I ask him some scales – C# harmonic minor hands together forte, he plays once and then again
with the metronome. I ask him to wind the chair up, move the chair back, tilt forwards from the hips and avoid accenting any notes. I say, ‘Awesome’ and comment that it sounds different, because he is sitting higher. ‘If you’re underneath the keys, it will sound laboured’. E-flat Major hands together with crescendo and decrescendo – good. right hand C melodic minor piano – Jane asks Neil to ‘watch how to play the scale properly’. I comment 90% and ask (and demonstrate) him to pronate and prepare his thumb a little earlier – ‘That way you’ve got a better chance to get the thumb under without actually reaching’. I sit down and show him, drawing his attention to the small adjustments of the elbow that work with the thumb pronation. I then do a critical comparison and Adrian agrees that the thumb is more likely to bump if used in isolation. I ask him to do it again without overlapping any fingers when pronating. He asks if Holly can go outside. G# harmonic minor staccato hands together is next – ‘That is so good! Sounds awesome!’ He says that Jane said that his staccato is good. I say that it tastes like an expensive dessert rather than a bit of cooking chocolate. E Major contrary motion – ‘Now when you’ve got those tonal bumps, it means that the technique is not right – You’ve got to roll your elbows out and your forearms in’. Using critical comparison, I show him how to achieve a more uniform sound. ‘I’m adjusting with my elbows, and that helps the arms to roll in’. He sits down and is able to make these adjustments straight away – ‘Good; excellent – that’s what they’ll (the examiner) be looking for’. B chromatic right hand loudly – I put the metronome on briefly to check – good boy. Staccato thirds left hand – I suggest that he’s not really aligning himself; I adjust the position of his forearm, elbow and trunk to the left. I then ask him to go a bit slower. I put the metronome on to guide the tempo – ‘Throw your arm down and try and land in the bottom of the key’. He tries again and looks to me for feedback – ‘It’s OK, it’s not terrible, just try to keep improving’; I ask him to play the right hand (be active, be a bit more robust; more precise, more robust; good boy). I remind him that it’s only a very small part of the exam (no freaking out, OK?). E Major arpeggio hands together – I comment that it sounds a little bit slow so I put the metronome MM = 52, four notes per beat. It’s then obvious that they aren’t too slow – ‘Oh no, my mistake, sorry, it’s fine’. I say, ‘They’re all of a really high standard, well done (Oh cool)’. E minor arpeggio hands together – ‘It’s clear you know what you’re doing, well done’. E-flat minor arpeggio left hand – he comments that that’s the one with all the flats; I find it very twist and I agree. I say, ‘OK that’s great, awesome! Really good’ and Adrian waves his arms and says, ‘Yay’. We move
on to his pieces – *Invention* (List A) first. He plays it from memory – ‘OK, well that’s very good, well done’. He asks me, ‘Much improved more?’ I say, ‘It’s definitely improved a lot (Yay!)’ I sing the ascending sequential part towards the end, letting him know that he’s getting faster there; he plays to check ‘Is it this part’. I say yes and then suggest that he start a bit softer and then grow. He tries and I say, ‘Yeah, especially in the left hand now’. As he plays I sing the left hand with him – ‘That’s much better, now when you come to the legato …’ – I demonstrate, asking him to build up the staccato, but then immediately drop to soft when the legato fragment starts, before building up again. He gets the score out and I review and demonstrate my suggestion again, this time referring to the score. We take turns a couple of times and he is showing improvement; I seem to be a bit tired and impatient today. I show him the left hand of final bars – it’s obvious that I’m aiming for the main quaver pulses with a more subdued approach to the off beats, but instead of articulating that, I get impatient because he won’t ‘just listen and copy me’. I use gesture and expressive vocalisation to ‘ask’ for what I want, and to his credit, Adrian interprets, ‘Oh, so it’s every second one’. Perhaps my instructions could be a little more clear and concise here? However, I do go on to say, ‘It’s not like loud soft, it’s just loud and then not as loud, but if you make them all the same volume, it won’t roll forwards’. He tries again – ‘Now that’s the idea, but overall it’s too soft’. He tries again – ‘That’s it’. He says, ‘I find that hard’. I point to the score and demonstrate, asking him to play louder on the low E (Adrian – ‘and then this one less). I agree and now articulate that the high E is on a quaver off beat – ‘Anything off beat, you don’t want to make a big accent necessarily’. He takes to the idea, and points to score, confirming other instances of where to apply the concept; I agree, ‘That’s right… that’s right’. He plays again and picks it up quite quickly. He is having some difficulty making the low E louder and cleverly applies double rotary movement, and I praise him for doing so. I take the time to demonstrate that you can get a louder sound by pressing, but… (Adrian – ‘You don’t press!’). He plays the left hand again with very good sound, but I caution him against slowing down too much (!) He tries again, as I conduct. I do go on to suggest that he would probably pull back on the last two notes after all. He tries again, but I pull him up, as the shape sounds too flat (‘No, that sounds da da da da’). He tries again, and I say that it sounds a little bit better, but it sounds like he is slowing down. I sit down and demonstrate the left hand (Adrian points out that I held back a little during the last couple of notes), and then I play the opening hands together before
making a comparison with the tempo in the closing bars. I ask him to play again, ‘Same speed as the beginning’. He tries – ‘That’s too loud, there’s no colour in that’. He tries again, but doesn’t emphasise the low E, which he realises. He plays again, well this time and I ask him to add his right hand back in. He tries – ‘Now how about make the right hand more interesting, don’t just play the same volume the whole way’. Using gesture and expressive vocalisation, I suggest that he has lots of opportunity for colour there – all of those notes are sort of rolling around making little pictures’. He suggests that he could build up the right hand (similar to the left hand) and I agree, playing the hands together for those first few notes of the section. He tries the hands together – ‘Good, but your right hand is sort of… (I sing jagged notes)’. He tries the right hand and I ask him not to make so much of the repeated D’s – I see know that I could have referred to double rotary movement and rates of velocity to achieve this much more quickly! I demonstrate and he tries his best to copy – eventually he says, ‘Oh I see, you go more less more less’. I agree, saying, ‘They are the off beats of the off beats; do you see, semiquavers 2 and 4 (I make a mistake here saying semiquavers 3 and 4 so I am clearly tired!) are the off beats of the quavers, so don’t make everything the same volume (Adrian – I get it)’. He tries again and does well, but instead of saying, ‘Good job, now try use a quicker pace overall’, I say, ‘Yeah, but don’t slow down either’ – framing in a more positive way isn’t exactly a strong point in this lesson 😒 He plays again, faster this time, but I interrupt, but I don’t exactly ask for anything, I just experiment and try to find expressive idea what I’m looking for. He tries again (‘No, they’re all the same volume’), and I refer back to what we were just doing, ‘Are you going to play F G# and B all the same volume? Even though they are louder (than the D’s), they’re not all the same loudness’. Amazingly, Adrian seems to understand (‘Oh, I get it’) and while pointing to the score, rephrases it in his own way. I say that you would copy the way that you would sing it, and I go on to use gesture and expressive vocalisation in a critical comparison (‘but you wouldn’t go… that’s too shouty’). He tries again – ‘No that’s too shouty’. He tries again and I step in to demonstrate, though I don’t seem to do a good job either! Eventually, I say, ‘But your F is already just as loud as your G#’ – I think that if I’d used numbers to depict the volume levels of the rising crescendo, Adrian would have picked it up much faster – I was probably just too tired to think creatively/laterally. He does well this time – ‘That’s better’. He tries again and looks to me for feedback, but I dismiss him rather cruelly, ‘You listen, don’t look at me’. He
tries again – ‘Good, it’s right, isn’t it? (Yeah) That’s what I asked for, now keep going; move on… (Adrian – You can hear the loudness)… Yeah’. He plays again – ‘No you’ve just sort of gone from really getting louder to nothing, so how are you going to shape the next bit?’ I can hear the frustration in my voice, bubbling just under the surface.

He tries again – ‘Good! Do something with it Adrian’. I demonstrate something (without making it explicit) and he responds with, ‘Do you like stretch that’. However, instead of asking him what he meant, I say, ‘You didn’t catch what I was doing though’. He tries, it sounds identical to mine, and he says, ‘Oh, the same there’. Nonetheless, I say, rather rudely, ‘Did you catch what I was doing? (Um, yes) Yeah, I you can’t think of anything yourself, just copy me (OK)’ Too far! He tries again, and I ‘ask’ for what I want by singing, but when he doesn’t imitate it exactly, I say, ‘No’ and then play it again without qualifying what I’m asking for. I mumble, ‘So I waited before I…’ as he plays again. I say, ‘No, you’re not waiting after the A’. Jane says, ‘Stretch a little bit hey?’ (Mmm). Adrian points to the score and asks, ‘After the A?’ and I say, ‘Yeah, it’s just an idea, but if you can’t think of your own ideas, I’ll give you some (OK), you just have to copy’. He tries – ‘Well, that doesn’t really work’. He points to the score and asks, ‘Do we hold back on the A?’ and I say in a huff, ‘No, this A, here (Oh)’ He tries and does what I ask, but then I say, ‘You need to take more responsibility for your own ideas (Yeah)… I mean I can show you exactly what to do but (think of them myself) … I think you should like, you know, invest in a little bit more time listening to your own playing and you know, if it’s going up make a crescendo; if it’s going down… (OK) …rather than just asking me what to do (Jane – are you listening? Adrian – Yes), because you’re getting to the stage where you need to take over a bit more (OK, umm). He tries again, its fine, but… ‘There’s so many notes there that I can’t go through everything in detail 5 times (Adrian looks to Jane for support and she says, ‘Listen carefully’) You listen to your own playing (OK, yeah). OK, so I’ve given you some ideas, but you need to go with that (Adrian takes off his jacket and says, ‘Yep, umm, do we move on?’ as he clearly has had enough). Nonetheless, I say, ‘No no no, no… so it’s improved, but you were getting faster in that part that I just showed you (Adrian points to the score, saying, ‘Here, here’), and you were using speed to intensify the sound instead of actual sound (Adrian nods)… So that’s a big mistake people make’. Jane refers to the bottom of
page one, asking if the rhythm was correct. I say it was much better and ask to hear the piece again. I say that he is achieving about 85% now – ‘There’s room for improvement, but it’s still quite good’. He barely starts before I interrupt, saying that that isn’t the same speed that he was playing during the closing bars. In an effort to feel the beat, he starts over-emphasises the B on the second beat of the bar, and I criticise him for ‘whacking’ notes, ‘as it stops the piece from going anywhere’. He tries again, quite well, but instead of praising him, I use critical comparison ‘how not to do it’ – I am coming across quite negatively here, and as I walk out of the room, Adrian looks at Jane and she says, ‘Roll… rolling’. He tries again with hands together – ‘No, that doesn’t have any shape to it now, so you can’t just do one or the other, it has to be a combination (I sing and gesticulate the theme expressively)… It’s got to have a little rise and a little fall. You’re rising but whacking, and then when I say don’t whack, you don’t do anything’ (?) He tries the right hand, but I say, ‘There’s no shape there… try to sort of roll through the notes’. He plays and I say, ‘Immediately it’s different, what are you doing differently? (Um, rolling like this – he rolls his elbow)... So do that (I sound slightly exasperated)’. He starts playing from the beginning, but it really doesn’t sound very confident or expressive, and the tempo fluctuates slightly. It seems that my ‘approach’ has really affected Adrian’s confidence and even his ability to confidently employ body movement and gesture to achieve those outcomes – the exact opposite to what I am trying to achieve! I interrupt as he comes to the C Major modulation, saying through my hands, ‘The speed keeps changing every two bars (I put my hands down)… the speed keeps changing (Oh) … You’ve got to choose 1 speed and stick to it, and you rise and fall with the tone without changing speed … (He plays), but that doesn’t mean you accent the notes either’. He continues to play while I click/conduct, but I interrupt again, saying, ‘That sounds too slow to me, you won’t’ be able to maintain that’. He starts again, but doesn’t even finish the first bar before I say abruptly, ‘Look, stand up’. I demonstrate a couple of bars, but it is hardly anything to close to perfect! We swap places as I say, ‘Try and sort of… don’t just play the notes, play the shapes’. He tries – ‘No you’re whacking the notes again’. I interrupt and demonstrate staying on the surface of the keys, rather than using ‘fingers’. He tries the right hand (it’s good) and then looks to me for feedback – ‘Well you listen to yourself and does that make a difference’. I say, ‘Big difference’ (there is, it’s sounds beautiful). He tries again and again to recreate that same sound – ‘No, you’re speeding up there, you’re speeding up there ... you’re
speeding up’. He tries again and I interrupt him by turning on the metronome. Jane rubs his back and says, ‘It’s OK, just do your best’ – I can tell he is close to tears. Eventually, I find the speed (on the metronome) and so does Adrian after a couple of attempts. As he gets to the bottom of page one, he starts to increase tempo just a little, and I interrupt saying that he has two different ‘problems’ – pushing through the middle, but not starting the piece fast enough. ‘We’ve already been through this before – you have to match the speeds’. He starts again, but I interrupt on line 2 saying, ‘That’s not fast enough’. I start using gesture, vocalisation and body movement saying, ‘You’ve got to roll with it’. He plays and I continue in this way, ‘Good’, but then I pull him up because he is getting faster in the lead up to the C Major modulation. He tries again, but I interrupt towards the end of the first page, walking in and out of the room, saying, ‘Start again from there’. I interrupt and point to the score, saying, ‘You got to that beat too fast; you’re getting faster during this part here’. Adrian wipes his left eye for a second time. I say, ‘It’s like a box, this is how much room you have – shape within that, but you can’t go under or over the box, this is how much room you’ve got’. Adrian nods and says, ‘Use all of it’. I say, ‘Spread everything out between the two posts – some of your posts are too much, then too small’. He starts the C Major section again – ‘No, the right hand got faster there, where was that?’ He points to the score and I say, ‘It’s the same speed as this’ as I play the central motif in C Major and then A minor. He plays the C Major motif again – ‘No, the last three notes you’re fastening up’, but to be honest, he played perfectly in time here, I’m not sure what my problem is. I sing with the metronome and he tries again – ‘That’s good but it sounds like a hammer now … the skill of the piece is to be able to make it sound melodious, but still very exact. You’re making yours sound melodious but not exact, then when you exact it sounds hammered. He tries again – ‘No you got to the bottom G too quickly, and that meant that everything else sped up’. He tries again and I sing the motif, asking him to land on the D with the beat; I then demonstrate. He tries again – ‘Your gesture is not fluid enough’ (gestures). He tries again – ‘You can see there, it didn’t come back in time’. He tries again, but I don’t say anything, I play and then say, ‘As you’re playing these notes, you need to be rolling back so that you get in time … (He plays) … That’s better, but then you don’t roll so quickly that you roll out of time’. He tries again – ‘No you’re not in time there … So you’ve got to get the circles (I’m gesticulating) of the right diameter to be able to cover the notes in a gestural way without speeding up or slowing down’. He tries
again – ‘You came over too quickly and you bumped the thumb’. He tries again, but I don’t say anything, I just play a couple of times and then guide his arm while he plays, but the view is obscured. He plays again – ‘No, but when I guided you it was lovely and smooth, and then when you do it …’ He tries again, but I don’t say anything, I just sing and guide his right arm, once without notes and then once with notes. He then tries himself a few times – ‘OK good’. I ask him, ‘Do you practise with the metronome? (Yes) Do you listen? (Yes) Do you record yourself; watch it back? (Mmm, I don’t know where the iPad is; Neil says, ‘Adrian that’s just an excuse’) He plays again and looks to me for feedback – ‘You’ve got to get to the point where you’re not looking at me for directions, I’ve already given you all the directions. You need to take more responsibility’. He plays again a couple of times – ‘Good, now other hand back in, but keep it nice and in time’. He tries it about 10 times, and starts to make some good progress the last couple of attempts, mainly by adding more and more notes, chaining them together while maintaining expressive tonal shape and almost perfect rhythmic stability. As you hear my footsteps coming, he tries again – it’s not as good and I come in and say, ‘That bit’s not in time though. Listen we haven’t got time to practise here, you’re supposed to be practising at home not here – it’s a lesson’. He looks at Jane and says, ‘OK’. I say, ‘all right, let’s move on’. Jane suggests that he play *Sonatina in A Major* (List B). He plays quite well, though there are some untidy spots, a few rushed movements, and a couple of hesitations. When he finishes, I say, ‘OK, that’s good, all right (I very quiet yay). It’s good, (but) it just sounds like your playing’s not really expressive anymore Adrian (I need to be um …) … It just sounds like you’re playing the notes and you’re not really listening or creating something’. I start singing the quiet staccato of the middle section and he starts playing from the beginning of the middle section. I say, ‘For example there, you’re going… (I play the left-hand three-note slurs flat) … instead of … (I play them with more shape). He plays again, better this time, but then I criticise him for playing the B minor chord too loudly (‘Don’t go bahh, go baa’). He tries again – I sing and then say, ‘We need to hear the notes’. He tries again, but I pull him up for going too fast, which essentially pulls the rhythm out and creates untidiness. I demonstrate with precise rhythm, and then he tries. I say, ‘You’ve got to get louder there (I play) and then softer; you’re not doing any of that. (He plays a couple of times) … Yeah, so play it in time and with expression’. He tries a few times and then I criticise him for not being exact with the semiquavers, though I don’t word it exactly like that – ‘No,
here how I’m doing mine shorter (I play right hand and then he copies)… Yeah, make it more sophisticated’. He keeps trying – ‘Did I go dun da da **da** da dun? Or, dun da da **da** da dun? (He plays) … Yeah, so don’t *over*do it; you’ve got this tendency to do it over the top or not at all, you have to find somewhere in the middle (OK)’. I ask him to put the two lines back together – he tries many times (view obscured). I correct his fingering, saying that it will give him a different sound and I also criticise him for playing too fast and without the required legato. He continues to practise until he has success – ‘So those little details, the piece is full of them and you’re not really bringing them out, you’re just playing the notes’. He tries again, but the rhythm of is still not quite 100%, so I demonstrate, doing a critical comparison, but it’s not a fair representation of his attempt and my ability to describe exactly what the problem is rather vague. When he gets the rhythm accurate, I criticise him for not using enough legato. When he plays the fragment with correct rhythm and good legato, I say, ‘Correct, no but it wouldn’t be loud there it would be soft… wouldn’t it?’ I sing and use expressive gesture, after which he tries several times – ‘No, but wouldn’t it be softer at the end of the phrase?’ (View is obscured). I refer to the way ‘you’ would sing it, doing a vocal critical comparison. I say, ‘That’s it… You’ve got to do legato though… that’s not legato… that’s not legato… correct. OK, now play it from the beginning and try to, you know… you might be a bit bored of the pieces, I don’t know, but try to make something of them, try to illustrate them to the listener, pretend I’ve never heard them before’. He starts playing, but I interrupt after just the first idea – ‘No hang on, da da da da **da** … wouldn’t it be better to go (Adrian plays with lovely phrase shape)… surely it would be better to get softer there’. I interrupt again, demonstrating a more refined end to the opening phrase (view is obscured) … so make that softer (right hand) and that one softer (left hand)’. He tries – ‘No, that one louder and then that one softer’. He plays again – ‘Mmm’. He plays the BG# saying, ‘So those two are loud?’ and instead of taking *his* lead in an effort to understand, I say, ‘Isn’t that one at the end of the phrase? (Yeah)… So you make that one the softest’. He plays a few more times – ‘But you wouldn’t play the B louder than the E; that one would be the loudest (top E) and they’d gradually get softer towards the A’. He tries – ‘No you’re not getting softer (He tries again)… See the frustrating thing is you used to do this kind of detail with this piece, and you’re not doing it now’. He tries a couple more times – ‘Good, that’s better, then the left hand’. He experiments with the shaping of the left hand after I ‘sing’ it – ‘Oh yeah, good… now add the
other hand back in’. He plays the first phrase with hands together – ‘No but you’re making your last note louder than either of the previous two’. He plays again – ‘Correct’. He plays again – ‘That’s it, that’s how you play Mozart; everything’s got to be phrased and very exact. That’s where the beauty of it lies, otherwise it sounds da da da da; there’s no meaning in it’. He tries again – ‘So you have to land on the note slower to get it softer’. He starts to experiment with the speed of descent within the right-hand A, and then adds the hands together – ‘Now we can’t hear the left-hand notes at all’. He continues to refine the shape of hands together – ‘That’s better… (He plays again) great, now start again, and all phrases should be tapered off like that’. He starts from the beginning, he gets a little further – ‘No, but you’re getting too soft, too soon, and then playing it loudly’. I sing in critical comparison, staring with the ‘right’ one and then the ‘wrong’ one. He plays the right hand – ‘No’, and then again – ‘Correct’. He swaps to the left hand, after which I say, ‘Now do the same thing in the left hand for the opening phrases’ (I sing the melodic notes with crescendo and decrescendo while keeping the repeated A’s soft). He plays the left hand with good shape, though a little inexact in terms of rhythm – ‘It’s exactly the same as in the Bach before, you’re playing everything the same volume, and that won’t flow anywhere’. He plays again – ‘That’s better, now make the first C# softer’. He plays the left hand well – ‘Good, you used to do this really well with this piece’. He plays again, quite well actually, but for whatever reason I get up suddenly to come and ‘correct’ his loud C#, playing ‘his’ version in an unfair and exaggerated manner. I demonstrate the left hand slowly – ‘So it’s loud, and then you come back to soft and then build it up again, and then back again’. He plays the left hand again – ‘No that’s too loud (I play my C# probably softer than necessary)’. He tries again – ‘It’s too loud… too loud’. It’s really not! This is difficult to watch me being so unnecessarily critical; it’s like I’m enjoying being so pedantic. To his credit, he keeps trying – ‘Good, if you start too loud you’ve got nowhere to go’. He tries again – ‘Now why are you banging the bottom (repeated) A?’ I mimic the way he is playing in an exaggerated manner. He wasn’t really ‘banging’; as I watch now he played a very skilful overall crescendo through all notes, including the repeated A’s. He tries a few more times, looking at me intermittently – ‘You’re banging the A again’. He plays again – ‘That’s better, now put the both hands back together’. He plays hands together several times – ‘It’s too loud at the end of the phrase’. He tries to play the right hand A softer – ‘Remember you’ve got a left hand as well, maybe the left hand is too loud’.
He plays again – ‘It’s too loud’. He plays each hand separately a couple of times, both with expressive phrase shape – ‘Now put the hands together and do that, don’t start from the beginning, you’re just wasting time’. He tries again – ‘It’s too loud’. He plays again – ‘That’s better’. He plays again – ‘Can you play it softer’. He plays again – ‘Can you play that softer though, those notes at the end’. He plays again – ‘That’s it’. He plays again – ‘That’s it’. He plays again – ‘Good’. He plays a few more times – ‘No we can’t hear the notes properly now ‘cause you’re not going down deep enough’. He plays again – ‘Good, so I don’t mean all notes soft, I just mean the last ones’. He plays again – ‘Yeah those two, good’. He plays a couple more times – ‘So play the right hand for that bit (I sing bar 2 of the melodic line)’. He plays the right hand – ‘No, that A is too loud’. He plays the right hand again – ‘Good, and then do the left hand (I sing bar 2 of the left hand)’. He plays the left hand – ‘And then feel the same… when you add the hands back together, feel the same way in each hand and listen’. He plays it several times, the last being the best – ‘Good, now at the beginning (I sing the melodic line bar 1 and he copies)… Yeah, so you wouldn’t bang that… when you’re playing the hands together, you’re banging that C#’. He plays the first two notes of the right hand – ‘Good, now add the hands back together again’. He asks, ‘From the beginning (Mm-hmm)’. He tries a couple of times, before I interrupt – ‘See while one hand’s getting softer there (I sing the right hand), the other one’s going (I sing the left hand), and that’s the beauty of the piece, and that’s the skill that’s required. He starts playing again, but then stops suddenly and looks at me – ‘What are you looking at me for? You should be listening’. He plays again – ‘Good’. He tries again and then ‘corrects’ the right hand – ‘That’s it, so the E is louder than the C#, good… So, roll onto the C# with less weight’. He plays the right hand – ‘Now as you do the other hand, you have to be thinking and combining the gestures together’. He tries again – ‘No you’re just speeding up now… Listen, you’re doing the same thing as you’re doing in the Bach. Speeding up does not equal getting expressive. Expressive is something that you do with the tone and the colour of the notes, not the speed of the notes’. Poor Adrian makes zero eye contact. He tries again – ‘The C# is the same volume as the E’. He tries a few more times, before I finally get up, come over and ask him to ‘use this sort of motion’ (an upward gesture as I roll onto the E). He plays the right-hand first two notes – ‘Good, now while you do this hand, that’s what you’ve got to do with that hand’. He plays the left hand a couple of times – ‘That’s better’ and then I demonstrate the left hand; he copies. I say, ‘Much better
now, add the other hand in’. He plays the hands together – ‘Don’t bang the C#, use gesture’. He plays again – ‘No see what you’re doing wrong is you’re going (I play the right-hand E-C#) … and everything stops. As soon as you stop, there’s no sensitivity in the sound’. He plays the right-hand notes again – ‘OK, make it … illustrate the note to the listener (he plays while I sing) … So just because you’re playing in one hand doesn’t mean that you stop moving in the other’ (?). He plays the right-hand phrase a couple more times – ‘Was you C# softer than what the E had decayed to?’ He plays the phrase really well – ‘Did you answer me? Was your C# softer than what the E had decayed to?’ He is clearly thinking as he has his right-hand fingers on his chin. I say, ‘Do you know what I mean?’ (No)… Are you serious? After all these years? He looks humiliated … Decay means get softer so the E has… the E … After you play the E (Yeah), it will start getting softer (Adrian plays the E and agrees)… So is your C# louder than what the E has decayed to – if it is, it’s not softer’. Well, that’s as clear as mud! He plays E-C# again – ‘No, that’s not softer than the E’. He tries again – I stand up and say, ‘No, like this’ and I play the two notes. ‘You play that (E), but immediately it starts to decay, like the note goes away, (he plays) so you come in at a softer volume than what the E has decayed to (he plays), and if you don’t, it won’t sound softer, it’s as simple as that (Adrian nods and says OK)’. He plays the two notes again as I sit down – ‘Now add the other hand back in’. He plays the hands together again – ‘That’s the best I’ve heard it in the last 20 minutes’. He plays again – ‘Now if you could just play softer at the end of the phrase instead of loud’. He plays the second bar – ‘No you’re playing softer towards the end, I just want you to play softer at the end’. He plays again – ‘Correct’. He plays the first bar – ‘No, that’s too loud’. He plays again – ‘Good, OK we’re there (he nods)… That’s the amount of detail that was in your piece about two months ago. It sounds like your just racing through it and not listening anymore’. He says, ‘OK’. I say, ‘all right, I can hear the other one, but I’ve only got so many hours in the day, I can’t sit here and do it all with you again (he nods). It’s up to you, it’s your piece, not mine’. He looks at Jane a couple of times – ‘Keep going’. He starts playing, but I interrupt – ‘No that’s not the s … you’re playing it differently now. The C#’s got to be softer’. He plays the first two bars again – ‘That’s got to be softer there’. He plays bar 2 – ‘So, why don’t you use gesture a bit more, why don’t you throw your arms in when it’s got to be soft, and throw them in slowly when it’s got to be … ah, throw them in … like, quickly when it’s got to be loud and slowly when it’s soft’. Social skills and
the ability to communicate clearly are virtually non-existent in this lesson – I’m cringing! He plays the hands together again before trying the right hand separately – ‘That’s it, so it’s (I sing the first two notes and he plays them)’. He plays the hands together – ‘Now we can’t hear all the notes now because you’re going down too slowly in the left hand (He plays the left-hand bar 2) … That’s it’. He tries again – ‘No, no you’re not … Oh God, so draining’. I actually huff! He starts playing, but I interrupt, saying, ‘Just do the, do the next bit, I can’t bear it anymore, just move on, quick’. He pokes his chin – ‘Just do the next bit, keep going’. Jane pats Adrian on the back and points to the score, saying, ‘The next bit, what’s the next bit?’ Adrian points to the top of page two and starts playing after Jane says, ‘Think about how to phrase the sound’. He doesn’t get very far before … you guessed it! ‘No, we just went through that (I sing the left-hand three-note slurs and Adrian taps his chin with this right hand index finger and then plays the left hand alone)… OK wasn’t that, isn’t that the same idea as at the bottom of page one? (He points to the score) … So you need to apply the ideas that I teach you to all sections of the piece. It just takes too long if you don’t. If it’s a three-note slur it’s soft-loud-soft, soft-loud-soft’. He stares at the music and then says, ‘Oh’ and Jane points to the score saying, ‘This is a phrase …’ He plays the left hand – Neil used to have the same problem, he’d only do it for the bits that I went through. You’re starting on the same route, I can tell. Listen, (he looks) … I can tell. Apply what you know to what you don’t know. It’s not like, you know, this is completely new to you; I’ve already been through this before. So you look at see it and go, ‘have I seen this kind of thing before in the piece, or in other pieces’, and then you apply it’. He starts playing the left-hand three-note slurs and then continues with the hands together – ‘OK, there’s so much opportunity to do like (I sing a descending sigh) … it’s just so beautiful there, you’re not doing anything with it’. I stand up and ask him to look at the left hand, referring to the score, ‘You’ve got a two-note slur and then two staccatos’ (I then play more of the left hand)… you know it’s just so pretty (I play a little more of the left hand and then start singing with expressive gesture). Adrian tries – ‘No, you’ve got to do … if you want it to be louder, you need to do more activity’ and I show him the left hand is slow motion. He plays the left hand (view obscured) – ‘Can you think of the most exciting thing ever?’ He answers, ‘Going to Dreamworld’ and I ask, ‘Can you play it like that? (I start singing)… So excited!’ He plays and I say, ‘OK, that’s so much better already. You have to give something of yourself to the piano’ He is doing much better, but I say, ‘Isn’t there a
rest there though?’ He tries to sort it out – ‘Isn’t there a rest there though?’ He tries – ‘Isn’t that a quaver though?’ He plays – ‘No it sounds dull again’. I start singing, gesticulating and using ‘The whole orchestra is playing’ with the left hand rhythm. He does much better – ‘Now you’ve got 3 ideas there’ (I start singing energetically ‘and second one Adrian, and third one what are you going to do with it?’) He plays the left hand again as I coach, but he backs off on the third one – ‘No, you didn’t do anything with it. I did lots but you didn’t do anything’. He plays the third phrase, but I interrupt – ‘No what I mean is, what are you going to do with it; you should be louder’. He says, ‘Oh’ and Jane says, ‘Crescendo’. He tries – ‘The rhythm’s wrong there… the rhythm’s wrong’. He tries again – ‘Now they all sound completely the same’. Jane adds, ‘You need to make a crescendo’. He plays the left hand again, twice more – ‘No, but you’re going da da da da da da da da da da da da da. It’s (supposed to be) da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da da. The first beat of the bar is more important’.

He plays well this time – ‘Yeah, do you want to write any of this down, or are you just going to remember?’ He looks for a pencil while I go and get a drink. Neil complains, ‘When am I going to get my lesson? Adrian has had a 1 ½ hour lesson already, and (he’s) forgetting every skill’. He writes on the score and Jane says, ‘When you go home you need to shape the sound… Make it more exciting’. I come back and say, ‘It feels like your expression’s just gone in your pieces, I don’t know what’s happened. Adrian (Yeah?), what’s happened? ’ He shrugs and Jane says, ‘Sometimes not enough concentration’. I say, ‘His playing sounds dull, I’m sorry, but it doesn’t sound that good. It sounds sort of like an ‘A’ but…’ He falls into Jane and is crying. Jane says, ‘It’s OK, when you go home you just shape the sound. Mark is not criticising you, he just want to give you some constructive comment’. Neil asks if he will have his lesson, ‘No mate’. Jane – ‘Come on you have to open your mind and listen carefully. Shape the sound and make it sound better. All right? If Mark just says good, very good, then you can’t make any improvement, OK. You still have the weekend to sit down at the piano and think about how to shape the sound; how to make the sound; how to work on the details all right? Could you do that? Come on, I’m sure you could, all right’. I ask to hear Little Bird, but Oliver suggests that Neil play so as to let Adrian have a short break. After around 20 minutes, I ask Adrian to play Little Bird. The notes are all there, but it’s very messy and has quite a few wrong notes. ‘OK, well it’s in rhythm. Um, not sure what to say’. Adrian mentions that it’s hard to play the left-hand trills fast. I suggest that he play slower and get all the notes
precise. I help him to clear up the left-hand demisemiquavers by suggesting he further activate his thumb – ‘There’s no point saying I can’t do it, you have to make steps to do it. Either slow down, or press the notes all the way to the bottom’. He tries again before I say, ‘The runs over here are not even and I can’t hear the left hand through most of the piece’. He tries the beginning hands together – ‘Your left hand is not actually playing all of the notes’. He makes steps to clear up the left hand, and I suggest that he do the same when the hands are together. After a while of trial and error with hands together, I ask him how long it has been since he has practised (coordination) drills for the piece. He says, ‘A month’. There is a long pause. ‘OK, you’re not playing all the notes in left hand; it’s not accurate; it’s not precise (Oh). It sounds like you’ve come up with your own version because it’s a bit easier for you. You’re not playing the notes that are written’. He comments that his left hand’s not fast enough, and I say, ‘Well mate, that’s why you’re supposed to be doing the drills, to get faster, but if you don’t do them for a month, it’s not going to help’.

Lesson 27: 7 September 2014

Reviewed 19 January 2015

- The lesson starts with me telling the boys that Andrew got the Lisa Simpson Lego mini-figure. Adrian says that he likes ‘his guy’, (Scratchy). I ask him to play Little Bird – Oliver says, ‘Come on; serious’ and Jane says, ‘Come on, do your best’. He adjusts the chair; Jane is video recording on the iPad and I take a seat. It isn’t the greatest, but I do say, ‘Oh that’s improved so much, good boy, well done’ (Adrian waves his arms and says Yay). I clap and Adrian says, ‘I did the drills’ as Jane asks, ‘Did he miss any notes?’. I say, ‘Yeah, it’s made a massive difference; you did miss a few notes and you sort of heard that (Adrian – but not as much as Friday)… It’s still of a very good standard. I fell much more confident with that’. Adrian starts waving his arms and smiling as he looks to Jane for her reaction. Jane says, ‘You still miss a few notes? (Adrian – only a few)… You told me this morning that you didn’t miss anything this morning (she smiles)’. I say, ‘Well maybe you did do it perfect; it’s harder on the grand piano (Jane nods)’. I remind him that if he has done all his good practice, it’s better just to keep playing in the performance or exam, even if he makes a mistake. Jane paraphrases and reiterates this point to Adrian. I say, ‘With practising, you can always go and do some more drills on that bit, or, you know… when it comes to a performance, you’ve got to just go with it. Of course the more practise that you
do, and the more prepared you are, the less likely you will muck things up’. Jane and Adrian nod. Jane says to Adrian, ‘So even with a scale, you can’t go back to the beginning’. Adrian gesticulates while saying, ‘You have to keep on going’. I confirm and qualify, ‘within reason; they want you to do well so it doesn’t take forever’. Jane tells Adrian that there will be another student behind and in front. I say, ‘Don’t worry, she’s not going to get angry or anything weird’. Adrian seems relieved. ‘They would prefer you to do well so that everything runs on time’. Jane says, ‘Just prepare yourself’. Referring to the Little Bird piece, I remind him to make sure his performance maintains a triple lilt – I clap one to the bar as Adrian plays again. It really does sound quite good actually. After a brief discussion about the poco ritard indication in the closing bars, I say, ‘I am actually genuinely surprised that it’s improved that much in a day – how did that happen?’ Jane smiles and claps, and Adrian happily tells me, ‘I did drills a lot’. Neil says, ‘He didn’t want to get shouted at by Mark again’. Jane tells me that after the last lesson, they returned home and Adrian stayed in a very bad mood, but didn’t throw himself into a tantrum. She says that he asked her, ‘Am I hopeless?’ (I say, you’re not hopeless mate) Jane tells me that she said, ‘No, but tomorrow, you put some good time and your heart, and put in a good effort to practise, and then you can pick it up. I think he take it more serious now, and be more humble and listen (Hmm), instead of saying oh I’m so good I don’t have to listen’. It’s interesting to see how much Jane gesticulates as she speaks here. I say, ‘Oh, don’t do that’. Adrian tells me that he listened to the audio and Jane confirms that he listened to it many times. I say, ‘It’s remarkable how much that’s improved (Adrian looks very proud)… I can’t actually… I think that was what was contributing to my frustration, because I could see such a good student and it was just a mess, and I couldn’t understand why someone like you would play so messy (Neil – badly)’. Jane says, ‘I think it’s very useful to have the boys listen to the audio again. Even yesterday Neil listened to all the audios (she lists them), and I just remind him, see you play too loud is it, and he say yeah, yeah’. I say that he would definitely get an A for that performance, ‘It’s really good, well done’. Both Jane and Adrian are so happy, they almost seem like one person. He says, ‘Yay’ and waves his arms. I suggest we move on and Jane asks him to play the Sonatina, reminding him to be humble, ‘That’s very important’. I say, ‘Be humble? Did you think that you were the best at everything?’ He looks at me, smiles, points to his chin and moves his leg up and down. Neil says, ‘I think he was’. When Adrian says, ‘Yes’, I say, ‘That’s OK,
that’s all right’ and Jane says, ‘Do your best’. He plays the Sonatina with several false
starts; ‘You can tell it’s so different’. Looking back, I can see he has some moments
of non-clarity, but I say, ‘That’s outstanding, that’s really excellent’. Adrian is very
excited – he puts his hands in the air and says ‘yah’ as Jane claps. ‘I can tell, just by
the way that you’re carrying your head, I can tell that you’re really interested in it; I
can just tell immediately (Adrian waves his arms saying yay and Jane comments that
it sounds different). I say, ‘It sounds so different, it sounds really… sophisticated and
important (Yeah)… When you played it on Friday, it didn’t sound very important…
It’s got to sound like a little prince… (I sing – I’m so, rich and in control)… I’m king!
(Adrian – In the manor)… I’m just so important’. Jane suggests, ‘If you look at the
audio later, you can communicate it’. I continue, ‘Rather than, here I am, I’m a Grade
5 piano student, playing this piece, I wish this would be over. I’m just so wonderful
‘cause I won last year’ (Adrian laughs). Jane says, ‘You know, it’s just like we have
the interview at the two different college – the first teacher at the Kelvin Grove, she is
a good teacher, but she’ll say it’s my job (she looks at her watch) … all right time’s
up, bye, OK? That’s the performance on Friday, and then there is another teacher at
Hillbrook – Oh I really want to show you our campus, would you like to come and
have a look? I really want to tell you everything; like that’. Neil agrees. I say, ‘I can
tell, that sounds like, oh really interesting to listen to’. Jane adds, ‘See, I could feel a
difference’. I’m not sure if I hadn’t noticed before, but Jane uses many gestures as she
speaks. Adrian says, ‘Instead of just like a computer – Oh, here’s the story’ (he uses
gestures) and Jane asks, ‘Anything he can do to improve this piece?’ I say that I think
the piece is beautiful the way it is, though the smaller rhythms are sometimes not clear
(I sing), but not so unclear that it sounds wrong (Oh). I walk over and stand next to
him at the second piano and point out a couple of spots where he could do some
partial practice. I work with him making the rhythm of the Ti-tic-a rhythm more
deliberate. I explain that he was coming in too late with the first semiquaver, making
the next two notes slightly inaudible because of rushing. I say, ‘Speak to me (Oh)’. I
do a critical comparison, first singing clearly with gesture and then slightly ‘blurring’
the notes. He says, ‘OK’ and I say, ‘I can’t hear you; don’t mumble’. He tries a few
times (That’s better). I then coach him with grading the decrescendo during the last
three notes of that phrase (I play slowly and then usual tempo). He tries – ‘Good, sort
of like over here’. I point to the score and play the second half of the opening theme.
He plays again and Jane nods, as I say (and nod), ‘OK? Same kind of thing’. He plays
again, after which I say that he plays Mozart and Haydn quite well because he has a
good ear for detail, which of course was missing at the previous lesson. I pretend to
whack him on the head with the books and everybody laughs. He points to the score,
telling me that we would use the same tonal detail to play the motif when it appears in
a different key. I agree and say that if I heard that performance at an exam, I would
say, ‘Lovely phrasing, beautiful sound, I can certainly hear what you’re intending to
do, however, the fast notes are a little bit unclear. Could you speak to me more clearly
with the fingers so I can get what you’re saying; that’s what I would write, I would
still give it a really good mark though’. I use gesture and a clear articulation in my
voice to demonstrate my point here. Jane nods when I mention that there’s always
something that you can improve, no matter how good your skills are. Adrian asks to
play the Invention; Jane records and I sit in the far corner with my arms folded. The
expressive tone colour is lovely, but he cannot control the tempo unfortunately. I say,
‘all right, that’s awesome, you’ll do a really good job at the exam with that. If you
want to do well in the competition, listen very carefully to what I’m going to say to
you’. He says, ‘The tempo’. Instead of taking the ‘tempo’ track, I say that because of
his rushing, I can really hear what’s happening. To do this, I demonstrate the left hand
at the bottom of page one with where the piece modulates to E minor, first with
expressive width and vocalisation, and then without. He tries a couple of times before
I dramatise the left hand fragment, using expressive gesture, vocalisation and facial
expression. He tries and it’s interesting how he tilts forwards, just as I do. I say,
‘Good boy; excellent’ and nod, looking very satisfied. ‘If you do that, that makes the
whole cadence to E Major (should be E minor!) much more clear. You know it’s a
minor (Yeah) …’ Neil interrupts asking what a cadence is. I say, ‘A cadence is when
you go like (I demonstrate on the second piano, and then refer back to the piece,
playing the perfect cadence, B7 – E minor). I go on to explain (and play) to both boys
that the last two bars of the first section is (I play B7 – E minor). Adrian points to the
score and tells me, ‘That’s the arpeggio going backwards’, and I agree. I say (and
dramatise), ‘In pieces like this, you need to be very specific and say, ‘Listener, it’s a
cadence in E minor’. Those three notes set the cadence up’. I lean over and play the
hands together for the cadence, and the bars leading into page two – ‘You’re actually
rushing through here’ (Oh). Adrian plays the first (sequential) bars of the second
section. I interrupt, saying, ‘OK, that’s good, but it doesn’t … I can’t feel anything’.
He tries again, and I coach him using expressive energy, body movement, gesture,
verbal direction and clapping. I explain that I have little goosebumps so I know that he is on the right track. He asks why I have little goosebumps – ‘Because I can tell that you understand what I’m saying (Oh) … and it comes out in the sound. Can you hear the …? (I dramatise the intensity of the piece)’ Jane laughs and says, ‘That’s why I say Friday was a good lesson’. I say, ‘I thought very carefully about what I said (to you on Friday), and I realise I was a bit unfair, but at the same time I was like (makes frustrated face) … I could just feel you pulling away from me (Adrian – not now) … Not now, I feel like you’re right with me, and you’re working just as hard as I am (Yep) … You know, it takes a lot of energy to teach well (Yep) … See I’m not sitting in the chair going ‘Oh, I think you should get louder there’. It takes a lot of energy to teach well, and it takes a lot of energy to play well (Adrian – That’s how it’s done). You can’t just play well without putting yourself into it (Yep). There’s no amount of lessons of like, ‘Oh I think you should get louder there and like … Without you being into it, it won’t happen (OK)’. Neil says, ‘Yeah I know Mum’. I continue, ‘So it’s the same with Neil (I start singing and moving with expressive energy)’. Adrian says, ‘It’s true, if the kid doesn’t get into it, the teacher doesn’t’. I respond, ‘Oh yeah, totally! If the kid’s not into it, I start to lose interest. But, I have different expectations for different kids; some kids aren’t that good, so I just sort of go, ‘Oh well, that’s the best they can do’, but when a really good student comes and they’re like … wait a second … (Adrian – Don’t do it) … something’s wrong’. Jane is standing beside us and asks Adrian what he needs to remember from today’s lesson. I ask him if he wants to write anything in the score. I suggest that he should write, ‘tempo’ and Jane suggests he write ‘cadence’ where the music modulates to E minor. Jane suggests that he still doesn’t fully understand the concept of cadences; I clarify that cadences are really a fancy way of saying chord progressions, which they both seem to understand, at least superficially for now. This is one of the main reasons why I now issue students with copy of the score with the analysis written in for them, so that harmonic information especially can be reflected on as an expressive device and absorbed early in the learning process, rather than relying on their ability to remember information that is ‘learnt’ non-contextually. I go on to make the analogy of the sequential passage that follows the E minor cadence, as an opportunity to ‘show the audience what’s happening’ and ‘play with their ears’. ‘Don’t just show off – show and tell. (Adrian says, ‘Show and tell with the piano’) … Show and tell with the piano – now show us what the piece is about’. He plays *Jinker Ride* while Jane records with the iPad and I
sit in the corner, this time with legs crossed and hands in my lap; he plays very well. When he finishes, I smile and look forward – ‘It’s pp at the end (Oh)’. I ask him to stand up and I demonstrate the last couple of bars, answering his question about holding down the pedal. He sits down to have a go, but has a bit of trouble orientating himself to the notes, so I help – he does well and I nod, OK. He shouts ‘Yay!’ and throws his arms in the air as I say, ‘That’s awesome, Well Done’. I suggest for the exam – terrific, I can really understand what you’re doing. For the competition – we will need to add pedal in a couple of spots. I suggest that for his exam, he be sure that the left-hand thirds are really clear; I show him what I mean, and explain regarding touching the point of sound. I suggest that he loosen his wrist and throw it down more loosely. I ‘experiment’ with shaking out his arm and he laughs. I interrupt, saying, ‘OK, just stop there. I still think it’s of a very high standard (Thank you). It’s really good’. He plays more of the left hand and I ask him to throw his hand a little faster into the thumb. I say, ‘Can you angle it so this one comes down further?’, essentially asking him to play on the tip of a downward sloping thumb. I compliment him on a better result and ask him what he did different. He explains, but I caution him against twisting for an extended period of time. After further experimentation, he seems to maintain greater clarity when he holds his left elbow out slightly, but I go on to say that every piano’s touch is different, so if the notes are not clear, it means that a physical adjustment might be necessary. He reminds me that some pianos need more weight for the key to be depressed. I add, that the further in you are, the more that is true. He tries with the left hand of Jinker Ride and seems to understand the concept, especially after I ask him to experiment both in and out with a single finger. ‘If you’re going to be moving in to the back of the keys, you have to adjust everything’. I suggest that he ask his Mum and Dad every now then if they can hear the top notes of the left-hand chords clearly, rather than swearing and saying, ‘Get away’. I say to use someone else’s ears and their opinion – ‘You’re a good student, but you’ve still got stuff you can learn’. As he looks inside the piano, he comments that he needs to be able to see all hammers hit the strings for a clear sound. He plays In the Wind – I think it sounds too fast, but he is able to maintain the tempo throughout. Nonetheless, when he finishes, he looks to me for feedback – ‘That’s awesome. (Yay!) You did miss one or two notes (Oh, yeah), but that’s not going to sort of, bring it down’. There is some discussion regarding playing the programme from memory. I say, ‘Well done mate,
well done’. He asks me if there will be an orchestra at his exam to play the Haydn Concerto with him.

Lesson 28: 14 September 2014

Reviewed 20 and 22 January 2015

- The lesson starts with Jane reminding Adrian to hold his feet flat and firm, and my asking Adrian to play his competition pieces. I ask him if he will play the Haydn concerto for the end-of-year recital – ‘You absolutely have to play it, I insist!’ Adrian smiles and Jane laughs. Adrian plays the Bach Invention in A minor; this is most stable that I have heard the tempo thus far – ‘OK, that’s good. I’d give it 85%, it’s very good’ (Yay, yeah). It’s interesting how Adrian plays the E minor arpeggio at the end of the first section before I give any other feedback. I ‘agree’ and play it a couple of times, saying (as I gesture towards my ear), ‘Yeah, it’s not talking too me though’. He plays the arpeggio again, this time with much more deliberate expressive intent, forward tilt of the trunk and movement of the head – I agree, saying, ‘Yeah, that’s it; that’s what’s missing in your playing, I can’t hear … you’re not talking to me’ (Oh). Jane says, ‘More clearly hey?’ and I say, ‘I just can’t hear the ideas clear enough’. Adrian asks if he should do it again and I agree, reiterating, ‘It’s still good’. He starts again, but I interrupt within the first bar or 2, saying that that’s quite a different tempo to the one that he finishes with. He adjusts the tempo and I then introduce an expressive tenuto on the second left hand A, presumably to highlight the syncopated rhythm. I suggest that he ‘parachute up’ to achieve the effect of making the higher A seem louder; he and I take turns, merging the up movement of the staccato and the down movement of the tenuto into a single gesture (Oh). He continues to play before I pull him up, pointing out that he is starting to rush soon after the modulation to C Major. I say, ‘The first part is much better – you’re talking to me again, then you started mumbling just there; don’t cry’. He starts playing the right hand of the C Major section and I say, ‘Yeah, just there, you started to take off; speed’. He plays hands together from the beginning of the C Major section with more stability in the tempo. I interrupt, saying, ‘Talk to me, talk to me … C Major’. It’s quite interesting that yet again, as soon as he incorporates the gestural activity of his arms with an overall ‘sway’ of the upper body, the playing comes alive. He continues to play as I lean in saying, ‘That’s it; talk to me; make me listen to you’, all while gesturing and pushing forward with my own upper body as the semiquavers resolve to quavers,
essentially where harmonic tension becomes harmonic resolution, albeit temporary. I also use hand gestures and expressive vocalisation to help him highlight the expressive potential of the right hand tied notes, which are also sequential and harmonically resolved. I interrupt as soon as he starts to gather momentum in the left hand, saying, ‘No, no, your left hand is starting to carry away again’. I take him back to the E minor arpeggios, demonstrating and suggesting that he take his time to finish the idea. He is having some difficulty with the keeping the elbow stable (‘don’t let your elbow collapse; bring your elbow out there’), but it probably is a question of engaging the upper arm muscles here. Nonetheless, he plays the arpeggio quite well and I say, ‘Good, now the next part, take your time to talk’. He starts playing from the E minor arpeggio again, moving into the next section. It sounds quite beautiful, but I interrupt again, saying, ‘OK, no you’re not speaking; the right hand is … (I sing and gesture deadpan and then expressively) … show me’. He plays the right hand better, but again I say, ‘Show me’ – he repeats and it does actually have even wider tonal shape. I say, ‘Good, now add … go from (I sing the E minor arpeggio)’. He picks it up from the E minor arpeggios as I stand in the corner, gesticulating and using expressive vocalisation. I interrupt, clicking the crotchet beat while saying, ‘No, I still feel like you’re rushing through that whole part’. He plays again, while I gesticulate and sing in the background, but I think he is becoming distracted, and stops to think – ‘That’s all right’. As he plays this time, I watch quietly, commenting, ‘No, your quavers are too fast’, referring to the left hand. He starts to play the semiquavers, but I say, ‘No these’, playing the left hand quavers on his piano. I start to play wrong notes, but the message is still there! ‘Show … you know … take your time’. He starts playing the left hand and is doing quite well – ‘No, go (I sing and dramatise the descending semiquavers, which he copies) … Yeah, make us listen (I gesture here too)’. As he starts to play the left hand quavers, I say, ‘They’re not decoration’. He continues to play and I try to keep him within a uniform crotchet pulse, but I sense a degree of frustration. He stops soon after and I say, ‘OK, good boy, good boy. You know that excited feeling I was getting with Neil? (Yeah) … I feel anxious (I use gesture here) listening to this (Oh) because it’s just too … I can’t… it’s too rushed’. I start singing the left hand expressively with body movement and gesture, breathing between phrases. He takes over, but soon after, I say, ‘No you’re rushing there … ba da da 1 2 3 and 4 and 1 ba da da 1 2 3 and 4 and 1’. This time as he plays, I conduct and sing the beat subdivisions expressively, ‘Now that’s better’. I sigh, nod and
continue, ‘I feel like I’ve caught my breath’. He nods and says, ‘Yeah’. I say, ‘OK, now you’ve got 4 times there (I hold up 4 fingers), what are you going to do, them all the same?’ I then sing the 3 sequences, ‘dramatising’ and creeping towards him on the third, after which Adrian says, ‘How about … get a bit louder?’ I shout, ‘Yeah!’ He starts playing again, but increases tempo on the third – I say, ‘That doesn’t mean faster though’ as I clap the crotchet beat. He tries again, during which I start playing the opening theme on the second piano, saying, ‘So it’s got to fit with the beginning’. He starts playing the left hand again and does better this time. After he finishes that section, I say, ‘It’s actually weird how you and Neil are having the same lesson, but in a different way’. I go on to discuss (and demonstrate at the second piano) how the middle section of his piece was faster than the beginning (Adrian – Oh yeah). He seems to understand, and in putting it this way, it seems less like a criticism and more like something that others find challenging too. I ask him to add his hands back together. The tempo is very stable now, and I say, ‘Now more this time’ as he approaches the final sequence. As he continues to play to the end, I use gesture, body movement, conducting, ensemble playing different sections of the piece (I play the opening while he continues with page two) and vocalisations to coach him: both hands; come on; don’t rush; ex-paand!’ As he finishes, I say, ‘OK, we’re up to 90% already’. He of course throws his arms out, and says, ‘Yay, like him (points to Neil)’. I go on to say that for some reason he seems to find it hard to shift out of the 85-90% bracket in terms of performance polish, and I ask him to leave it at 90%. He then jokes about going up and down between 90-95%. Jane suggests that during his home practice, he will play the piece with the metronome, but then finds it hard to maintain a uniform tempo without it. I respond, saying, ‘Listen, listen listen – compare, compare, compare’. I play the opening and then ask him to play the opening, stopping him to remind him regarding the first left-hand note staccato, which he does. I then ask him to play from the start of the second section – I say that it sounds faster to me, and Neil agrees. I ask him, ‘OK, does it sound like you’re playing too slow there now?’ (A bit) … Yeah, that’s because it’s too fast (gestures), so you’ve got to pull it back (gestures) and expand (gestures) the phrases there (OK). I’m not treating you any differently to your brother; don’t take it personally (He nods and says OK; I smile)’. Jane says, ‘Adrian, just don’t rush … at the beginning of the second page, don’t rush’. I say, ‘Compare the beginning to the second page again’ and he
starts the piece again as I clap. He then moves straight to the second page; I stop clapping and he finishes out the piece. I nod and say, ‘Good boy’. He says, ‘That was good?’ (Huh?) ‘Did I get the tempo right?’ I confirm, but go on to demonstrate a little of the left hand on page two, saying, ‘I still feel like you could do more sound, it’s not loud enough’. He starts playing the left hand, (Yeah) and when he starts to accelerate, I say, ‘No …’ but he is quick to put is pointer finger up in acknowledgement; I chuckle. As he plays the last phrase in the sequence, I encourage (by way of demonstration, demonstration and saying, ‘doubly rotate on everything’) him to apply double rotation for a full sound. After a couple of good attempts, As I play a little of the opening, I ask him to start from the beginning again. He asks me, ‘All the way through?’ I say to just play the opening bars as we are going to ‘compare’ tempi again (Oh). He starts playing and I start clapping the beat, saying, ‘Now do the second page with lots of sound’, which he does. As he plays, I continue to clap, saying, ‘Squeeze out the sound; draw it out’ while using gesture, body movement and expressive prosody. As he finishes, I say, ‘OK, we’re coming up to 92% now, very good’. He of course ‘cheers’ with his arms and says, ‘Yay!’ I point out through demonstration that he has a slight tendency to ‘race’ through the left-hand staccato quavers in the closing bars. I suggest that he think of the beat and then compare the left hand quavers to the tempo of the opening, playing both. He tries, and does better. I then use random notes and both hands to play a loud soft loud soft loud soft loud soft sequence for him to internalise. After he tries this activity, I caution, ‘Don’t let the second note push you forwards (I use gesture)’. He then plays the left hand alone and I say, ‘That’s better … better, good boy’ (Yeah). He opens the score and tells me, ‘Also, I get a bit faster on the last line sometimes’. I say, ‘Well, it’s the same thing – the second note of the quaver pulse (he starts playing) …is sometimes pushing you forwards’. As he finishes, I point to his hand and say, ‘Yeah, that’s nice’. As he plays staccato quavers again, I say, ‘Good boy … Now … Do the same thing, but throw your arm faster into the bottom notes … Where is it?’ Adrian points to the score and I say, ‘Oh thanks’. I highlight the gradual crescendo that could be achieved as the notes on the main beats ascend stepwise. Thereafter as he plays the left hand, I start getting dramatically involved, using gesture and expressive vocalisation, singing ‘A B C D E’, which would have been great if the notes I was singing were in fact the ones being played. As he finishes, he looks at me and I nod, giving him a wide-eyed excited smile. He points to the last couple of notes, saying, ‘Double rotation there’ and I smile and nod
proudly. We experiment together a few times, and I say, ‘I like how you went softer there’. He finishes and I smile and nod, saying, ‘Well Done… It works doesn’t it?’ He points to the music, telling me what dynamic level he is using for individual notes. I say, ‘You know, it might seem like I’m criticising you, but you’ve done a lot really well (Yay!)… You have. He asks me if it’s 92% now and I smile and say, ‘I reckon’. Oliver laughs and Jane reminds him to pay attention. While indicating ‘levels’ with my hands, I ask him, ‘Can you keep it at 92 and keep going up to 95 rather than sliding back to 85 again?’ He asks me, ‘OK, how about 91?’ I ask him what happened to his tooth (‘I have a plate’). He shows me and I say, ‘Did you know I have false teeth?’ Both boys are very interested and come to have a look. I say, ‘They’re false on the ends, because they were all cracked and chipped’. The boys tell me that Oliver is shy to show his teeth. Neil says that he took a selfie. I comment that Neil has such a happy little face before Adrian and I continue. I say, ‘I don’t want you to feel like it’s no good, because it is good (Yay), but when you play faster it makes me feel anxious, and that’s when I start to feel stressed (Oh). It’s not because you’re doing no good, that’s not why I’m stressed, it’s just that the music’s making me feel anxious (OK). Does that make sense? (Yeah, I get it). It might seem like, oh, Mark’s getting really annoyed again, but it’s the way you’re playing it is making me feel anxious, not you’. Using gesture to illustrate my point, I continue, ‘You’re not making me anxious, it’s the music making me feel like stressed (Oh) because it’s getting faster and faster, and I can’t relax’. He says, ‘It’s the music, not me, yeah I get it’. I say, ‘So when you speed up, that makes me stressed because I feel like I can’t hear what’s happening (Adrian – in the music). So it’s not because you’re doing a bad job… I know it’s probably a bit strange to understand (Yeah)... It’s just that, when you keep speeding up, I feel like… I can’t breathe (dramatises)’. Adrian says, ‘Oh, I get it… I get it’. I say, ‘Whereas when you go (I start singing expressively and gesticulating)… I feel like it makes more sense to me, I feel like, oh I get it’. Jane comes over and suggests to Adrian that he write, ‘take your time’ as a reminder. He gets the pencil, Jane takes a seat, and I suggest he write, ‘Take your time and make left hand louder; expand the phrases, don’t rush’. After a small amount of banter with Neil, we continue with the Mozart Sonatina. He proudly tells me he can play it from memory, and then starts. It’s really quite stylish, but he still suffers from racing through without fully articulate the ideas. As he finishes, I say, ‘OK, good boy… (Adrian – 80%?) You’re playing it well, but it’s not exciting me because you’re rushing through it again, I’m sorry, I know I
sound like a big, sort of, pain in the backside’. He says, ‘Do it again?’ I continue on, demonstrating through expressive gesture and vocalisation, how he could expand as he ascends up the Major scale, rather than ‘doing the opposite, which takes away from the excitement’. He tries again – ‘No, just wait a slight second before you get to the top note’. After he tries again, I say, ‘Yeah, it’s so much better when you do that instead of just racing through the bar’ (Oh). After he tries again, I play it slower and suggest that he ‘make each note in turn louder’, which he also tries slowly. I go on to say, ‘If you didn’t have any notes, it would be… (I then play random notes with both hands while still maintaining the same degree of crescendo and phrasal expansion)’. He tries the concept using the same idea. I go on to suggest and play, ‘1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 – it’s like little steps, and you’re getting louder one step at a time’. He tries again, after which I ask him (and demonstrate) to put the ‘notes’ back in. He plays again, but I quickly jump in, ‘No, you’re rushing at the end there’. He keeps trying before I suggest that he ‘drop faster’ for the top notes. He tries again before I eventually say, ‘Oh, I think I know what the problem is – you’re dropping faster to try and get louder, but in doing so, you’re increasing the speed’ (Oh). I go on to remind him through demonstration that it’s not a fastening of the tempo, but a quickening of the overall speed of downward descent – ‘You’re still keeping the same tempo, but you’re just landing into the keys faster’. He does better, but I still ask him to partial play the last two sixths. He does so; I play the passage and then does so, after which I smile and say, ‘OK?’ He says, ‘Yeah’. I then play further, asking him not to increase the tempo of the left hand by using critical comparison. I say, ‘Fill out the whole beat – don’t be in a rush’. He tries again and I say, ‘Don’t squash the beat’ and then sing and conduct ‘a circle’. I then go on to play the harmonic outline of the piece while saying, ‘That’s your speed’. He plays a small fragment again and I say, ‘Yeah, then you won’t have a problem when you get to (sings quicker notes). The reason you’re having a problem there is because you’re speeding up in the previous bar (Oh)’. He tries a couple more times, before I demonstrate how he is tending to speed up in the left hand. He tries again and I say, ‘Good’, before going on to explain he is tending to compact the beat between beats 4 and 1, which ultimately makes the music less exciting. He paraphrases by saying (and gesticulating), ‘I’m squishing it (I agree) … I have to spread it out’. I agree, saying that he has to make all beats the same size. He tries again and as I nod, he tries again. I then ask him, ‘Isn’t that loud?’ which he does, but then I caution him not to play loud and then suddenly soft. We review the rhythm a
couple of times (he tends to rush) before I add the left hand to his right hand. We do this a couple of times before I ask him to put the hands back together again. When he does so and increases in tempo, I put my fingers on my temples and say that the tempo is making me stressed again. He plays much better this time and I nod my head and say, ‘That’s it, I can listen to that now’. He tries again, but I indicate that it’s getting too slow and I start clapping the crotchet beat. He tries again – ‘Good boy’. He tries again and once stable, I remind him of the dynamics while playing on the second piano. He tries it again with success so I ask him to check it with the tempo of the opening, which he does. We go back to the previous section, but I caution him that he won’t get better if you get there faster (Oh). I isolate the left hand, explaining that playing the semitones and octaves are wide apart, but still need to be close together in terms of pulse (I indicate that he is getting faster when leaping from low to high notes in the left hand). I say, ‘If you could just learn listen to your own playing, it would be so much easier. We could do other things (he nods), but most of your lessons revolve around wrong tempo (Oh)… Don’t cry, it’s OK’. He plays the left hand slowly and I smile and nod, adding, ‘It’s the challenge that you have (Adrian – tempo)… Tempo’. Jane says, ‘When he play concerto I think it’s a similar thing, so he need to slow down and listen’. I say, ‘Everyone has their own challenges. For Wendy it was partial practising, for Neil it was his attitude and caring about the music, for you it’s your tempo, for Kelly it’s trying to make the music alive; everyone has a different problem’. Jane says, ‘When I hear Adrian playing concerto, usually when he play the semiquaver part (pause)… I’m not criticising you, you’re playing beautifully, but sometimes we just can’t hear it clearly, that’s the problem’ (Adrian – yeah). I continue, ‘Anyway, we’ll I’ll just relax a little bit because I can see that you’re getting a bit sad… you’re still doing good’. Jane asks me if it would be helpful if he slowed down the beginning of the piece. I say, ‘I’m not sure what it is, I think he just sort of forgets about what it sounds like (Adrian nods)… You’re just going for the notes instead of listening to the overall (I use gesture here)… Anyway, it will be something to work on in time to come. Try not to feel sad, you’re still a good boy (he nods)’. Oliver laughs and Jane says, ‘It’s OK Adrian, it doesn’t mean that you play bad, but just be careful; don’t rush’. I say, ‘That’s why I’m getting stressed, it’s not because you’re a bad boy, it’s just that wrong tempo makes me personally, it makes me feel anxious. I don’t know why, it just does’. Jane says, ‘It gives us the feel of rush’. Oliver suggests that for the following two or three days he could use the metronome
during his practice. Jane and Oliver tell me that he finds it annoying and doesn’t like to use it. I say, ‘I suggest you use it – I thought you would have been’. Jane asks if he understands, and he casts his gaze from me to Jane to Oliver and then back to me. I suggest that his playing is still of an A standard and just because it’s not 100% doesn’t mean it’s no good; you’re still a good boy (he nods). Jane laughs and he looks at her and then Oliver. I say (again!), ‘It’s one thing that makes me particularly anxious as a person-teacher-musician, is when people can’t keep the tempo, it just really bothers me, I’m sorry. It’s not that you’re like annoying or anything, it’s just that that sort of playing annoys me, OK? Sorry (I pretend to shrink)’. Oliver and Jane laugh and Adrian smiles. Jane asks if he can turn on the metronome when he does his practice. Adrian nods. I play the harmonic skeleton on the second piano and suggest to Adrian that the notes have to fit ‘into’ that. He plays a couple of times – ‘That’s better’. He plays again – ‘That’s no good’ (?) I suggest that we play a couple of bars together, after which I ask him to imagine hearing ‘that’ in the background as he plays (I use expressive gesture here). I continue conducting and he continues to experiment – ‘That’s better’. I turn the metronome on to a minim pulse and he plays a few times before I ask him to play the left hand alone. He has some difficulty with remembering the notes (no score) so I play the left hand on the second piano – he picks it up quickly. I do a harmonic skeleton, presumably to help reinforce the overall context, and he plays the left hand again (good boy). He plays it again – ‘No good’. Neil laughs. He divides the fragment in half, landing precisely on the minim beat (good). He plays again – ‘Perfect’. Both boys say, ‘Yay’. I say, ‘Oh, you’re such sweet kids’. He plays with hands together – ‘You got there too soon on the B’. He plays again with hands together – ‘Good’. He plays again – ‘You didn’t start with the beat, so…’ He plays again – ‘No’. I experiment with three-note fragments, before suggesting that he play a three-note gestural fragment – AAG# which he does a couple of times (Good boy). I then ask him to copy a five-note gestural fragment – G#AAAG# (Good). I then ask him to copy a more complex one, but he looks at me confused. I ask him to put the hands back together, demonstrating as usual. He tries, and while it sounds 98% right, I say (and demonstrate where) that he is still going too fast being the AG#A semitone figure. He plays one bar instead of two – ‘Good’. This time he plays the whole two bars, but I don’t give any feedback. He plays it again as I smile and tap the piano with a pen – ‘That’s it’. Neil says, ‘Yay’. Adrian plays again – ‘Correct’. This time he says ‘Yay’ as he looks at his parents and throws his arms up in the air.
Jane asks me to put a sticker on the two bars that we were practising. I get a coloured sticker and give the metronome speed minim = 66 or crotchet = 132 (though I don’t say this correctly initially), but write it in correctly. I suggest that he do the same thing for ‘that part’ (?) He plays again – ‘Much better, excellent!’ As usual, Adrian says ‘Yay’ and gives himself a cheer. Jane suggests that he might be a bit nervous. After he plays the F# minor bars, I reiterate, ‘Apply what you learnt here’. He plays the F# minor bars again, after which I point to the score and I ask, ‘Now what steps did we do over here, that you could apply over here?’ I suggest that he could play the left hand rhythm with the metronome while playing random notes first before adding the ‘actual’ notes back in. At first I move his hands for him, but then he does it himself, after which I ask, ‘Now put the notes into that feeling’. He does very well. I gesticulate and say, ‘Take the notes away, do the movement, and then put the notes back in with the metronome and I think you’ll have success. We’re going to have to leave it there… It’s funny, you feel stressed, so that makes your playing get faster, and then I feel stressed and then I get stressed, and then that makes you stressed, so your playing gets faster, and then I feel stressed, so we’re just like… Ah! We’re both getting stressed’. Adrian looks at Oliver and I, and smiles. Jane and I summarise – I demonstrate and say, ‘It doesn’t matter what the notes are; take the music away, get the rhythm right and then put the notes back in, OK?’ Jane asks the boys to say thank you. I give Adrian a hug and say, ‘You’re still a good boy – please don’t go home and start worrying. Neil’s a bit more hardy than you isn’t he?’ Adrian waves goodbye.

Lesson 29: 5 October 2014

Reviewed 23 January 2015

- The lessons starts with the boys giving me a gift and card to say thank you. Jane thanks me and says that because of me, the boys did well in the Competition and their exams. I say that I’d like to think that we meet each other half way. Jane gives me copies of the competition reports. I give the boys $5 each for participating in the City Hall concert, part of Mya and Khoa’s $40 prize that we decided to split between everyone. As he adjusts the chair, Adrian waves at me and I say, ‘hello, you like coming to piano?’ He says, ‘Yeah, we haven’t had a lesson for two weeks’. I ask him if he’s missed me (no). I tell Neil that I was really happy he received a HC in the competition, and that he really deserved it (Yay). I ask him if the result made him feel proud (yes). Adrian starts playing Alla Turca – he has done such a good job in
learning the piece independently; it’s so musical and stylish. For the final section, I play the left hand as he is doing the broken octaves divided between the hands. After he finishes, I say, ‘That’s amazing! That’s incredible!’ He tells me about how he has divided the hands in the final section, and I say that that’s the problem with the higher grades – oftentimes you need a bigger hand. I demonstrate the broken octaves – ‘Ideally … can you do that?’ He tries; I then ask him to play one broken octave fragment, using a gestural movement. I say that he can clearly move (to cover the distance between the two notes), you can stretch it, but you don’t want to stretch it (Yeah). You want to move to it’. He says that he finds it hard to get a clear result, so I ask him to play using full octaves, which he does. I say that his hand is a bit small for the piece and he looks at Jane and smiles. I go on to say that in 6 months’ time, he may not be, so there’s no harm in playing the rest of the piece and leaving out the octaves. He goes on to tell me that he tried the notes, but he’s finding it a bit ‘big’. I say, ‘That’s OK, you just put it away for 6 months and then bring it out again when you’re a bit bigger, but what it’s so musical what you’re doing (Yay)... It’s really like, interesting to listen to’. He tells me he got 4 pages finished in two weeks (Mark – amazing). He looks at Jane and smiles proudly. Jane says that he picked it up quickly, because he likes it and he enjoys playing it and put the time in to practise it. Adrian tells me that his grandpa has the CD ‘for it’. Jane mentions that he took away some of the bottom notes (for the octaves) and I say, ‘Yeah, that’s fine’. Using the score, I review and play the section with octaves, saying that he can continue doing the top notes, but that he should try to do the left hand rolled chords. He starts looking through the score – I help him find the section and then show him how the rolled chords come from the arpeggios that he has been studying. I demonstrate the A Major arpeggio and then the rolled chords slowly. He copies the rolled chords and I nod, demonstrate and say, ‘And as I was saying to Wendy, you don’t hold the shape there, you just sort of go … (I play, and he copies) Yeah’. I demonstrate what it would look like ‘if it was a slow melody’, i.e. make gradual adjustments, and then what it would look like if I maintained a stretched position. I demonstrate that you would make gradual adjustments, but use a faster overall tempo in a single gesture. He tries and does well on the first one, but gets ‘stuck’ on the second one. He tries again, with more success. I ask him to watch (‘Good boy, now do this’) as I coach (by demonstration without verbal direction) him to start each rolled chord with a preparatory gesture. I watch as he experiments a few times, but doesn’t quite get the
concept, even though I demonstrate again. I ask him what position he is in when he plays the first rolled chord. He adjusts his elbow and trunk to the left. I say while demonstrating, ‘Good … So what you’ve got to try and do is get from there (and then) back to there’. He has a go and does better; I give he a ‘half’ nod, saying, ‘When you get the right sound, it will mean that you’re in the right position’ (he nods). I demonstrate again, saying, ‘See how mine goes … If I don’t get the angle that I did when I did this (I play the first chord), when I come back to it won’t sound the same (Oh). So you’ve got to try and get the same angle and the same movement’. He tries again, and I say, ‘Close’; he tries again, ‘That’s better’, even though both attempts weren’t quite right. I demonstrate and ask him to ‘do that a few times and sort of stop in between (to check) and sort of, feel where …’ He does well (good), and I go on to explain that you would shorten the time frame between each rolled chord while still maintaining the preparatory step. He tries again, but it’s still not quite clear, though I say, ‘Good’. I demonstrate and say, ‘So as you play this last A, you use it to move across’. While it would have been better to just indicate that he needs to simultaneously widen his elbow as he plays the last A, we keep experimenting together until I say, ‘That’s it!’ and he turns and smiles at Jane (Yay). I continue, ‘Do you understand? (Yeah) So that note gets you prepared for the next one (Oh yeah), and you’re sort of recycling the movements (I rolly polly my hands) … one note gets you to the next (yeah), and that’s why I can do (I play the 4 bars of rolled chords as Adrian watches) … it’s not because I’m gifted or something; it’s because I know what movement to do’. He points to the score and asks me how he should get from the top A down to the bottom D. I explain, ‘You used that note to parachute down; it’s sort of like doing this (I play the A rolled chords), except wider. It’s the same movement, but further (I show distance with my hands)’. He looks at the score and then plays the D rolled chord. When he has some difficulty with clarity, I play each pair of notes, emphasising a gradual adjustment of the hand and forearm, which he copies. I then play the full chord, and when he copies, having success. I move to demonstrate the D-D# dim-E chord sequence, emphasising the preparatory movement between the end of one and the start of the next. When he tries, he seems to have difficulty remembering what notes to play and peers up at the score. I come over to assist and ask the boys what chord it is, Major, minor or diminished – Adrian answers first! I then ‘test’ them playing E minor first inversion. Adrian answers E minor second inversion but Neil is correct – ‘Wow you’re so smart’. Adrian plays and asks me if ‘this’ is second
inversion – I say yes, and then ‘connect the dots’ to Neil’s ‘Moonlight Sonata’. Neil tells me I’m playing the wrong notes, but I go on to demonstrate the opening in a few different keys. I then go on to demonstrate Invention in D Minor and Invention in B-flat Major though there were a couple of mistakes and Adrian laughs. He says it sounds different, and I say that it has a different colour, because it’s a different key. I demonstrate ‘cheerful’ D Major through the Haydn Concerto. Adrian says that D minor isn’t (cheerful) and I play some of the Mozart Concerto in D minor. Both boys say they have never heard of that concerto, and I suggest that they go searching on YouTube. Neil asks me the opus number, and I explain that we use Kochel, K466. Adrian points to his score and says that his is K331. I say that the Alla Turca is the third movement from this sonata (I play the theme of the opening movement). I explain that Mozart sonatas have three sections to the piece and demonstrate a little of Andrew’s K570, first and third movements. I go on to explain and demonstrate, that the Alla Turca is somewhat unusual because it comes from the Sonata in A Major, though it starts in A minor and ends in A Major. Adrian flips through his score and agrees. I paraphrase the same concept and so does Jane. Adrian asks me why there are repeat markings – I suggest that perhaps in the olden days, you were payed more money the longer you played, assuming Mozart played in rich people’s houses 😄 I say to Adrian, ‘So I’m so impressed; I am so impressed’ and he throws his arms in the air saying, ‘Yeah’. Jane reminds Adrian that he needs to ask me about the parts where he has deleted the notes of the left hand. We go back to the section where there are double octaves, and I do a quick demonstration with hands together. He tries the right-hand broken octaves, commenting, ‘I need to lift up’. I suggest and demonstrate that he practises the broken octaves in ‘overlapping pairs’, emphasising fluidity of gestural movement. He says, ‘Yeah’ and we do it together. I go on to suggest that he use the second B to catapult to the next C#; he tries and I say, ‘So you don’t need to stretch, but for the parts that are in octaves, just play the top notes, I don’t want you to ruin your arms (he nods) … You’re too little’. He is still concerned about the rotary octaves, and I emphasise that is probably OK if he moves from note to note rather than stretching from note to note. I say that rotary octaves were especially popular with Beethoven, and I demonstrate a little of the Pathétique Sonata. He turns and smiles at Neil, and I say that I am a professional after all; though I may not ‘perform’, I am still skilled (OK, 7/8ths). ‘I might not do concerts, but I can still play’ (OK, 7/8ths). Neil goes on to explain that though he tried a little of the third movement of
the Moonlight Sonata, he is still too small for the octaves stretch, and I concur, suggesting that I can find something else for him instead. Adrian mentions that he prefers *Alla Turca* rather than the other piece I recently suggested (not sure which?). He seems surprised when I tell him that’s OK to give things a go and if they are not quite the right piece, there is no harm in moving on. I reiterate my own experience, and he says, ‘Really?’ I play a little of the Chopin Valse in C# minor, asking if he likes it, though he says he hasn’t tried it yet. I say, ‘Oh, it’s really nice’. He says that it has lots of pedal. I ask Neil why he sometimes pretends to lisp. I play the first page of the Chopin Valse, slowly. I say that it’s very popular, that I’ve taught it twice before and that I think it would suit him. Jane and I suggest that he give it a try this week and Oliver comments that it’s a good piece. I say that it’s a lovely piece and Neil says that it’s a great piece. Jane mentions that she thinks it’s the piece that Lily Heaton played in the competition and that she played so beautifully. I mention that her pedalling wasn’t that good and Jane seems surprised. I go on to say that she had a lot of imagination, and that adjudicators look for creativity, not necessarily perfection. I mention to Neil that even though his piece was probably more ‘perfect’ it could use additional creative involvement. I ask Adrian to demonstrate the opening of *Alla Turca* to Neil, and I point out via imitation how he involves his body in the act of sound creation and subtle tonal nuance. I go on to say, ‘I haven’t even taught him any of that, but he’s come up with his own ideas’. Adrian disagrees, saying, ‘No, that was from the CD’ – everyone laughs. I qualify, saying, ‘He’s gone further than what the teacher has told him’, and both boys add, ‘and the CD’. Adrian adds, ‘and the YouTube channel’ and I add, ‘that’s what people listen for’. Jane asks Adrian to sit still, though he finds it tricky to do so. I go on to give feedback on a couple of others in Neil’s section, reading Angela’s report, suggesting that he continue to strive for more imagination in his playing, and also complementing him on his ability (while demonstrating) to let the music breathe at the first cadence in E Major – ‘You are doing well’ (Yay). I go on to say that sometimes the standard fluctuates in age groups between years, giving examples. Jane suggests to Adrian that he show me ‘Rage over a Lost Penny’, which he plays the first couple of pages with hands together. I smile and say, ‘Wow! That’s actually really good!’ (Really?) Yeah! (Yay!) Oliver laughs and Jane says that he didn’t learn anything new on this piece this week, due to the octaves being unmanageable, and what he had just played he had learnt in the first week (after the competition) of our two-week hiatus. I comment, ‘You’re getting so
fast’ and Jane says, ‘Because he enjoys joyful pieces, that’s why pick up quite quickly, yeah’. Adrian is flipping through the score and asks, ‘What does this mean?’ (Very, very lightly with a little bit of agitation). He asks me what that means – ‘sort of scarily’ and I play the right hand. He asks me why there is a line – ‘the top one or the bottom one’. I point out a wrong note/chord in the left hand earlier in the piece – we find it, Adrian corrects it and then goes looking for a pencil while I comment about Neil ‘shuffling through his papers’. I say that I don’t have a pencil case, but he could use the pen I have. Jane asks me if it’s a Grade 7 piece – ‘probably, definitely higher than 6’. She says, ‘But I think it’s a good try for him’ and I say, ‘Yeah, just let him have a go. As I said, not every piece… (Adrian – suits people) suits the hand span. It’s difficult when you’re this age and playing higher-level pieces (Adrian – like Grade 7)’. Jane comments about a 5-year old prodigy on YouTube playing Alla Turca – she asks me if he would have modified the original – ‘probably, yes’. I suggest that he start the Chopin Valse (the one that I chose), as well as the two that he chose (Alla Turca and Rage over a Lost Penny). I ask him to continue with the Haydn Concerto and also practise the broken octaves in Alla Turca, cautioning him against stretching instead of ‘moving’ lest he develop tendonitis, which I explain briefly at Neil’s request. I demonstrate ‘how the fat wobbles’ if done correctly, making it easier to play. Adrian comments that he doesn’t have any fat to wobble – ‘Oh, excuse me. You’re just so athletic’. Everyone laughs. I comment that he isn’t very muscly though; like some kind of chicken; Adrian laughs. I ask him if we can practise the Concerto. I also ask the boys what they will play at the Intermediate Concert in four weeks’ time. Jane mentions the second movement of the Moonlight Sonata, pending me hearing it in today’s lesson. I tell Adrian that he and I will play the concerto together, but he suggests that I find him an orchestra. As I sit down to start playing with Adrian, I smile and say, ‘This is exciting isn’t it’ and he smiles. After a short introduction, he begins the solo with me playing the second piano. There is a beautiful moment during the tutti when he looks at Neil, Jane and Oliver and smiles – he is so proud of himself. It’s pretty good, though he stops due to a memory lapse half way through the next section, though I coach him and he gets back on track. There are still problems with accuracy and fluency when the semiquavers transfer to the left hand; the tempo between sections still needs greater unity. We stop at the cadenza, or lack thereof! Oliver laughs. He asks me if it’s good – I say, ‘It’s OK, it’s about 80%’ and he says, ‘Yeah that’s good’. I add, ‘75’. He says, ‘78?’ and I say, ‘77’. I say, ‘Don’t
cry, I’m just being honest with you …’ – I go on to point out that he is rushing the parts where the main theme appears, suggesting he work with the metronome. I also point out where the right-hand broken chords are very good, and where they are too slow, i.e. ‘The easy bits are too fast and the hard bits are too slow’, though I qualify that the difference is not huge, but noticeable. He sets the metronome on 132 (crotchet) and I suggest that he go with that tempo this week. He tries a little while standing next to Neil who is seated. I show him which part ‘isn’t much good’ because he is missing out notes and beats. I play what he plays and say, ‘Sound familiar?’ Oliver laughs. I play it slowly while he watches – I caution him not to cut out any notes while laughing playfully. I ask him where his score is, because ‘I will write on it’. He picks up the coloured stickers, asking, ‘One of these? One of these?’ and I say, ‘Yeah!’ He says, ‘Yes!’ and I say, ‘Yeah, wow!’ He says, ‘I get all 5 stuck together?’ I say, ‘Yeah!’ and he says, ‘Yes!’ while throwing his arms up triumphantly. I help Adrian put the stickers on the score as he writes so of his own directions, suggesting that he partial practise those ‘bits’ slowly, perhaps MM = 80. I suggest that the octaves aren’t probably such a great idea – perhaps playing the top of the right hand and the bottom of the left hand; until his hand grows, there isn’t much he can really do. Everyone laughs when I say, that he is playing the piece quite well – 77/100 as opposed to 45/100 (I sing a descending tri-tone), though it’s not ready for a public performance yet. Oliver suggests that his fifth finger is a little bit weak, but I explain that it will feel stronger if his ability to align the fifth finger with the rest of the arm continues to develop with review and practice.

Lesson 30: 10 October 2014

Reviewed 25 January 2016

- The lesson begins with Jane reminding Adrian to ask me the questions he has for me. He says, ‘Did you know, I learnt all of my right hand (for Alla Turca) from the beginning to the end?’ and I say, ‘Did you? No!’ After some brief time reflecting on Neil’s lack of practice, I help Adrian with the last page of the right hand, suggesting he refigure the octaves/chords, taking out the bottom notes. I help him with the acciaccatura, suggest the he roll through the notes rather than stretching for them, i.e. taking them with his arm, rather than his fingers. For the final sixths, I suggest that he take them with different fingering from that printed in the edition, lest he will stretch his hand – in fact it really is unnecessary for a bigger hand at any rate. As Neil is
getting a lecture in the background, Adrian turns to Jane and smiles when I say, ‘Good Boy’. I take the score and write in the adjustments, while Adrian paraphrases what he needs to do. As he plays the DC#BC#D… semiquavers, I ask him to angle his hand diagonally inwards so as to avoid twisting. I sit down and demonstrate the changes that we have made. He asks me about the differing notation for the rolled notes when comparing right and left hands, but I had to admit that I really didn’t know and that it was a great question. I then demonstrate the (refigured) section again. He asks me about using the pedal – ‘Do we just touch’ and I say, ‘Yeah, we call it direct pedalling, so you just touch, touch’ (Oh, OK). He asks me if he should hold the pedal down during the final chords, but I suggest that it will sound pedal using direct pedalling. I go on to indicate that the piece is trying to mimic the sounds of a Turkish Marching band, showing him the ‘bass drum’ left hand rolled chords. I ask him, ‘Can you see it?’ and he says, ‘Oh, I get it’. I pretend to play the ‘trumpet’ right-hand chords and he smiles at Jane. I say, ‘It’s very cool isn’t it? (Yeah)’ I suggest that he show me his left hand. He plays me the last section of the left hand and I ask him to play the full A-Major chord, then I ask him what it would sound like without the top note. We both agree that it does sound better with all four notes, so I write a question mark in the score. I ask him, ‘How are you going with the Alberti bass?’ and he plays a little of the left hand. I ask him where the term ‘Alberti bass’ came from (no), continuing to tell him about ‘Mr Alberti’, who’s idea influenced other composers from the Classical period. Jane says that she remembers the technique from Neil’s Haydn Sonata in D, and asks me about the broken chord formation (BTMT). Interestingly, Adrian asks me why the score indicates 4-3 for the D-C# semitone, saying that he prefers 3. I try it, say that that’s probably a good idea and he writes it in. I ask him, ‘How did you go with the Haydn Concerto, fixing up the areas that I discussed with you last week? (He nods) Did you do some? (Yeah) Do you want me to work through that, or just leave that until Sunday? We can keep going with this one (Alla Turca), because we’ve only got about 10 minutes left’. He tells me that he’d prefer to keep working on the Mozart, and gets his score out; Jane says that he has ‘heaps of questions’. I ask him, ‘Are you going to play this for the recital?’ (He nods and says maybe). I smile and say, ‘Really? How exciting!’ He tells me that he’s learnt all of it, all the right hand and left hand (Me – No!/Jane – He want to). He says that he still finds it difficult with the broken octaves, so in the interests of finishing the piece in the time remaining, I suggest that he play single notes instead, similar to what he
does with the full octaves. I ask him to show me the broken octaves, saying, ‘Oh, that’s pretty good actually’. I ask him if he’s getting any pain in the arm from doing the broken octaves and he says, ‘Yeah, a bit’ which Jane also confirms. I say that it is probably best that he modify this part to single notes too, especially as the piece is just for enjoyment and he is still on nine years old. I go on to say that when children are skilfully at an early age, it can be problematic finding pieces that are suitable, but are still challenging. Jane seems a little confused, so I sit down and demonstrate single quavers in the right hand with the written left hand (Adrian – so you do the same thing as earlier); she records on the iPad. Adrian plays the hands together, as above. I suggest that he maintain clarity for the left hand rolled chords, and without prompting, he is able to apply what he learnt in the previous lesson, making micro-adjustments between each pair of notes, before using a single gesture of the arm to play all notes. He continues with hands together until the Alberti bass section; while it’s hesitant he clearly understands what to do. We briefly experiment with fingering of the right hand during the Alberti bass section, alternating between starting on 3 or 4, setting on 3 as it suits his hand; he ‘corrects’ it in the score. I say, ‘So are you excited about this piece? (Yeah) … Oh, goody’. Jane tells me excitedly that after this one, he will start the Chopin Waltz. I turn to Adrian and say, ‘Yeah?’ He nods and she says, ‘Yeah!’ She mentions that they have watched the YouTube link that I sent them, featuring Yuji Wang. There is some discussion of the link that Yuji learnt at Beijing Conservatorium and Adrian learns at Brisbane Conservatorium. He says, ‘I have a question ….’ and there is discussion revolving around the fingering 32123212 then D-chord first inversion, or 32123214 then D-chord first inversion. I say that it depends on what suits his hand. He tries both variations, suggesting that he could also try 32123213 too. That ends up being the best one and I compliment him, saying, ‘Very good thinking; it’s good to be questioning what works, not just do what the editor says (He says yeah as he writes it in) … Half the time the editors aren’t piano teachers (Mmm), they’re music academics (Oh). They’re not always teaching, so they don’t always know what’s best. (Jane – It’s quite challenging hey?) … You’ve got to question what the fingering is in the text, because it’s not always good’. Adrian continues to write in his fingering, playing the passage intermittently to check. I go on to say that it’s fine to take notes out if necessary, as it’s often not noticeable. Jane double checks that he has asked all questions; he says he has, though he starts playing the left-hand rolled chords again, just to check. While standing beside him, I
demonstrate the macro and micro-adjustments required, saying, ‘You could actually … come around … a little bit more … it’s better than it was’. Adrian tries again, and I say, ‘That’s better … yeah … Not only … good … good! What do you notice that movement does?’ He responds, ‘Um, it’s more clear sound and um, definitely more grand’. Jane agrees and I say, ‘It’s more grand, it’s louder. That’s because you’re using momentum, not pressure’. He agrees, and demonstrates what a ‘pressure’ approach might look and sound like. I go on to provide the analogy between what we are doing here and throwing a ball, where there is a preparatory movement back before throwing the ball forward. We discuss how shot-put could be a ‘pressure’ approach, but on reflection, and not being an expert (!), there probably a good degree of preparatory movement with the entire body that helps there. Adrian says that he didn’t get into the shot-put team at school. I say, ‘It’s really good mate’. Jane helps ‘remind’ Adrian to ask me how to execute the right-hand trill in the A minor section. I ask him to start on the upper note, slowly demonstrating how the hands would coordinate. We work with him, and briefly mention stylistic differences and periods in terms of starting on or above the written note. I write in the eight notes to be executed within the crotchet beat, and I continue to help him ‘organise’ the hands. I demonstrate again, and he plays slowly three more times, checking with me for accuracy. I mention that there will be eight demisemiquavers divided into 4 + 4 on each quaver. I suggest that he keep it nice and slow for now; ‘very sort of square’, as you can always speed up later. He asks me if he should do it ‘square’ or faster for the concert, and I suggest faster, but for this week, do it nice and slow and ‘square’. I ask him to practise the Haydn Concerto (Yeah I know) in preparation for his lesson on Sunday. He asks me if I’m going to the QPC highlights concert the following day, but I say that I can’t unfortunately. He says, ‘Oh’ and is clearly disappointed. I say, somewhat surprised, ‘Are you playing? (Yeah) No! (Yeah I am) OMG how exciting! Yay!’ I give him a big cuddle; it’s a very special moment captured on film forever. I ask him if he was invited (Yeah). I ask him what he’s playing and Jane said that he practised this afternoon. I ask her to forward me the email containing the program. Adrian asks me if we’re having another lesson on Sunday, and when I say yes, he gets excited, saying, ‘Yeah, cool’. We talk about how there is to be no recording (unfortunately). Adrian gets excited about the prospect of seeing the Diploma section. Jane mentions how wonderful it is to see Rachel receive two first prizes, and how hard she must have worked to get there. Adrian says that last year’s winner of the
Diploma section William Shi wasn’t it the competition. I suggest he may be trying for something even bigger, and that could be something for Adrian to aspire to. Adrian asks me, ‘What’s the biggest piano competition in the whole world?’ When I mention the Chopin or the Tchaikovsky, he asks me if it’s universal – ‘What if it’s held on Mars?’ Oliver encourages Adrian to set a dream and then go for it.

Lesson 31: 12 October 2014

Reviewed 26 January 2015

Adrian’s lesson starts with him playing the last section of the Mozart Alla Turca. As he finishes, I give him a round of applause, and he says, ‘Yay’. I ask Adrian how the QPC concert went – he starts clapping his hands and says that it went well. Adrian tells me that Jeremy got two trophies, including one for the duet. I say that he could enter the duet section next year, but he doesn’t seem so keen; Jane tells me that he and Neil are always arguing with each other. Adrian tells me that the trophies are smaller this year, demonstrating the approximate dimensions with his hands. I suggest that it may be to cut costs and everyone laughs. Adrian says that last year the trophy was 4 times bigger and Jane concurs that it was 1/4 of the size compared with last year. We move to the Mozart – I explain that because it’s a grand piano, it would be good for him to start further to the left for the left-hand broken chords, so as to ‘get more thrust’. He tries again, with good results- ‘Yeah, that’s better’. Thereafter, I ask him to add the other hand back in. I say, ‘Sorry to interrupt, but that part is too slow compared to here’, referring to the Alberti bass section. He tries to adjust it a couple of times as I conduct him. He tries the left hand again and I sit down demonstrate the ‘join’ between sections with the left hand. I say, ‘It’s still improved since last time’. I turn the metronome on and we team play, with Adrian playing the right hand, though he is playing the final section. I ask him to go from the section before the Alberti bass starts. First I demonstrate a little with hands together, and then we both with hands together in unison with the metronome – it’s successful for the most part. I say, ‘Good boy, can I suggest that you put the metronome on to that MM = 90?’ (Yeah). I ask him to get a coloured sticker and to write in the tempo for home practice. I turn the metronome off. I mention that the adjudicator for the QPC whom I know personally said that he played very, very well (Arms up and Yay!). We have brief discussion about how developing a student’s playing can take many years. I ask Adrian if he likes the piece and he says yes. I ask, ‘When did you find time to do all the practice
since Friday … this morning?’ He says, ‘Yes, and yesterday’. ‘You’ve done a great job’. He says, ‘I have an idea; can we do … (He plays, adding the bottom A to the final right-hand chord)’, and I say that its fine as long as he can stretch the octave. I ask him if we can move on to the Haydn, he agrees, and we start from the beginning; the tempo is quite conservative when compared to previous weeks. I interrupt to put the tempo back on track a couple of times, as he fluctuates between a little too slow and sudden surges of speed. It’s so wonderful to watch him nod his head during the tutti – he’s really into it! To his credit, he has really improved all sections since the last time we met. We discuss options for the cadenza, with Adrian checking about the trill with me. When I say, ‘Just do as many (trills) as you want’, he says, ‘Oh cool’. We rehearse the ending many times, from bar 235. I teach him the concept of gesticulating with the head in order to indicate the exit of the trill. He looks at his parents a couple of times and smiles proudly. He says, ‘That’s cool’ and then ‘Yay’ when Jane, Oliver and Neil give him applause. I speculate that one day he might get to play a concerto with an actual orchestra. We talk briefly about the concerto competition in North Queensland. I suggest that he works with the metronome on a couple of spots. He tells me, ‘I practised this part’ and when I say, ‘Yeah I can tell, really good boy, really good boy’, he throws his hands, says, ‘Yay!’ and does a brief victory dance. He says that he did a lot of practice on his Mozart yesterday. I mention that the part where we took out the octaves doesn’t sound so good anymore, suggesting that maybe we should put the octaves back in, or use the pedal, or play the hands closer together. Adrian suggest that he could play single notes in the left hand and octaves in the right hand, and I ask him which is his bigger hand. I then start to demonstrate his idea and then he tries at the first piano. He asks me how he should use the pedal, but I suggest that he play the left-hand bass notes legato instead. He plays the left-hand legato in unison with me, after which I ask him to keep practising the left-hand legato until known before adding the right-hand octaves. He ‘asks’ me if he can do the right-hand ED# semitone with single notes and the bass minims in octaves, i.e. ‘swap it over there’ which I call ‘a great idea’. He responds by saying ‘Yay’ repeatedly while bobbing up and down with outstretched arms. I say, ‘You’re so interested’, and give him a hug. I caution that the section around bar 180 is too fast, and I ask him to slow down (Yep). I go on to give him further direction regarding tempi of individual sections, suggest that he work with the metronome and we work together to find the tempo MM = 132, trying a couple of sections together while we
are both sitting at the two pianos. As he plays the section using full-octave broken chords, I ask him to ‘ride the beat’, gesturing to move ‘forwards, forwards, forwards, forwards’. As the lesson concludes, he says, ‘Thanks Mark’ and I say that while it’s not quite ready for the concert, it is well on the way. He gives his thanks again and I thank him for his energy.

Lesson 32: 17 October 2014

Reviewed 28 January 2015

- The lesson starts with Adrian pointing out that there are demisemiquavers in the Mozart. I ask him what the main note of the right hand rolled chords is (C#). I say little, instead using a sideways head tilt while smiling, to encourage him to see the chords as a joy represented in sound. We play in unison, and then he continues with the right hand while I play the left hand. I say, ‘Good’, and then go on to demonstrate crescendo with the repeated C# asking, ‘See if you can colour those ones’. He implements the idea while I go and get the score from Neil. It’s interesting how much he uses his head and upper body to generate expressive energy. I demonstrate using my head to illustrate the final cadence. He asks me about the fingering for the right hand sixths thereafter, checking if he should use 3-1; I say, ‘Maybe do 4-1’, but then I come over and check, saying to stick with 3-1. ‘Great’, I then go on to ask if can voice the top note of the sixths, working firstly with the A. He asks me, ‘How about here?’ referring to the top C#. I agree and encourage him to play the top notes alone. I then sit back down at the second piano and demonstrate the top notes alone, asking him if he could aim for a ‘ring’ in the sound, before adding back the sixths. He tries and I smile encouragingly, ‘I can hear quite a lot of C#’. We continue to experiment together, with me demonstrating a free fall a couple of times. When he has success, I complement him on the lovely ‘ping’ in the sound. I mention that because of his small hand size, it may prove challenging, but this type of voicing is typical in chords, as seen here. Though I’m not happy with his hand position here, he does achieve a good result. I caution, ‘Don’t practise that too much, because you’re actually twisting quite a lot there. There’s not much you can really do, because you’ve got a small hand; don’t do any more than a minute or two of that – it’s no good for your hand’ (Yeah). He goes on to ask for feedback regarding the left-hand Alberti bass section. He is having difficulty shifting from the last note of the Alberti bass (E) to the low A that starts the next rolled chord, so I demonstrate a sideways shift to the left in a single
gesture, which he copies. I ask him I had showed him this before and he says no. I then add the note before the E (B), slightly changing the gesture to include a slight right swing before a shift to the left as before. After he does this, I ask him what he thinks the next step might be. He doesn’t answer so I demonstrate adding the previous high E, which he copies. I ask him what he thinks the next step might be, and this time he adds the previous low E, making the sequence EE-EBE-A. I agree (Yeah), and copy him this time. I then add on the subsequent C# after the bottom A, using a gestural swing to the right, which he starts to implement (good boy). I then add the next note, E which he finds more challenging, but does get there. I then play the entire sequence AEC#D-AC#EA and he copies (good boy). I then demonstrate the hands together, indicating that it would it would be stylish to take a bit of a breath (gesture) at any rate. To make the concept clear, I demonstrate with a slight breath, and then rushing into the cadence. To further illustrate, I then conduct and sing the melodic line (Oh). I clarify via demonstration, that we did the previous exercises above to ‘get you used to the shift, but in reality, you would do it that quick, you’d go…(I play left hand)… you’d have a little gap there’. He copies (yeah, good boy) and then I demonstrate the hands together. He tries (that’s it) and then I continue to coach him with hands together, though I stop at the bar line and through my arms freely into the air, which he is able to copy. I say, ‘Good boy’, and then do the hands together, but add in the left hand rolled chord too (Well done). Finally I add in the final ‘piece’ of the puzzle, the right hand rolled chord, which he is able to copy. I say, ‘Good boy, so you practise that all right?’ and he plays again. I caution him not to get too heavy with the Alberti bass, and he plays hands together again. At this point, we go back to the initial idea of the E to low A and start to repeat the process for the left hand for a second time, though I quickly abandon the detail and go straight for the hands together again. He seems to catch on very quickly, ‘Yeah… Ooh, lovely sound’. We smile at each other as I play the fragment hands together again. I ask him if he realises that the music is supposed to represent a (Turkish) marching band, demonstrating motives and gesturing crash cymbals; bass drums. I go on to describe that some instruments in Mozart’s time (?) had the ‘Turkish stop’ where there were percussion instruments connected to the keys. He asks me how big the instrument was, but I say I’m not sure, though I saw it on YouTube recently. I go on to ‘show’ him where the crash cymbals would be, and suggest that I could forward him the link to see for himself. After a brief discussion while looking inside the piano, I encourage him to
always find a sense of the bass line when playing Alberti bass, before moving on to some coordination drills, but encouraging a sense of upward gesture in each hand to do so. I complement him on his improved coordination, and then direct him to move a little quick to the bottom A. I suggest that tomorrow morning, he can do some of these… as I go on to demonstrate the add-a-note exercises that we covered earlier in the lesson, this time beginning to add the right hand C#, essentially practising the coordination and the shift simultaneously, which I draw his attention to. After he starts to have success, I then direct him (via demonstration) to add the subsequent right-hand rolled chord too. After a couple of repetitions, I then play the whole fragment with hands together for him to copy. When he has success, I say, ‘I knew you were going to get it that time’ – he shakes his hands, smiles and says, ‘Yay’, looking at his parents. I go on to illustrate using gesture how partial practising doesn’t always involve doing a whole ‘part’, but rather involves starting with a fragment until comfortable, before ‘sliding in’ another bit, and then another bit, and then another, essentially ‘patching’ it all back together. I say, ‘When you’ve got difficult shifts and coordination, you just do one thing at a time until it feels free. If there’s any stiffness, you won’t get it right’. Adrian smiles, nods and says, ‘Yeah’. I then ask him to play from the beginning ‘please’. He plays a little of the first A minor cadence with the right-hand trill, reminding me that I had asked him to play it slow – I say, ‘Snail?’ and he laughs. I ask him to show me again, before I play it a little faster. He continues to copy me at a faster tempo and I ask him not to over-extend fingers 4 and 5 during the trill. I ask him to keep his third finger rounded, asking him to scratch his nose. He tries again, but I laugh when he does too many. I then break the trill and the resolution notes apart, asking him to gesture upwards after CBCBC, before adding one extra note at a time, until the whole trill is played using a single gesture – I look shocked and say, ‘Oh that was beautiful’. He replies, ‘I wish everything good in my life was on video’. I smile, pause and say, ‘It is; you’re on camera’. He looks at the camera, throws his arms up and says, ‘Oh yay!’ I play the bar with hands together and he copies, first too many then correct (Good boy). I suggest that as he has a slight hiccup with the right hand, we will review the process of adding a note in the direction of travel again. I encourage him to keep his fingertip firm and his elbow high. We do the same as before, though the difference being the addition of the left hand. I say, ‘Feel the bottom of the key’ as I continue to ask him to copy me, before adding more notes to the ‘chain’, always with a gesture in the direction of travel. Whenever there’s any
slight sign of mental or physical discomfort or inability to control the number of notes, I take him back a step, reducing the number of notes before adding more again. We repeated this process a few times, before I start to apply same process, but starting with the last few notes. Each time I encourage him to round out his fingertips and widen the elbow. Eventually we build the whole fragment up again and he smiles at Jane and Oliver after I say, ‘Well Done Mate’. I take him back a few steps again, splitting the fragment into halves with a slight pause. I instruct him, ‘So you break it in half like that, and review each half, over and over until you can get it perfect’ – Adrian nods. I go on to say, ‘And eventually...’ as I play the whole fragment with hands together. He copies me and I say, ‘See you can see it’s better already (Yeah), so if you were to extend what we did, you could see it would improve (Mmm, yeah)’. I mention that Mimia said he played beautifully at the QPC highlights concert. I say, ‘Let’s hear it from the beginning’, Jane says, ‘Adrian, get ready, sit properly’ and Adrian waves and smiles at all of us. As he starts playing, I can hear that he doesn’t sound as comfortable as in the previous week, though there is much to be admired, including his improvement with hands together and trill at the end of the first section. I stand and watch, offering a smile now and then. As he finishes, I clap, saying ‘Oh Well Done, good boy’. He smiles and says, ‘Yay’ while looking at Jane. I say, ‘OK, so, now some feedback? (Yeah) Well, it’s really improved. I tell him how his projection of the left hand A at the end of the F# minor section is really interesting. I say that I like it a lot; it sounds funny. He says, ‘That’s my idea!’ (‘I like your idea a lot’). I go on to give him feedback on the softer double thirds, saying that we don’t always hear them clearly. I encourage him to have greater finger activation in addition to the vertical activity of the arm. He sits down at his piano and experiments. When he achieves a more clear sound, I ask him what he is doing different, physically. He shows me that he is curving his fingers more and I paraphrase saying, ‘So a little bit more clutchy’. He tries again and I nod, demonstrate and ask him to drop right to the bottom of the keys. I say that I can appreciate that he is trying to get a general dynamic swell to the thirds, but caution him not to avoid ‘mumbling’ (I demonstrate the vocal analogy). He tries again, but has difficulty maintaining clarity in the thirds that ascending – I direct him to partial practise these, saying, ‘catch, catch, catch’. After he has some success, I say, ‘That sort of worked, that analogy of catching of the notes. It like they were a ball’. He tries again, but the clarity isn’t quite as successful as before, so I demonstrate rolling through the first three notes followed by a tonal
splat, which he copies. I then ask him to exaggerate the movement and volume of the thirds, and we do several rounds, culminating in me suggesting that he might do some ‘exaggeration practice’. I peer around at Jane and I label the process, ‘the exaggeration technique’. I dramatise that he is ‘sort of mumbling around there and I can’t hear you’; Adrian laughs. He tries twice more, and shows improvement, though he says ‘Whoopsie’ the first time. I then demonstrate a very exaggerated version! Jane suggests to Adrian that he ask me for a pencil so that he can write ‘exaggeration’ into the score, which I do. I ask Jane how much sight-reading material the boys have at home, as I have more. As I help Adrian with the spelling, I ask them what they had for dinner; apparently Adrian doesn’t each much. I show them the sight-reading books that I have and let them know that they borrow them. We carry on and I point out that Adrian has a wrong note in the left hand during the first section (F natural rather than F#). He plays, corrects, and then writes himself a reminder within the score. I ask him if he would like a coloured sticker to highlight the area to practise (Yes, but not the arrow one!) Jane asks Adrian not to be too bossy. Oliver comes in and I ask him where he parks the car. I relay when my car got broken into at Musgrave Park. I ask Adrian if he will include the left hand leading up to the cadence of the first section. I also remind him to practise the trill as we did earlier in the lesson. I tell him that the F# minor section is excellent, though sometimes the following A Major section is a little uncoordinated (he says ‘muddily’). He asks me if I mean that the right-hand legato is overlapped, but I clarify, ‘No, your right and left hands are not coming at the same time (Oh) … Last time I heard it, it was a bit slower and it was pretty perfect, but since then it’s got a little bit untidy, just slightly’. He plays this section hands together, and I say, ‘Good boy, so mainly here …’ and I demonstrate the fragment that is not synchronised. I ask him to play again and then interrupt to indicate that there is some slight overlap between fingers 3 and 4. He tries the right hand, and I ask him to ‘angulate’ the hand a little more by lifting the elbow in order so as not to be ‘so flat’. Via gestural demonstration, I indicate that the hand faces to the left as he travels up to the right, so that the fingers don’t ‘get stuck’. I say, ‘That way your fingers don’t get stuck. I they’re sort of too flat, it’s very hard to lift them up, whereas if you’ve got curvature and height, it’s a bit easier to control (Yeah)’. He has another go and I copy him. He tells me that the repeated A is to be played using 5-4. I ask him to do the ascending scale again, pointing out that he is still quite flat during the first pass of the thumb. I ask him to try and pronate, just like he does in his scales. I show him how I
‘start here’ and ‘end here’ using different positions of my arm, elbow and hand. He tries the scale again with very good success in clarity of touch. I show him what it sounds like when I try to maintain a flat hand without the use of forearm pronation. I then demonstrate G#AA with fingers 454 (the interchange between ascending and descending) and ask him to copy. Cleverly, he ‘tells’ me via demonstration that there is a slight change of arm position when repeated A with fingers 5 and 4. I agree, adding there is a change of direction with the notes and therefore the arm. After he tries a couple of times, I say that even though all of that information is not indicated, it is implied and it makes the piece easier to play. He goes on to show me what fingers he changes on the next pair of repeated notes. I demonstrate and say, ‘Try to think of your upper arm as being the lever, rather than relying on fingers. When you rely on fingers, you’ll get tight – I’m lifting up slightly so that I can drop onto the next one. It’s like I’m sort of throwing it over’. At that point I throw a pencil from the right hand to the left hand. He asks me to show him the pencil throw again. I do, but this time I sing the notes too and then play the right-hand passage immediately after. I remind him that if he doesn’t use any arm movement, the fingers tend to get tight. He tries, and I say, ‘Good boy, now try not to do it with your head; use your upper arm’. He copies me as I play it a couple more times, increasing the tempo. I say, ‘Obviously that’s too fast, but it proves a point, doesn’t it? If you’ve got the right movement, the speed is not an issue (Yeah). People often say – I wish my fingers were faster. It’s got nothing to do with your fingers; it’s all about the upper arm’. Oliver says, ‘Adrian watch’. He pulls himself ‘out’ as I ask him to come over to me and rest his hand on my back, just behind the top of the upper arms. I ask him to feel these muscles move as I engage my upper arms and elbows, further suggesting that playing ‘comes from your back’, not just the fingers. I do clarify (via demonstration) that the mechanism does depend on the shape of the fingers too, as flat fingers don’t provide an effective lever system, much the same as straight legs require a lot more energy than knees bent. I further suggest that the slight problem with coordination between hands is probably because of the right hand not being as technically efficient as it could. I demonstrate the A Major section with hands together and ask him, ‘Please’. He plays and then I start a different round of exercises, stopping at the beginning of the second beat of the bar, emphasising through repeated notes where the hands come together. He has a go, but I interrupt, telling him to remember the changing ‘angle’ of the forearm and different parts of the sequence. He tries, and then I ask him if he likes
Maths and Geometry (Yes), relating what we are doing to that through the use of angles, though he says he doesn’t like angles! Oliver laughs. He seems to be losing concentration – Jane says, ‘Adrian!’ I try to coach him with hands together, but he resumes the right hand as before, but has incorrect fingerings now… After I correct him, I ask him if he is ‘doing the angle thing that I showed him’. He tries again (Better) and again, (No, I heard a big clunk on the D), and again (That’s better). I ask him to start to turn (pronate) as he plays the first three notes of the scale. The result isn’t as effective as before, but nonetheless, I push on, asking him (via demonstration) to put the hands together without changing the choreography of the right hand as we have just explored. He does and asks, ‘Better?’ and I agree, despite there being a little bit of overlapping between fingers 3 and 4. I ask him if he’s curving them, reminding him that if the fingers remain flat, they have to work harder to maintain clarity. I demonstrate the hands together and Adrian copies; though it’s not perfect, I say, ‘Much better, you keep working on that’ and he does one of his usual ‘arms out’ gestures to celebrate the small successes. I point out that he has a wrong note at the end of the F# minor section (D# not D in bar 39). He goes to his piano and ‘fixes’ the right hand as I write in the score for him. I caution him that I’m starting to sense that this spot will start to become a little untidy if he starts pushing the tempo too much, especially if he starts stretching between adjacent fingers. He plays the hands together, looks at me and I say that the right hand is a bit wonky. He asks me what I mean, and I illustrate by doing a critical comparison with my voice and hands, ‘perfect’ rhythm and rhythm with ‘wonky bits’ (Oh). He does it again, and it does show improvement, so I ask him what he did differently that time. Oliver laughs, Adrian smiles, and I suggest that it sounds like he might be listening ‘more’. I demonstrate portions of the hands together, asking him to be precise. I then instruct him (without words) to copy five-note gestural fragments, and then 10-note gestural fragments. He tries the 10-note fragment, but it’s not precise, so I ask him to ‘look at the angle’ of my elbow as it slightly adjusts to accommodate the second half of the 10-note fragment. Everyone laughs as he unintentionally exaggerates the angle. I ask him to look at my elbow and how I make a gradual adjustment and ‘gently move into it … As I play BABA (2154), I’m starting to angle it so that my 5 can come in without any jerk’. He has a go, but asks me, ‘Which 5?’ and I review the pattern again. After he starts to get the idea, I say, ‘Those micro-movements are the things that keep everything pristine (Adrian – Those are really micro) … Yeah they’re very
small, and people who couldn’t care less, they miss those, and that’s why their piece will never truly sound pristine. If you want it to sound really perfect (and) fast, you must use micro-movements so that you don’t twist and stretch’. Adrian asks me if people really hear the difference, and I say that they will. Jane asks Adrian to write down some notes in the score to help him remember. I write some gestural choreography in the score, indicating how the hand might change angle and direction. I start to summarise the areas that we worked on in the lesson to remind him of what to practise during the week. He seems very restless and fidgety today. I indicate that I would like him to use pedal, but we may have to leave it until next lesson. Without prompting, he says, ‘I know’ and proceeds to add touches of pedal into the left hand rolled chords – I smile gladly and say, ‘That sounds like a big brass band now’. He says, ‘Yay, because I heard the recording’. I go on to play the Alberti bass section with hands together, asking him how he plans to increase the speed. He puts his index finger up and says, ‘I know, I know’ and proceeds to use add-a-note technique at tempo in the direction of travel. I say, ‘Good. What about the coordination?’ and then proceed to demonstrate how he would do the same thing, but adding the left hand one note at a time too. He agrees, but instead of trying he puts his music back into the plastic sleeve. I move on to show him the Alberti bass, suggesting that he is ‘angling too much this way’, i.e. he is twisting too much to the left with the left hand when playing the D chord, second inversion. I ask him not to play the upper notes quite as loud as the bass note, by playing and saying, ‘Fast, slow, slow, slow’ indicating the speed of key descent. We then move to the Haydn Concerto – I ask Adrian if he practised with the metronome (Yes) and I ask Jane if she received the YouTube link, but she says that she didn’t have time to show him. After a slow start, we begin again; I conduct him in duple time from the second piano – ‘Good boy, nice tempo’. He smiles so proudly during the first tutti! We do a good job overall, and I give him a big hug when we finish. Everyone claps, and I ask him, ‘Is that fun? (Yeah) … It’s really improved’. He asks, ‘Tempo?’ and I say, ‘Yeah, the speed is much more even. I’m going to have to start practising my part now’; Oliver laughs. I mention that we didn’t quite get the ending together, suggesting that he could give me more of a clear indication of his final notes. We practise again, ‘That’s great, it’s really good’. We finish with a discussion about the left-hand semiquavers, as I encourage him to segment the bars, being sure that each one feels completely loose and comfortable before chaining them together, essentially building freedom into the passage little by
little. I do a demonstration with hands together, segmenting the passage into bars with a loosening of my arms in between. I say, ‘Once the muscles start to freeze, the fingers start to seize up as well, and that’s when you’re likely to slow down and get tired’.

A3.5 Case Study 5: Kelly

Lesson 1: 16 February 2014

Reviewed 5, 6 and 8 September 2016

We start the lesson talking about what we might cover during the lesson and about how hot it is outside. I mention that I parked in the car park rather than walking today. Both Jean and Sam are at the lesson. I open up the technical workbook to Grade 6 saying that this is about ‘where we are’, asking Kelly to do all scales and arpeggios for that grade. I ask Kelly how her harp lesson was today. Jean says that she is learning ‘Fantasy’. I asked Kelly who the composer is (Saint-Saëns). Jean says that Kelly loves the song; Kelly is smiling. I mention that he wrote 5 piano concertos and we discuss the spelling ‘Fantaisie’ (Kelly tells me it ends with ‘e’ rather than ‘y’). I show her how to find the scales within the technical workbook. We start with B Major – I mention five sharps and she plays hands together, two octaves. The chair is too low so I adjust it. I ask her to play right hand 4 octaves, and we review the starting position. I ask her to curve her distal joints and roll (pronate) her hand inwards. As she plays I adjust her forearm, mentioning that the upper arm muscles stay switched on. I say that the challenge is keeping the looseness of the forearm while tightening the ends of the fingers. She plays right hand again and I encourage her to keep the elbow wide and adjust her body position. I ask her which direction she finds easiest (in terms of trying to keep the elbow loose) – up or down? She is not sure, and I say that most kids find it easier descending. I demonstrate and say that when coming down, it’s easier for the forearm to rotate, and not as natural when ascending. I say that despite this, you can learn how to do so. She plays the right hand again and while adjusting her, I ask her not to let the elbow drop after she has rolled the thumb under. She plays again and I say, ‘So you have air under your arm, and then follow across with your body’. I show her where her third fingertip is bending backwards. I adjust her, suggesting that she feel a slight friction towards herself as she makes contact with the key. She plays right-hand ascending again as I guide her elbow. I ask her to face
me and put her fingers on the piano chair. The view is obscured, but we are working on distal joint curvature. I ask her to transfer ‘that feeling’ to the keys and she does so. I say that as she is descending, fingers 3 and 4 tend to collapse. I guide her elbow and she slows down – ‘that’s what I’m looking for!’ I ask her to apply that technique to all scales rather than focusing on tempo ‘yet’ (laughs). I ask her to cultivate greater firmness in the distal joints, accompanied by a rotary movement when turning the thumb. I sit down at the second piano and do a critical comparison. I suggest that she will get there; ‘It is tricky and you really achieved well just at the end there’. I ask her to swap to the left hand – she plays two octaves. I suggest that her ‘mistake’ is because her thumb needs to rotate under more. As I manipulate her forearm, I say, ‘When you rotate, your thumb gets longer … turn the muscles in your upper arm on and have your elbow loose’. Kelly descends again with the left hand, but I say that she is ‘sort of squeezing instead of rotating’. I guide her hand again and then ‘unlock’ her arm, saying, ‘Let everything go, just have this turned on her (upper arm) and the ends of the fingers firm … all the other joints in-between nice and lubricated’. She descends again and has more success. I encourage her to pronate her forearm even further. Again, I get her to physically ‘let go’ – ‘Good … good girl’. As I stand next her, she descends again and I guide her elbow and shift her across – ‘that’s better’. We smile and I say, ‘As soon as there’s any tightness around here, you won’t be able to rotate’. As Kelly looks on, I put my arms up and rotate both forearms quickly from the elbow, saying that if I try to tighten anything, the arms lock. I say, ‘The challenge of doing scales on the piano is to have this (top of the arm) firm and the fingertips firm, but everything else is very loose’. I dramatise that you don’t sit loose, but ‘it’s a combination of the two’. I become very animated, using expressive gesture and saying that she did get it in the end, but it just takes time (points to my watch). Kelly nods when I say that that is what we will be working on this year. Kelly smiles when I say, ‘not scales for the whole year, don’t worry … once you get it in one it’s easier to achieve in others’. I ask her to tick the scales that she does so that I know she is on track. I tick B Major and suggest we do F# Major, asking her to find the page. She looks at the page and I ask if she has played this scale before (no). I smile and say, ‘Wow! 1 2 3 4 5 6 sharps’. I suggest that it’s actually quite easy and demonstrate while standing, saying that it is similar to B Major but with E#. She tries one octave and then I ask her to work on her fingertips on the chair and I kneel down. I ask Jean and Sam if they have been well. I ask Jean if she is busy driving Kelly around. Jean
says yes – cello, chess. I say to Kelly that she must want to do well with music. Jean says that she loves cello too and never wants to give up. As I sit with her, we work on firming up her distal joints while pushing her knuckles up. I say, ‘Gee you’re getting better at it aren’t you’. I suggest that these chair exercises can be part of her practice. I ask her to transfer to the piano. She plays F# Major ascending and descending two octaves and I guide her wrist/forearm pronation on the way down. I ask her to start lower this time, and to curve the hand diagonally inwards rather than being ‘front on’. As she descends I encourage her physically to let go of the tension in her forearm and wrist, guiding her inward pronation and upper body ‘last of all’. I ask her to play the bottom F# and hold onto it, while letting go of the tension in her wrist – ‘That’s it, much better’. We move to the right hand. Kelly is smiling. I ask her to practise the hands separately two octaves with the hands very low or very high, so that there is no added complication of crossing the body. Kelly plays the right hand and I adjust her inward pronation. When she misses the E# I say that she needs more lateral adjustment with the upper body as she goes higher. I ask her to let go of the tension in her wrist so that her thumb can go under further. She smiles as I do a ‘see-saw’ with her forearm and wrist. When I attempt to adjust her upper body again, she smiles excitedly when I say, ‘Very good that’s it!’ I say that she is starting to get the idea quicker now – ‘it’s taken less time than B Major’. I give her the thumbs up and say, ‘Very good’. Kelly nods when I ask her if she thinks she understands what I’m asking her to do. I say, ‘I think you are’ and suggest we find the page for E-flat Major. As she finds the page I say that she is ‘starring’ in my confirmation presentation. Jean is excited but Kelly seems a bit worried. I show her on the computer and Jean and Sam laugh. We all laugh when I say that Kelly’s pseudonym is ‘Kirsten’ or ‘Katrina’. Kelly plays E-flat Major and I adjust her at the top – ‘gee you’re really getting the idea aren’t you’. I point out that she is ‘standing up’ on the thumb, rather than staying flat (I demonstrate at the second piano). I encourage her to stay high and ‘roll over the notes’. I do a critical comparison, and using expressive gesture, draw her attention to not stay ‘square’. I ask her to play E-flat Major left hand, encouraging her to start with her body behind the note, adjusting her upper body and head across to the left. As she descends, I guide her forearm and elbow so as to maintain height. I ask her what she is thinking as it seems to be a lot easier for her now. She doesn’t seem to be able to articulate an answer, so I say, ‘Lots of good things’. I ask if she has done A-flat Major before (no) so I help her find the page. I point out the four flats and do a quick
demonstration. She tries the right hand but I stop her and ask her to start higher so as not to ‘squeeze’ the body at the start of the scale. ‘Start where you’ve got a little bit of space (between the arm and body)’. I ask her to practise the ‘rolling technique’ doing two octaves in each hand. As she plays the right-hand ascending I kneel behind her and encourage her not to drop her elbow (‘keep everything switched on’) while moving her head and upper body across to the right. I say that we’ll do that one again and I guide her elbow to stay high while adjusting her head – ‘firm feet, firm tips’. ‘Very good … well done sweetie … good girl’. I stand beside her and suggest that there is a lot that goes into a good technique, from the bottom of the feet, through the stomach, how your hold your arms, how you hold your head, the fingertips and the rotation of the forearms. I suggest that after a while, you get a picture in your mind of ‘everything sitting in the right spot’. I say that it probably feels a bit segmented at the moment, but soon she will form a ‘kinaesthetic image’ of what it feels and looks like to play. As I sit and demonstrate, I suggest that I personally don’t separate everything because ‘it’s been sort of programmed’, but because she is only young we need to take things step by step. I ask Kelly if she likes finding out about the ‘nuts and bolts’ or if she prefers pieces, but she just smiles. I suggest that she is a good kid and I ask if she is good at home too. Jean says no problem at all and we laugh when I ask if she has run away from home. I ask her to do the chromatics for homework, and say that we will move on. I briefly recap – Majors and chromatics for homework. I type into my computer what we are doing and ask her to tell me the Majors and she does. I type in the chromatics too and remind her that I’m not looking for speed, but rather posture and fingers. Jean seems worried that Sam didn’t record that particular part when I was summarising. I pick up Kelly’s theory book and suggest that I will take it home and mark it for her to save time. I laugh saying that Adrian gave me his whole book and 10 past papers to mark – ‘it took nearly an hour’. I mention that he needed to correct quite a bit though. We move on and Kelly takes out her Haydn. Jean says that the third movement needs to be checked. I mention that it looks easy, only one page; Kelly plays. ‘Oh that’s beautiful … I’ve never heard such beautiful contrast of dynamics. Wow, sounds like a professional playing. Amazing, how did you do that?’ I conduct and sing the terrace dynamics, saying, ‘it’s very pretty … very good girl’. I say that the notes are correct and the rhythm is good, but suggest (and demonstrate) that if she enhanced the two-note slurs, there would be more ‘smile’. I take out the orange highlighter and ask her to apply that idea to the whole movement. I ask her to
try not to make the first of each two-note slur the same volume, lest it inhibits forward flow. I sing and gesture with a gradual crescendo across C – D – E. She tries a few more times – ‘hey that’s good’. While standing at the second piano, I use expressive gesture and vocalisation to demonstrate this macro crescendo, ‘so that it feels like it’s travelling’. I coach her as she plays – ‘do you understand? It gives the music shape’. I do a critical comparison playing flat first then vocalising expressively, saying, ‘It sounds more like a song’. At Kelly’s piano, I demonstrate the whole phrase and she copies. I point out that the last two notes G and C are staccato, even though it’s not marked in the score. Kelly is quick to imitate and produces a beautiful tone here. I demonstrate the second half of the phrase and Kelly looks on. She seems a bit confused, so I slow down and show her how to approach the trill a number of times. I point out the leaning note before the trill and demonstrate. Kelly tries, and I demonstrate again. I count ‘how many’ and write in the five notes for the trill. I point out that the last note E is the end of the phrase so she would lift there. I am writing in purple and highlighting in orange. Kelly continues to experiment, and I get excited and gestural, ‘See how it’s coming to life now? You did a really good job and it’s starting to breathe’. It’s like we’re pumping life into it by doing these two-note slurs and adding the dynamics. It was all there, it just needed to be blown up a bit, like a beach ball’. I dramatise what blowing a beach ball would be like. I ask Kelly if she understands and she nods yes. As I demonstrate the first section again at her piano, I point out how much I loved the way she floated off the thirds. I ask her to do it again, but she has a bit of trouble synchronising them, so I talk and demonstrate. We experiment for the next little while, asking her to lead with the third finger, asking her accent and doing a tonal splat for the first thirds followed by an accent. I ask her to play the thumb closer to the key edge and the third finger further back towards the black notes. I end by illustrating with my body, how she might turn ‘things’ around just a little to the side for better synchronisation. I explain what synchronise means and reiterate the idea of turning slightly to the left rather than forming the hand ‘front on’. She tries again and I point out that also leads to enhanced voicing of the top notes. She tries multiple times, I demonstrate, she tries again and I ask her ‘what did you do then? It just sounded very pure’. I encourage her to keep experimenting saying, ‘The way you hold your hand will affect the sound’. I say that it’s not just loud and soft, but the small adjustments will affect the tone. She nods. I suggest that on the violin or cello it’s small adjustments with the fingers but with the piano it’s
small adjustments with the way that you hold everything. I demonstrate playing a single G, but approaching from 4 different angles, which leads to 4 different types of sound. At her piano, I demonstrate the next section and she tries. I question her – ‘is it all loud?’ While using expressive gesture and expressive vocalisation, I coach her with contrasting the Q and A phrases, within an f and p framework. She does well, and I reiterate the idea with gesture, sideways movement and expressive vocals. ‘It makes it sort of come alive’. I demonstrate the hands together and ask her to try. She does well and we move on, I encourage her to play louder on the return of the opening material. I suggest that she change the left-hand octave to a sixth so that she can approach it with greater volume. She plays the next part and I remind her (and demonstrate) to roll forwards on the E following the trill. As Kelly experiments a couple of times, I write in the gestural information, tracing it in the air with the pen first – ‘up and to the left’. I demonstrate the right hand again, saying, ‘So you just stroke the E on the way through’. Kelly tries again and I ask her not to slow down though. She copies me again, and then I add the previous gestural fragment. Kelly tries it too. I ask her to hold on to the G and then ‘rock across’ to the E, thereby giving it greater volume. She gets very excited and smiles when I pat her on the back and say, ‘Very good, that’s lovely’. I use gesture and vocalisation to ‘explain’ the difference between joining and not joining the G to the E (hiccup) – ‘You keep everything flowing’. I mark the score again and say that the reason she is doing well is because she has come well prepared with the notes. ‘It’s so easy to do this with you because you just know everything … it’s so simple’. I stand beside her and demonstrate the left-hand phrase while singing with expressive tonal shape. Kelly plays and I suggest that that is the cello. I dramatise someone playing the air cello with an elegant float off gesture to finish the phrase. I liken the piano arm to the bow arm on the string. Kelly plays again – ‘That’s awesome’. I ask her to pull the hands apart and do some practice on the sound before putting it back together. I say that the way she played it initially at the start of the lesson was ‘good enough’, but if she were to practise and implement these ideas, it would bring the piece to life. I say, ‘It will sound like the third movement of a concerto. The third movement is always very bright and happy. It’s elegant but it’s bubbly (I use gesture and Kelly nods). I dramatise and do a critical comparison where ‘everything smiles’. I draw a smiley face on her music. I gesturise and say the second movement is usually quite tender (like steak – Jean laughs). I suggest the first movement is usually elegant but bold and
regal. I say that the last movement is usually funny/cheerful. I mention that this piece is from the Classical period. I ask her if she would like to show me more and she nods enthusiastically. I suggest that we aim to play the concerto in the mid-year recital. We look at the first movement – before she starts I dramatise using gesture the difference in mood between first and third movements. Kelly plays and it seems very quick. I add a little accompaniment during the middle and last sections, coaching her with the tempo. ‘Yeah, that’s good, well done’. I mention that the cadenza got ‘a bit rushy’. I ask her to take her time and gesturise, encouraging her to ‘tell a story’. I demonstrate and mention that the cadenza is where you ‘show off’ a bit and ‘talk to the audience’ – ‘I’m playing with you’. I suggest that she make it sound like you want the audience to ‘guess’ what’s happening. I use expressive gesture and vocalisation to contrast between tossing the phrases away (‘gone’) and taking her time. I cue her from the cadenza and we play together, but she still seems to rush. I ask her to ‘make the left hand shine’ with crescendo when she has repeated notes. We continue to play in ensemble – it sounds beautiful. I ask her if she finds playing together fun and she nods. I say that I find it fun too. Using gesture, words and demonstration, we go back to the cadenza and I ask her to contrast the phrases with dynamics for a Q and A effect. I say, ‘What would you say … if a cat came along’, but then with expressive gesture and vocal dynamic contrast – ‘What would you say … I’m really not sure’. Kelly smiles and then plays. I interrupt her, demonstrating the return back to soft to begin the repeated notes. Following that is an exciting interplay between the two of us – she plays and I coach her with expressive gesture, body movement and lots of spirit! She seems to really enjoy herself and I do too. Using conducting, gesture and my voice, I suggest that she give some space before going on with the opening material during the recapitulation. I mark the score with Q and A (soft and loud). As I write the dynamics in, I review the ‘expression’ in real time with lots of energy. Kelly is smiling a lot. By dramatising, I reiterate how this first movement sounds different to the third, though both are still ‘happy’. I suggest that she can apply these ideas to most Classical concertos and I go on to discuss the moods of Mozart K467 and K466 (while demonstrating key melodic ideas). We move on to the end of the first movement – Kelly plays. I mention that the passagework isn’t quite exact as there is too much gestural roll. I sit behind her and take her through the add-a-note technique from top C. We then work on the turn before adding it back to the descending scale. I encourage her to start the scale with a preparatory movement. She joins the two
fragments together before we add the next note while moving to the right. I encourage her not to over-exend her other fingers when not in use. She tries (better) but I ask her not to come down with the elbow. I ask her to look in the ‘mirror’ to notice how the elbow pronates the forearm inward when turning. She is quick to correct it – good girl. She drops the elbow down again and we continue to experiment – ‘come up and over’. She keeps trying and I encourage her to remain loose, to face the hand diagonally opposite and not to change the vertical level of the forearm when turning 2 over 1. She seems to be tilting to the right when playing the third finger so we keep trying. Eventually – ‘Yes! That’s it good’. She seems to be more stable with her elbow and pronates without undue exertion. Her elbow position also seems wider here when compared to before. I mention that small adjustments often result in big changes, especially with rhythmic precision here. I encourage her to keep experimenting, and that ‘it’s not hideously wrong anyway … what you are doing is still good’. I mention that she seemed to be gripping the E while over rolling to the right, affecting her ability to deliver the remaining notes. I also say that it’s good to find the overall gestural shape, but then it will need to be reduced when the tempo increases. I ask her to remember (and do without gripping) all the little exercises we covered. ‘The whole idea is to develop a sense of freedom … quickness, not a sense of stiffness’. As I sit and demonstrate, I attempt to show her how small adjustments do make key differences. I say that it’s still very good and we move on to the second movement. I mention that Wendy is away so we can have a longer lesson today. We talk briefly about Reiki and then Kelly plays the second movement. After a while I sit next to her and play a little of the orchestral part to try and slow her down. I give her feedback – ‘Oh wow, you’ve really come on haven’t you’. I say, ‘She’s improved’ to Jean, but she doesn’t seem greatly convinced. I suggest that we should start a Young Con concerto competition before talking about the upcoming Piano Duo Festival and playing at City Hall. Kelly and Jean are audibly excited. I ask Kelly if she has ever played at City Hall (no) and I mention that I’ve played there a few times before. I tell Kelly where City Hall is before talking further about the City Hall concert. Jean asks me when it is (August) and I say that it would be good for Kelly to take part. I talk about a prospective duo partner. I talk about what other students are doing at the moment and how Kelly’s two concertos are a ‘special project’. I talk about Wendy doing eighth grade and how she will be fine, but she sometimes doubts herself. I say that I would like to help Kelly with her technique, but also continue with the
concertos, perhaps duos, perhaps competition, or perhaps another ‘challenge’. I start playing Albumblatt and Kelly smiles at Jean. I say that Neil is learning Flight of the Bumble Bee. I say, ‘You’re playing this really well Kelly’, referring to the second movement and I ask her to start from the beginning. I say, ‘Sorry to interrupt’ and play a little of the interchange between sections, asking her to put a bit of time in-between. I play along with her and then ask her to the same thing a little later in the piece. I demonstrate and then Kelly tries, though it still sounds a little frantic. I ask her to duplicate a triple lilt by ‘splatting’ on the first beat of the bar, before demonstrating and asking her to put that into the hands together. She does better and I continue to conduct her from the second piano, saying that the piece is starting to sound more like a minuet and trio now. I play a little more of the left hand before using gesture and expressive vocal shape (1 2 3 1 2 3) to demonstrate further. I then move to the melodic line, conducting and singing how to go ‘through‘ the bar. I ask Kelly to have a gradual crescendo through the four bars on a macro level with tonal shape on a micro level. As Kelly plays hands together, I sit at the second piano and conduct while singing. I demonstrate again how to she can get softer and have more space but it’s not quite clear to her as she plays again. I demonstrate the cadential point again, but this time counting the ‘space’. She does a little better. I then play three notes and wait between two and three, the upbeat to the next section. She plays again and I say, ‘Good try, good try’ before walking over and saying with a smile, ‘You don’t need to take off like a rocket’. Kelly smiles. ‘You’re very fast aren’t you?’ She plays again, and this time I use counting, body movement and gesture to ‘hold her up’ a bit before continuing into the new section. I say, ‘good’ while she continues to play until the end. I work with her on the repeated G’s, demonstrating and then using gesture and singing to convey tonal shape – ‘make them different volume’. She does very well with the right hand as I lean in with her – ‘good’. Hands together is harder for her so I demonstrate and singing the right hand again at the second piano. She tries again, but I say that it’s ‘too boisterous and a bit bangy’ and dramatise while gripping my hands and face. She plays again while I dance, sing and use gesture to cue overall tonal shape and terrace dynamics. I say, ‘Yeah’ when she finishes, before going on to suggest that she remember to shape repeated notes, ‘it’s like the cello’ and I air play cello while singing. There is a funny comparison where I ask her not to get ‘too diggy’ with the cello. I demonstrate say that the repeated G’s a like a little girl. She tries again and then I ask her to let her wrist be loose. She tries again and the tone is
sweeter. I say that if we play staccato with a tight wrist, the tone becomes wooden. At
the second piano, I stand and play in critical comparison a few times. Kelly nods. I
mention that we need a certain quality of sound, and she plays again (good girl). She
has a bit of trouble with clarity of the ornament so I sit at the second piano and she
copies me with a forward and up to the left gesture. We then deconstruct the repeated
G’s and ornament using add-a-note technique and tonal splat before combining them
together again. I then demonstrate and ask Kelly to move her head slightly forwards
just before she plays the ornament. She tries and we laugh. I go on to explain that part
of playing music well is the way that it looks as well as the way that it sounds, and I
mention that this year we will be working on these more ‘performative’ aspects. I do a
critical comparison before saying, ‘gesture tells the audience … oh I think that she
just go louder and softer there … otherwise they don’t really know’. Kelly seems to
understand and does well with that segment, but it doesn’t translate as well thereafter,
as she tends to rush. She has difficulty with fluency of the ending, but gets there in the
end. I demonstrate and use vocalisation to ask her to take her time. I do a critical
comparison, before using gesture while singing ‘la da da da da, let me breathe …’ She
does a little better, so I move on to adding a slight decrescendo by singing and
moving her arms, ‘come settle us down, then we go again’. She tries quite well, and
then I demonstrate, asking her to roll up and forwards on the thumb (E). She tries, and
I demonstrate again saying, ‘just very tender’. I ask her to think of her elbow moving
her arm forward (she plays but it’s too loud) and ‘yeah but not so quick’. She does
very well and I clap and say, ‘very good that’s it!’ She continues with hands together
and I tell her it’s beautiful. I reiterate the idea using expressive behaviour and
comedy. I say, ‘that does sound a lot better … it really does sound good … OK it
sounds excellent’ and we all laugh. I ask her what else we should do. Jean mentions
second movement of the Mozart and there’s a bit of a problem. Kelly shows me where
the problem spots are. I mention that the Haydn is right at her level, and the Mozart is
a bit of a stretch, so ‘don’t freak out yet’. Jean says that Kelly isn’t worried and Kelly
agrees. Kelly plays hands together as I stand and watch. She plays the first couple of
lines and I say good, asking her to stand. I sit and demonstrate, asking her to ‘fall’
through the initial cross rhythm without stopping to check if it’s correct. I demonstrate
and then do a critical comparison using gesture and singing to show the timing error. I
demonstrate and then ask her to play the left hand of the adjacent bars. She does so
and then she puts it ‘back into the song’ with hands together. I demonstrate again and
then Kelly plays, with success. I clap, ‘that’s it, you did it’. I do another critical comparison while singing and conducting. We briefly do the left hand join again and then she starts from the beginning and I play the second piano briefly before returning to conduct. She has trouble with the following cross rhythm so we stop and I demonstrate asking her to coordinate the C with the left hand (left, right, left, together). I write it in the music for her and she tries again slowly. She has success and I ask her to repeat multiple times (good). I then demonstrate and ask her to ‘doubly rotate’ from high D to C (good girl). I mention that this is so that the note is louder, as the pedal adds volume to the left hand. ‘Use rotation to bring out the sound’. She seems to have trouble combining the cross rhythms with the gestural choreography, so it’s probably too much too soon. I ask her to separate the two bars without joining them (yet). I demonstrate, helping her coordinate the G♯-A bar; she has success. (‘OK?’) I write in the music for her (T L R L T) and show her how the next section is the same. She continues to experiment with the next section where the hands cross over each other, and I coach her with the cross rhythms while referring to the score. She is very determined and smiles when I say, ‘You’re a good kid’. I ask to sit down, and I demonstrate ‘taking the sound up to heaven’ but it’s probably a bit premature, as she still hasn’t got the notes yet. ‘Draw the sound up and out, not down and in’. I continue to play hands together saying, ‘notice, this is what I mean about being performative’, referring to illustrating the entry of the right hand. I ask her to notice how my head is moving with the semiquavers. I do 3 critical comparisons: exaggerated, deadpan and then ‘normal’ in order to ‘help the audience understand what’s going on’. Kelly smiles. I ask her not to grimace with her face, but use her body instead. I continue to play hands together using expressive gesture and body movement. I say, ‘It’s more of a side to side, this corner to that corner, rather than flat and straight … sound is bouncing off the walls and into people’s ears, rather than loud and loud (lots of expressive gesture here!)’ Using expressive gesture, I sing the melody of the concerto: ‘it bounces … off the wall … and travels into your ears’. I say that she is doing well with it and that the cross rhythms are tricky, though she is further with it than last lesson. I mention that there are some ‘easier’ parts coming up though. I mention that it’s time to finish and get back to the car park. I ask Jean what else Kelly is playing – *Nessun Dorma*. Jean mentions that she hasn’t practised it as much. I say that it’s ok. Jean says again that Kelly isn’t scared of the challenge of the Mozart but she can tell when she is listening that ‘it sounds a bit wrong’. Jean says
that in harp, Tango is similar with rhythm difficulty. I say that I hope that the lesson has helped. Jean says, ‘It was a really good lesson wasn’t it Kelly?’ I ask Kelly if she had fun, and though she is out of camera shot, she says yes and I say, ‘Oh, that’s good isn’t it, I had a nice time too’. Jean and Sam ask about another sight-reading book as she has finished the last one I gave to her! Jean says that she hasn’t finished Invention yet, and Jean asks me to check it next lesson.

Lesson 2: 23 February 2014

Reviewed 9 September 2016

- The lesson starts as I tell Kelly that it feels like I haven’t seen her for ages, as I’m used to seeing her twice a week. I ask her what she is going to show me first today. I give Kelly her Grade 1 theory book and we look through it ‘briefly’ (takes about minutes), though we do relate tones and semitones of G Major to the keyboard. Also, we do some aural work with tones and semitones. Kelly has perfect pitch so I ask her to do two notes simultaneously and then chords. We also talk about intervals contained within Major chord inversions. I ask her to identify intervals thereafter, teaching her about quality of intervals within the Major scale. We relate minor/major seconds to tones and semitones. I ask Kelly to tick off all of the theory lessons that she has completed so far. I suggest that we move on to scales and arpeggios. Kelly asks to play arpeggios and I agree. I ask her to play B Major arpeggio before typing on the computer. I ask her how harp was and what she had learnt, but she seems unsure. She plays B Major and I comment that her distal joints are much better. I ask her to play four octaves now. I show her how to map out the 4 octaves and then she plays the right hand. As she comes to the top, I guide her body to the right and ask her to push her feet into the floor in order to stay stable. I sit down and demonstrate, asking her to notice the alignment of my body and head with the notes. I say that her rotary movement (pronation) has improved a lot. I ask her to play B Major contrary motion. She hasn’t started the contraries yet, so I suggest that we will this week. Kelly tries and then I ask her to slow down, presumably to enhance accuracy and fluency. I put the metronome on 50, two notes per beat (100, one note per beat). I ask her to try. As she gets to the extreme registers, I hold her elbows up and encourage her to tilt forwards slightly. I say, ‘Not too bad’ and then I reset the metronome on 80, 1 note per beat. I ask and adjust her elbows again. I say that doing it a bit slower gives you more time to think. I ask her why we tilt forwards – ‘It’s so that the elbow can go
behind the notes’. I point out that because my arms are longer than hers, it’s more likely that I won’t need such a forward tilt, unless I go further out! I do a critical comparison, noting that straight arms give you little control of the sound. I say that I would like Kelly to learn ‘that slight forward adjustment’ and I ask her to play B Major contrary again. She does mostly well and I suggest 70 beats per minute if necessary and she plays again. The posture is good. She is quick to tell me that playing slower gives her the chance to have a bit more time to mentally prepare for what is coming. I ask her to move on to A-flat Major, similar motion. She has trouble with hands together, so I suggest right hand; it’s more fluent. She moves to the left hand. I say that her technique has generally improved, so I ask to practise the hands together. We move on to C# Major; ‘nice and steady, there’s no rush’. I put the metronome back on and she plays hands together with better accuracy. Kelly plays E-flat Major with hands together, but there are many wrong notes so I ask her to play the left hand alone. I show her how to map out four octaves of E-flat Major with the left hand and she has a try. I join in at the second piano playing in sixths ‘to keep her concentrating’. I mention that in Grade 8, there are thirds and sixths – I also mention the main elements of scales playing: learning the notes, four octaves, position of body, firmness of the legs and firmness and accuracy of the fingers. I ask her to prepare all Majors, four octaves before moving to double staccato sixths. I demonstrate at Kelly’s piano and she copies. I do some tonal ‘splats’, which she copies with both hands. When she puts the notes back in, the wrists are certainly more pliable. We move to two octaves with the left hand and thereafter I explain that sixths are a preparation for staccato octaves. I suggest we move on, with arpeggios next week. I ask her how she went with J. S. Bach’s Invention in B-flat Major. I ask if she would like to meet on Thursday for another lesson. Kelly plays the invention with hands together. The first section is fluent, but there are lapses in fluency thereafter. I stop her half way through and suggest that it’s a fraction too fast. She starts again after I cue her with the tempo. I help her review some fingering in the left hand. She struggles towards the end of page one. I suggest that she needs more separate hands practice while observing the written fingering. I take bar 5 as an example and then show her how to practise, including separating the hands and then suggesting that she make the music as expressive as she can as early as she can, as opposed to keeping hands together and ‘having everything sort of flat’. I reiterate the need to pull the hands apart so as to learn the fingerings and gestures a bit more thoroughly. We take the left hand and I
start to coach her with the add-a-note technique in the direction of travel. I ask her to think of something really warm as she plays it. We review the rhythmic value of the quavers before I ask her to roll, but this distracts her from the rhythm. ‘Remember that they way that you look is as important as how you sound when you play the piano’ and I demonstrate again. Kelly copies and then we move further, but she is distracted by the rhythmic detail and makes errors therein. I ask her to use her body to roll through the notes. As I click and then put the metronome on, she correctly identifies that we are working in quaver subdivisions. I write in quaver = 60 and ask her to listen to the sound that she makes as early as possible (in the learning process). She is doing better with the tonal shaping but still misses the quaver values. I coach her further and she fixes the errors. I say, ‘OK, that’s better already. Don’t let the piece stay in the button-pushing phase for too long. It’s good that you’ve got an idea of the piece, so now start injecting it with some expression’. I sit down and demonstrate, reminding Kelly that she needs to use her upper body when playing; Kelly nods. We take another left-hand phrase and Kelly copies my overall trunk movement. I say, ‘That’s it … otherwise the listener won’t know what’s happening’. I do a critical comparison and ask Kelly to notice how I’m moving just a little the second time. I also do an exaggerated version and then another deadpan version, pointing out that that version looks like I’m not involved with it – ‘use your body to shape the sound. The notes are there, but there’s not much happening. Try to get it out of the note stage this week’. We demonstrate the right hand and I use the analogy of the little bird singing while moving to the top branch as the melody ascends. I ask Kelly to play – she does well and I remind her to lift of gently at the end of the phrase. I say, ‘OK, that’s starting to sound good now, yeah’. I say, ‘good girl’, and agree to perhaps meet on Thursday, pending Sam’s confirmation.

Lesson 3: 27 February 2014

Reviewed 12 September 2016

- We start the lesson having conversation that I’m glad to see Kelly as I felt a bit bored this morning, as I had nothing to do. Jean said that Kelly is a bit the same, ‘She works so hard. Some days I say that you don’t need to do anything, but she says, Mummy I feel bore’. I agree and we laugh. I say that I made some DVD’s for the research project. I mention that I have a day off on Fridays this year, as opposed to last year, when I was getting sick a lot. Jean says that I was very busy last year and I
say that hopefully this year will be more balanced. I say to Kelly that I can’t believe I’ve come this far already, and that it ‘just shows you what you can do when you put your mind to things. I’m a really big fan of hard work, you’ve probably noticed’. Kelly smiles and nods her head. I remind her that we were working on the Invention the other day, and we start looking at that. I ask her how she is going with ‘all her instrument practice’. Jean says that it’s going well and that cello is still very basic. I ask her if she is getting a good sound and Jean says that Kelly was a bit out of tune last year, but she is getting better now. Holly comes in and Kelly pats her on the head. I mention that progress on piano seems to be initially faster than on strings. Kelly sets up the music and I apologise for the mess (lots of books around). I ask her if she will show me how it sounds. Kelly plays the first section before I interrupt and say, ‘OK good, that is so different to the other day, it sounds very good’. I ask her to stand up and I adjust the chair (higher). I ask her how she practised before saying that it sounds like she is listening to the piece now. I start to say, ‘I loved how you …’ before demonstrating instead. I ask her to start again. I point out on the sticker that I placed last time – movement, gestures, phrasing, sound, articulatory detail and voicing – these are the things to look out for in the two-part invention. I mention that this piece is a good ‘teaching’ piece for foundational technique. I demonstrate and ask her to drop into the first left-hand note with greater depth. She plays hands together with beautiful expressive phrase shape. I suggest that it’s so much better and that we move on. I demonstrate the left hand opening with enhanced tonal shape, explaining in words the second time. I say, ‘good’ and ask her to play it faster with shape and then slower with the same shape. I ‘Good, so we don’t want any pressing’, and I ask her to roll through the notes instead. I show her what sort of sound the piano will emanate if she presses instead of rolls. She continues to experiment before I ask lead her into two-note slurs of each pair of notes within the ascending B-flat Major arpeggio. I explain, ‘Do a little rock to the left and then a little rock to the right’. She does well and so I demonstrate the hands back together, which she copies. She continues and tries to implement similar movement for the following bars, but there are more mistakes than before. We move to the right hand and I ask her to imitate a double roll as the thumb plays B flat. I demonstrate and ask her to drop into the opening notes. She continues the right hand only and phrases beautifully, ‘Oh, that’s lovely’. We review the decrescendo and upward gesture for the last phrase of the section. I write it in the score. Using expressive gesture, conducting and my voice, I coach her with a
gradual decrescendo and crescendo as the phrases descend and ascend – ‘and then it comes to rest … very good!’ I suggest that the way the music moves up and down is like ‘painting pictures’. I say, ‘That’s really what the piece is about, it’s painting sounds … that’s awesome’. I suggest that the trick is to be listening for each hand, before demonstrating hands together again. I ask her to review the left-hand forward flow by employing crescendo. I say that she is really getting the hang of the double rotation here, and that it’s much easier to get a ‘line’ if you play faster (I demonstrate), but to play it slowly, ‘it takes a bit more thought’. I help Kelly experiment with the overall gestural line of the arpeggio, with and without double rotation, explaining that double rotation can be an effective way of creating a crescendo without any harshness in the sound. I experiment with a single note C, showing her the different tonal qualities that the piano can emit, depending on the way the key is depressed. I ask her to start again, saying to Jean that she has done well. Jean says, ‘It’s very musical. Before I remember it was quite tough and rough’. I agree saying, ‘Yeah, a little bit buttony’. I explain the analogy to Kelly, while pretending to play on her shoulder with the corresponding touch – ‘Buttony where you push, and buttery (demonstrates on piano) is where you roll’. I ask Kelly if her family uses butter at home (no). I say that we don’t use it much, but I use gesture and explain that, ‘you roll through the notes smoothly, like you’re spreading butter’. I follow that up with a dramatisation of ‘hard butter’ that wouldn’t be an optimal choice. I ask Kelly is she has heard of margarine (yes) suggesting that could be a good alternative. I do a quick demonstration utilising this concept before Kelly plays again. As she plays, I use expressive gesture and vocalisation to encourage the concept of high and low voices and the modulation to F Major. Soon after though, she isn’t as confident with the notes and has challenges with the overall fluency. I seem to dismiss this and ‘explain’ the harmonic tension using demonstration, pointing out the ‘sweet’ expression of the top A. Kelly plays and has success, though the notes do seem to distract her somewhat, especially shortly thereafter. I reiterate how much she has improved. I demonstrate a little of the left hand using double rotation, which she copies. I ask her what key we are in there (G minor) and then lead her to ‘discover’ the relative key relationship to B flat. I liken the two keys to two cousins, one happy and one more serious. I suggest that the music turns from sweet to dark, where the clouds come in. It could be though, that this might be a bit premature, as she doesn’t seem totally confident with the notes. Nonetheless, she pushes on and I point out the
key change to E-flat Major (subdominant) while writing it in the score. I question Kelly what she thinks Bach is ‘doing’. She’s not sure, so I say that he is ‘playing around’ with the closely related keys, and that is something we need to show ‘the listener’. I do a quick reduction of the overall harmonic structure, calling it ‘modulation’, a new word for Kelly. I liken it to ‘morphing’ (changing keys). I explain what this means, suggesting that material that ‘connects’ the keys should be highlighted. Kelly plays the left hand as I kneel next to her (blocking the view), and I suggest that she take her time so that she can be ‘a sound artist’. We experiment together, and I sing. We use add-a-note technique to build the gestural shape of the left hand, and I compliment Kelly for noticing that I shifted in and out in order to roll more effectively. I do a (vocal) critical comparison to reiterate the slight decrescendo inherent in two-note slurs, lest ‘you get a hiccup sort of sound’. I follow this with practical demonstration and then Kelly experiments with gestural fragments. I encourage her to drop and fall through the notes, ‘be a little bit rougher’. I suggest that she employs double rotation in order to enhance the volume of the descending phrase. Kelly is very quick to catch on – ‘very good’. Using my voice, I explain that this will avoid ‘a weak note’, after which I do a critical comparison – ‘should be going to there’. I go on to explain that it becomes challenging to ‘drop’ when the phrase is played legato, and I ask Kelly what she would do instead – she correctly answers, ‘roll’. I demonstrate again, and Kelly copies easily. She continues to play and I coach her with the harmonic ‘arrivals’. I show her the ‘important’ note and ask her not to rush towards it. As she plays, I use expressive gesture, body movement and my voice to encourage her to go ‘higher’. I say, ‘Isn’t it clever?’ and Kelly continues, though the notes are not as easy for her. Nonetheless, we continue, Kelly playing the left hand and me playing the right hand. I explain that the piece is tricky, though it can sound ‘amateurish’, and ‘exercisey’ and not very pretty. I reiterate that the way you play the piece makes it come to life. I point out, circling on the score, how the piece moves through the circle of fifths (C – F – B flat – E flat). Kelly seems to understand and I liken it to looking at a leaf – it’s very perfect. I go on to explain that Bach has planned the piece perfectly, rather than ‘by accident’. I suggest that as musicians, we need to link the key changes to the expressive gestures employed – ‘If you can hear the keys, you can build the sound up and down, depending on whether the keys are dark or light’. I go on to say that G minor (dark) sounds different to C minor (gloomy). Kelly nods her head when I ask her if she understands. I use the different
settings on the dimmer light to ‘illustrate’ the closely related keys – ‘not only different volumes, but different colours as well’. I encourage her to think about that concept and listen for that as she plays. I go on to suggest a different fingering for the left-hand phrases (5 or 4?) and encourage her to roll from bottom note to octave above for greater expressive effect. I further suggest that if she starts with 4, she could interchange with 5 before the leap, which she tries. I ‘show’ her and she tries again, though it is tricky for her to adapt. I ask her to consider that and experiment. I remind her that when the piece is faster, she can also rely momentum not only finger legato: ‘When it’s slow, it’s very hard to generate momentum, and that’s when people usually stretch’. I suggest that a combination of the reviewed fingering and momentum may be optimal. Kelly tries the left hand, and then I suggest a ‘little rock to the left’, in order to generate the required momentum in order to avoid a stretch. I reiterate that this is especially important for Kelly, as her hand is still relatively small. I talk about another concert opportunity with Jean, possibly an aged care home. I ask Kelly if she would be interested and she nods yes. Jean says that it’s a good idea and I agree. I say that *Invention* is well and truly on the right track. Jean agrees and says, ‘It sounds very different’. I explain that in this piece, we use gesture and momentum together, where the fingering is a key component; also the underlying harmonic colour. I also remind Kelly to use gesture to convey the inherent decrescendo within two-note slurs. After she plays, I suggest that while the two-note slurs are effective on a micro level, she probably could over the overall a little more. I demonstrate the overall crescendo on a macro level, before taking her hand and showing her physically, using her hand and my expressive vocalisation (then to loud/then to soft/then to loud, etc.). I suggest that if I was teaching a toddler, that’s what I would do, as that is the overall effect required, though individual notes will then be added back in. Kelly adds the notes back into the overall gestural choreography, but I remind her (using expressive gesture and my voice) to stay within the basic pulse. Thereafter, I remind her that we need to keep the tempo even, despite the changes in volume. She plays the right hand again with very good control of tempo and expressive nuance. I remain quiet this time, but when she finishes, I say, ‘Very good’. I ask Jean if she can hear the difference, and she agrees that she was rushing slightly earlier, though her overall expression was good. I explain to Kelly that this very slight deviation in tempo can make the listener sound ‘nervous’, liken when people start talking too faster and stumble. Kelly blows her nose and I talk briefly about yesterday’s confirmation. I
demonstrate the macro nuance again and Kelly plays, but I pull her up when she begins to rush again. Using gesture and my voice, I remind her of the overall macro crescendo and decrescendo on the way up and down. Using a combination of single notes and exact notation, I explain that the crescendo on the way up was good, but the decrescendo on the way down could still be more refined. She tries again, and while I say her effort was good, the descending notes were ‘the same volume’. Interestingly, when she tries again, the notes become inaccurate as she concentrates more on the expressive nuance. She tries a couple more times, and I say, ‘It’s hard to do isn’t it’. I demonstrate again and Kelly is able to do it. I ask her to ‘play around with that’ before summarising using more voice and arm the overarching dynamics once again. Kelly nods. I ask Kelly if she would like me to hear her Grieg Waltz. We talk about a possible new piece. When I ask her how Czerny study is going, she says that she’s not very good at it, though I can tell she doesn’t like it. I ask her if she would rather move on to something else. She seems reluctant to disappoint me, and I ask her if she would prefer something ‘more melodious’. I say that it’s ok to have some control over the repertoire choice. When she finally agrees, I say that I had a feeling that’s what she would say, hence our discussion. I suggest that I will find something else and give it to her at the next lesson. Kelly plays Waltz hands together with the pedal and reasonable fluency overall. When she finishes, I say, ‘Oh there’s lots of good stuff about that. What do you think?’ I can tell she’s a bit hesitant to say, so I ask her what she thinks might be the next step with the piece. I suggest that the piece sounds a bit ‘cloudy’ and she agrees. However, I skip to the middle section and suggest that she start practising it faster in gestural fragments that are then chained together (which I demonstrate). I say that we will give it a vitamin C injection, a bit of a boost. Kelly sits down again and we start to find the ‘hidden’ gestures in the middle section, encouraging her to move her elbow to the right without tension in the elbow – ‘let all muscles go’. I ask her not to twist as we add more right-hand notes and then adding the hands back together. She tries to chain the bars together, but I say, ‘We don’t have to do all of it’, and we move to single bar fragments overlapping with the first beat of the following bar. I encourage Kelly not to squeeze the left hand, but to ‘just drop’. Kelly has success with the hands together – ‘that’s it!’ Kelly continues to experiment, and I ask her to watch how lose my arms are after I have finished the phrases. Kelly plays again and I encourage her to drop her arms into her lap when finished too. She does very well with single bars and then two bars consecutively; I praise her. I ask her
to feel as though she is leading with her left hand, not to think too much, and to ‘go faster’. I mention that she can do something similar with the next section. I move on to the broken chords, showing her how the pedal will operate. I say how inspiring it is when ‘someone’ (Kelly) comes ‘with stuff to do’, i.e. well prepared. I say that sometimes I feel bored when I’m teaching, but not with Kelly; it’s exciting. Kelly adds the hands together with the pedal, and I suggest a little slower with the tempo. I suggest that it’s a bit harder when played slower, so I ask her to play the left hand with the pedal. I add the chord symbols into her score, and demonstrate the underlying harmony using rolled chords in the treble. While playing the left hand and pedal, I show Kelly the inherent voice leading within the bass. Thereafter, I encourage Kelly to play the bass notes on the way through to the upper notes in a single gesture, rather than separating them into different gestures. I encourage a ‘sweeping’ gesture with the left hand, saying, ‘come into it like an ellipse’. As Kelly adds all notes, I physically map the elliptical direction in the air beside her, though it does seem to distract her a little. I encourage her not to stretch and to lift/drop instead. ‘Lovely, now think about your foot (pedal) as well’. Interestingly, when she adds the pedal, the elliptical gestures aren’t quite as fluid as before, though she does improve a little. I sit down and demonstrate, first drawing her attention to the hands and then my foot. Kelly tries again, and I ask her to lift her foot a little earlier, though this tricks her hands somewhat. I sit down and demonstrate, asking her to play the bass notes and pedal, correctly her clarity. Thereafter, I ask her to play the left hand again, though this time in common time, adding a second slur between the second and third notes of the waltz bar. I say, ‘Much better – the way you play this note will affect how you play this note’. I say that she has improved in the last 10 minutes. Thereafter, we work to refine the textural definition of the opening bars. I encourage her to drop into the keys and then ‘hang on’ gently rather than gripping, which I demonstrate on her shoulders. After I say, ‘OK, that’s starting to sound better already’, we work further on the melodic definition, including shaping the repeated B. Kelly smiles and plays well. I say, ‘That’s better’, and then direct her to project and stretch the top E. Using expressive gesture and my voice, I encourage her to ‘push forward after you’ve stretched’. We continue with this rubato and Jean says, ‘That was beautiful’. I say that we have run out of time before summarising our ‘plan’ for the piece – gesture, balance, stretching of time. I demonstrate and then we finish, saying we make a good team. Jean says, ‘It sounds really different. I’m not a musical person, but I can tell’. I
ask Kelly what she likes about learning piano, and she says, ‘It’s fun’. Jean laughs and says that Kelly says, ‘Yay! Piano lesson!’

Lesson 4: 2 March 2014

Reviewed 22 September 2016

- The lesson starts with us talking about Adrian being very happy for having a good lesson, as he got told off the week before. Sam said that Kelly can be naughty too. I say that Kelly has been doing very well, and I ask her how she is going. Kelly says that she needs help with Mozart page five, and I say that I like it when people come in and know what they want to work on. We talk about wearing glasses. Kelly opens the music and I ask her which particular part (all of it). I start by identify the key of A-flat Major and writing in the score. I ask Kelly what key we started in (F Major). I ask Kelly to play the left hand here and I wind the seat up. I ask her to create space between her shoulder joint and upper arm. I help Kelly identify E-flat 7 chord, first inversion and its relationship to A flat. Kelly plays left hand, and I adjust the fingering, checking each option with her (4 or 3). Kelly is having trouble keeping her distal joints rounded and I remind her. I write in the fingering. I ask her to tilt her hand inwards to support the fifth finger. I identify and write in B-flat minor, I ask Kelly to identify F minor (she does so correctly). I note that her hand is still very small, ‘still young … only 9 years old’. I say that she has a musician’s 12-year-old brain. I suggest we move on to the right hand now and I play it, identifying the turns (she hasn’t seen them before). I explain how to execute the turn as Kelly plays, noting the flat and natural symbols in the score. It takes some time, but she does seem to have success quickly. I ask Kelly if she is sure she hasn’t been a musician in a former life; Sam laughs. I say that she did the second turn on her own. We review both turns, including fingering. Kelly plays and I write in the score before moving on. I suggest some fingering for the return of the opening theme in A-flat Major; Kelly follows. I encourage her to lift and drop, rolling outwards with the elbow on the final note of the phrase. I ask Kelly how she was able to identify the notes and she says she has done it (them) before. We continue on, working on the fingering; I write it in the score. I ask Kelly which note we trill from and she says the upper note (usually). As we carry on, there is more fingering to review, but Kelly takes it in her stride; I continue to write in the score. I check if the lid is soft closing. I say that she is almost there in terms of the middle section. I ask Kelly to practise hands separately, and then ask her to stand up
so I can show her ‘what it might sound like’. I play the A-flat Major section with hands together, suggesting it’s probably the most difficult page in the whole piece. I ask her how she is going with the beginning, and then ask her which orchestra she might play with. I explain that there are 3 movements, which she can learn over the next few years. Sam says, ‘It would be very exciting wouldn’t it Kelly?’ I agree and Kelly smiles. Kelly tells me that she plays cello in the orchestra. I say that we can have dreams as long as we keep working hard. I smile at Sam and Kelly plays the opening hands together. The pedal is quite messy, but the notes are working well overall. She finishes the first page and I say, ‘Yeah, that’s really improved’, before saying that her trill is slowing down in the left hand. I play the left hand at the second piano while counting and Kelly joins in. I suggest that she direct her attention away from the right hand. She tries a couple of times to get the trill resolution right, but has difficulty – it needs to be scaffolded, which thankfully I see the need, but I don’t do enough of it with her really. I sit beside her and direct her to leave out the trill, but adding the EF all with the left hand. I demonstrate and then we move on. I say that the left hand is too loud, the right hand is a bit soft, but the rhythm is excellent. Kelly stands up and I play the hands together. I ask Kelly what I’m using a lot of when I play, and she answers double rotation (I agree). I say that that is how to generate power without squeezing. I encourage her to drop and roll and show her how to use double rotation with the right-hand semiquavers. She does well, but I stop her and review the double rotation inherent in the ascending C7 chord. She does very well and I say to Sam that he must be excited as her Dad. He says, ‘It’s good she’s enjoying it’ and I agree. I say, ‘It’s wonderful to see you growing up as a musician’. I ask Kelly what she enjoys about learning this piece – ‘It’s fun’. I ask her how it makes her feel – ‘excited’. I get excited for her and say, ‘It makes me excited to what you being excited’. Sam says, ‘I think this song suits her’ and I agree. I ask her if she understands what I mean about generating tone through double rotation (yes). I ask her to play again (keep experimenting with the touch) as I get out my music for the second piano part. I ask her to do an extra pedal when the right hand resolves by semitone. I write it in the score and demonstrate. I say that usually we would pedal once per two beats, but not where the right hand has semitone resolution. I also write in the pedal where the hands cross. I say that we haven’t covered pedal in this piece before, but now she is ready for it. Kelly plays the crossing hands bars with pedal, and I remind her to lift off without holding notes unduly long. I continue to write in the
pedal in the score as Kelly and I work together. I remind her how to practise the trill. I ask Kelly to stand and I ask her to give the top notes more volume (lift up and drop faster). I do a couple of tonal splats which Kelly copies, and I ask her to throw her head back just a little to ‘make the audience pay attention’, though not too quick. I laugh and do a demonstration and critical comparison, saying, ‘Use your body to shape the note as well’. I take Kelly’s hand and ask her to use the rest to prepare the hand to drop. I ask Kelly to keep the left hand subdued as she projects the right hand louder. She continues with hands together and we review the trill again. I ask Kelly to play softly at the end of the phrase, lifting the pedal too. I say that she needs to prepare the gesture on the third last quaver in order to generate the required momentum. I ask her to be extra careful with the pedal when playing in the lower register – ‘give it some time to dampen’. Kelly tries and has a good result, so I ask her to play hands together again. I coach her with a slight easing of the left hand quavers to stretch the bar line, just a little. I say, ‘If you do that, the audience will think it’s really expressive … it looks expressive too’. I do another critical comparison, referring to Kelly’s beautiful dress and arms. I say that it’s so elegant that way. I ask Kelly if she likes wearing dresses (no). Kelly suggests that she could wear shorts. Sam says that she likes to dress comfortably. I say, ‘OK, fair enough’. I tell Kelly that she really has improved, especially with the cross rhythms. She smiles shyly at Sam. I ask Kelly to show me the D minor part, pointing out the tie. I say that the sound she is making here is what is need on the first page. I suggest that she not be quite so brassy here in the minor key. I show Kelly how to shape the right-hand melody using gesture and she copies easily. I review the fingering here with her, suggest that it will help give shape to the sound. She puts the hands together, and tries with the fingering. I suggest a decrescendo too. It’s tricky to merge the two together, but she gets there. I show her the choreography for the C7 rolled chord, and she copies easily. I suggest that to get the tonal shape, she ‘release all muscles and then turn them back on’. I say, ‘Good girl, very lovely’. I reiterate that she has come quite a long way with the piece already. I sit and do a demonstration of the D minor section, doing a critical comparison with a brassy sound, suggesting that she could use some of that brightness during the opening theme. While playing, I use my face to illustrate the changing harmonic structure. I say, ‘So the keys tell you what sound, D minor/F Major’. I use my face, expressive gesture and vocalisation to convey the changing moods here. I reiterate how she could execute the rolled C7 chord, introducing a double rotation
before the top note, but it’s probably unnecessary. I say, ‘Well done Kelly, anything to say for the camera?’

Lesson 5: 9 March 2014

Reviewed 12 September 2016

- The lesson starts with Kelly adjusting the height of the chair, and we talk about how heavy the chair might be. I ask Kelly how her Mozart Concerto is going this week. I ask her how she has been since Sunday. Jean is away but Sam is at the lesson with Kelly today. Kelly gets the music ready and I sit beside her while she plays. As she approaches the D minor section, I hum, conduct and count the rhythmic subdivisions. When she reaches the end of that section, I say, ‘good girl’ and then sit asking her to get softer at the ends of phrases. I demonstrate saying that in general, the phrases ends are softer and I mark the score in orange highlighter. After she copies the two-note slur, I extend to the whole phrase, describing the choreography in real time, complete with articulatory lifts/drops. As I check the computer, I ask her if she lifted between G and F (yes) and we review again, first I demonstrate and then she copies. She finds it easy to initiate the movement from the elbow. We move to the next phrase that ultimately modulates to C Major and once again, she imitates the gestural information and associated expressive nuance with ease, though the last note was too loud/too soft/just right. I say that the piece has improved, though the pedalling is a little cloudy. I sit and demonstrate the end of the second phrase where two pedal changes are likely required. She responds quickly, so I ask her to ‘check out the A’, asking her not to hold the treble note longer than required. She tries, but I remind her regarding the A again, which she then corrects. We move on and I ask her not to hold down the right-hand B flat. She corrects, and moves on – the pedal is better this time. I ask her what dynamic level (forte) and note that her right hand needs to be ‘extra loud’ there. She plays the crossing diminished bars with greater melodic projection this time (good). I sit down and demonstrate, saying that the pedal isn’t clear on the last note. I do a critical comparison, asking her not to depress the pedal on the final note of that section (‘you get a cleaner sound’). Kelly plays a couple of times, and has success, so I ask her not to slow down. Thereafter, we review the placement of the resolving notes on the sixth quaver of the bar. Though I count, Kelly is still rushing here. I remind her to lift the pedal completely there. I ask her to change the left-hand fingering from 4/2 to 1/3 (‘it’s closer’). She is trying, but doesn’t get it. I sit down and
do a critical comparison and then Kelly takes the chair, but still rushes. I demonstrate
again, but she still doesn’t have success. In retrospect, there seems to be a need for
greater scaffolding here, as she is having difficulty combining the pedal, timing, and
fingering simultaneously. I seem to be getting a little impatient here, and she tries
multiple times. She eventually gets there – ‘That’s better, you’re almost there now …
try again’. When she does finally get it, I say, ‘Good girl, now you’re supposed to get
softer as well’. I feel a bit negative watching this, as I give a compliment, like ‘almost
there’ but follow with a negative, ‘it’s too slow though’. Am I feeling annoyed by the
previous lesson? I say, ‘It’s improved, but it’s still not quite right though’. I ask Kelly
to start again, indicating, (by demonstration and gesture) ‘take the music up and out’.
It seems quite good, but I say that she is putting too much sound on the semiquavers
and ‘nothing’ on the longer notes. I demonstrate, saying soft/loud, and ask her to ‘roll
onto the long notes’. After giving her plenty of praise, I say that the following
semiquavers are too soft. I ask her to stand up and I demonstrate, pointing out that the
last note, ‘is supposed to be soft’. I ask her to put more weight into the fingers when
executing the descending semiquavers and Kelly tries again. She does well and I mark
the score with orange highlighter. Kelly tries again, and while I say, ‘good girl’, I also
say that it’s very important to observe the length of the longer notes, as covered
earlier. I demonstrate and she does lift at the right time, but I remind her to play softer
at the end of the phrase. She continues on and I coach her with the volume of the
phrases – ‘big one … even more this time’. I also remind her not to slow down, to fix
the fingering and to get the pedal right. It doesn’t feel like I have much patience here.
When she does get there, I say, ‘Woo! We got there’ and Kelly looks a little worn out.
I suggest that we move to the next page, before mentioning that Mozart is really
difficult to play in term of the tonal control necessary. I ask her if she plays any harp
music by Mozart (no). I mention to Kelly that there is a flute and harp concerto that
Mozart wrote. I ask her how cello is going (good) before asking her how she manages
to fit in all of her practice commitments. Kelly shrugs her shoulders and Sam says that
she has a schedule that she follows (‘that’s so good’). I ask to hear the D minor
section and take a seat. I coach her with greater decrescendo with phrase ends and
clarity of pedal. The notes are there, though I spend some time correcting the rhythm.
I suggest that she add in the ornamented fills now, and demonstrate accordingly. I ask
her is she’d like to keep it simple for now, and Kelly smiles and shrugs her shoulders.
I slow down and demonstrate the ornamented turns slowly and Kelly starts to
implement them. As she goes, I write in the revised fingering. I coach her shaping repeated notes, phrase shape and fingering. Kelly takes it slow and implements the new fingering. I make a couple of corrections with fingering and pedalling. To bring the phrase to a delicate close I demonstrate and ask her to ‘caress’ the notes. I go on to point out the change of tone, mentioning that only a touch of pedal is required in the ‘triplet’ section. Kelly sits down and then we swap places, with me counting the triplet subdivisions and playing. She continues to play and I say, ‘No, the top note’s important’ as I demonstrate how to give greater volume by rolling onto the note, ‘on the beat’. Thereafter I convert her full legato to two-note slurs (‘like this … good girl’). I say, ‘Lovely, whoa, we’re at the end of the first section’. I ask Kelly which key we have modulated to (‘what’s the dominant of F Major?’) – she gets the answer after a short while. I say, ‘There’s lots to do there, but you’ve done a lot already … I can see that so good girl’. I suggest that the first page is ‘pretty much up to scratch now’. I say that her rhythm is excellent and using my voice and expressive gesture with my left hand, I play the right hand pointing out how the sound must be full. I smile at her, saying that while some of the details are not quite there, the pedal has improved a lot and the trill is mostly OK. I say that the trill looks easy, but it’s not and that she’s doing a good job, but avoid slowing down. I suggest that she practise the last three notes with both hands ‘a lot’. Again, I also point out how to lift the pedal here. Kelly sits down and plays a few times, copying me. I demonstrate, asking her to add a few more previous notes while maintaining pedal. She does well, but I remind her not to slow down. I demonstrate and count and she copies me. I ask her to make the last note softer (that’s better). Then I ask her to put the trill back ‘into that’. I say that the left hand is too slow due to thinking too much about the trill. When she does get the rhythm right, I’m very quick to find another fault, and we circulate through this pattern a lot in this lesson. As Kelly plays, I click and count. ‘Great, we’re definitely getting there … it’s a big piece for you. What’s next? Invention?’ Kelly finds the music and I talk briefly to Sam about Kelly being his phone’s screenshot. Kelly plays Bach’s Invention in B-flat Major with hands together – it’s much more fluent than in previous weeks, though the second page is still somewhat hesitant in places. I don’t say anything as she plays to the end. When finished, I smile at Kelly, saying, ‘Yeah, good girl, that sounds beautiful. Over here I can really hear your left hand now’. I say that while there were a few mistakes, the piece is ‘beautiful’ – the whole piece has moved on and she should feel ‘congratulated’. I ask Kelly if she has
any questions but she shakes her head no. I ask her how she thinks she is playing it, but she shrugs again. I give her some options (excellent, pretty good, terrible, etc.) and she shyly nods her head and says, ‘pretty good’, while swinging her leg nervously. I say, ‘I think you’re good at it. I don’t think it’s terrible or anything’, and that I can definitely hear a difference since the previous lesson. I suggest that we find some more things to ‘brighten up … give it a bit of polish … make it spick and span’. Kelly nods in agreement. I say, ‘You think?’ and ask her to start again. After she passes the opening bars, I say, ‘Oh, that’s lovely. That’s really improved’. I stop her after the first modulation and ask her to not hold onto notes longer than written (same as in the Mozart). I indicate that she seems a little unsure of fingering in the right hand in one spot, so we work on that and suggest that she use 5-3, 5-3. As she experiments, I watch on, after which I remind her of the articulation laid out in the opening. I explain that because of this, we need to change the fingering here, giving her several options to enable legato. Kelly implements the slurs and changes of fingering before I ask her to stand so that I can ‘have a try’. I experiment with the fingering and then apply it to the next phrase. I agree and then write the revised fingering in the score. I say that I loved the shape of the phrases during the opening bars. I encourage her and reiterate that the piece has definitely moved forward and ask her to give me a smile, but she seems a bit flat. I ask Kelly if she understands the piece (nods) and that it has to be shaped (nods yes). I ask her to play the right hand for that section which she does, and then she plays hands together. I interrupt shortly after (OK, good … that’s beautiful, well done), asking her (and demonstrating) to lift her left hand up during the rest in order to prepare for the phrase entry and ‘give it some air’. As she plays, I use body movement and sing, ‘give it some air’. I stand beside Kelly and show her what I call ‘a cold start’ before showing her the same phrase with a preparatory up movement. Kelly experiments and I ask her to ‘fall into the notes, like you fall into the couch’. I dramatise sitting into the chair in a single movement without ‘stopping’ just before reaching the chair. I enact a critical comparison, and liken the concept to the way she can fall into the keys without stopping ‘mid-flight’. Kelly experiments and I reiterate the concept, marking the score while saying, ‘preparatory up movement’. I go on to demonstrate when the hands converge together, saying, ‘that part sounds a bit notey’. I demonstrate hands together using add-a-note technique in the direction of travel, and Kelly copies me. I demonstrate again, encouraging her to ‘lift and drop’. She copies me and then we chain the gestural fragments together.
Kelly follows my lead and I ask her to play ‘more left hand’. I say, ‘that’s it … lift up and roll’ as I demonstrate at the second piano. I reiterate to Kelly that she needs to ‘lift up and roll’, and, ‘give yourself some momentum’. She tries again, but I suggest that she is ‘sort of stopping’, so we review the add-a-note technique in the direction of travel when the hands are played together. I ask her to keep everything moving – she does better this time and I say, ‘Very good … OK good. If you don’t keep everything moving, it starts to sound notey; that’s much better’. Kelly nods. I say, ‘So, there’s a few things to work on’. I say that I’m happy with how it’s going, but it doesn’t seem sincere and Kelly looks a little deflated. It seems as though I am now over-praising her to compensate – ‘you’re a really good girl. There’s still quite a bit to do, it’s not finished yet but we’ve got plenty of time. Can you implement what I’ve asked you to do? When it starts to sound notey, try the add-a-note technique, OK?’ I use gesture here and Kelly nods in agreement. I ask her if I can hear her Grieg *Waltz in E Minor*. While she assembles the music, I suggest that in about 4 weeks’ time, the *Invention* will be ‘pretty much finished’. Kelly nods and I say that she is ‘about half way through’, showing her on a sliding scale where she is this week and where she was last week. I also give her a progress indication for the Mozart *Concerto*. Kelly plays the waltz as I sit down beside her, giving her verbal encouragement. When finished, I give her a pat on the back and say, ‘Good girl’ and then give her praise for the ‘excellent’ middle section. I suggest that as the shape of the notes is very good, she could perhaps add the pedal in now. She plays it with pedal and then I ask her to play without pedal. I ask her to walk to the door and back. I ask her to play again, encouraging her to free-fall into the left hand. Thereafter, I say that the hands are excellent, though the foot isn’t as good. She manages to play hands together with clear pedalling and I say, ‘that’s it! Oh yes’. She plays all of the middle section well, so I ask her to repeat, but using a faster tempo. She struggles a little when playing the lower octave section. The return to section A is very beautiful, but I demonstrate, asking her to project the highest note more. Using expressive gesture and my voice, I ask her for ‘much more’. I go on to dramatise that it’s in E minor, before ‘crying’ in A minor – ‘It’s sad in E minor, but it’s crying in A minor’. Kelly nods her understanding as I demonstrate the harmonic shift on the second piano. Kelly plays and I say, ‘good’ before interrupting and asking to sit down. I demonstrate and ask Kelly to keep the middle voices (beats 2 and 3) of the left hand softer. Kelly plays and I ask her to provide more ‘ring’ on the top note of the treble. I demonstrate melodic clarity and
then she tries again ‘good girl’. I mention that unfortunately, we are nearly out of time, before asking Kelly what was covered in today’s lesson. She is so quiet that I can’t make out what she is saying. I do teach her how to say Mozart and Bach. I say that she has, ‘done heaps of really good things’ and ‘I suppose I just see more and more and I have to remember that you’re only a kid … you’re doing a great job’. I smile at Kelly. I remind her of the challenges of the Mozart (rhythm, pedal, phrases) and liken it to Classical ballet. I mention that the Grieg can be ‘a bit more free’. I say that Mozart teaches the player a lot about ‘how’ to play. I move to the Grieg, and show Kelly how she can generate more tone, asking her to play the right hand. I ask her to lift up on the G, which gives momentum to sound the A. Thereafter, I ask her to roll forward so that the final note of the phrase is softer. I then ask her to add the hands together again, before reviewing the choreography of the right hand so as to keep the harmonic notes soft and well into the background. I sing in critical comparison and Kelly smiles. I suggest that, ‘it interrupts the flow of the waltz. By using your arm in a particular way, you can avoid pushing the (harmonic) note too much. I demonstrate and suggest that she play the harmonic F# ‘on the way up’ before rocking back and forth on the following melodic notes. Kelly nods as I say OK. I ask Kelly why we might move our arms in these ways. She shrugs her shoulders but nods when I say, ‘to make the music colourful … expressive’. I go on to say that tonal manipulation can enhance the sadness that a musician might feel as they play the piece. I do a critical comparison, before saying that she might combine feeling a bit sad with good tonal control through gesture.

Lesson 6: 23 March 2014

Reviewed 22 September 2016

- Jean is with Kelly today, and I say that it feels like I haven’t seen her for a while. It’s the evening of the interview and we are going to have dinner. I ask Jean when they are flying to Korea (next week). She says it’s about 12 hours. They are going sightseeing, but Kelly won’t have regular access to piano, though Jean says she will take the sight-reading material with them. I mention that it is probably time for a new piece; also the extra concert but probably not suitable as they will just be back from Korea. We talk about it some more and reminisce about last year when Kelly was playing The Clown. Kelly nods and I say how far she has come, as has Adrian who also played The Clown. Jean says that it feels like a long time ago now and we laugh. I also mention
that she was playing *Gold Rush* – ‘it’s amazing how far you’ve come’. I ask Kelly what she would like me to listen to, but she’s not sure and looks at Jean, eventually she says Mozart. Jean says at home Kelly asks her which song she needs to practise. We laugh and tell both tell Kelly that she needs to decide for herself what to work on. Jean says, ‘You’re the boss’. We laugh about the time that Kelly told me that she wanted to be a magician, mistaking it for musician. Jean says that she likes magic and is learning coin tricks. Kelly smiles and nods when I say, ‘Really?’ I tell Kelly that my cousin and I used to do magic together. I suggest that we have a listen, and I play the orchestra part on the second piano. She has difficulty with the rhythm of the D minor section but tries her best, and we continue on. I smile and say, ‘Wow, that’s the first time we’ve done it together, how exciting!’ Kelly nods when I ask her if she enjoyed that. I ask to hear her part from the start of the D minor section. She has difficulty with the consecutive turns. I ask her to return to the start of the D minor section, asking her to land on the F on the second beat after the turn. I conduct her and she does well. I ask her to lift her foot off the pedal on the F. I say that I love how she plays the repeated A’s with such nuance. I play that part in an attempt to help her with the rhythm. We continue on in ensemble; it’s much better this time than earlier. I coach her verbally with the timing of the turns, heading towards the main beats; she tries her best. I have a look at the fingering she is using, and I review the fingering of the last two notes, saying, ‘You’ll be better off’. I say that she is ‘clamping her whole hand there’, referring to the previous 4 and 5. I ask her to copy me as we start to work on the overall gesture of each fragment of the turns, but it is clear that her elbow is too low due to a low seating position. I encourage her to make fingers 3 and 4 as clear as possible and adjust her elbow and shoulders. We start the process of add-a-note technique in the direction of travel. She has success and I say, ‘Oh, that’s great. So don’t just use fingers … use momentum, otherwise you’ll get stuck’. I sit down and play at the second piano, reminding Kelly that she first learnt that idea in *Le Cou Cou*: ‘It’s not just fingers … you’ve got to roll through the notes’. I sit beside her and I coach her with the gestural direction of the phrases. I ask her to pronate her forearm to assist with the thumb passing, but I can see now that such a low seating position is making this difficult to achieve (her thumb is very flat). We chain the notes together in the direction of travel and she does have success (very good). I say, ‘So if you do those drills, you’ll find that your thumb will find its position’. I ask Kelly to isolate the 2313 fragment, which she does. I ask her not to ‘come down’ and I throw her
elbow up as she plays the fragment. I ask her to round out her distal joints and then help her with the elbow again. I say, ‘When I move your arm (elbow) it just works so well. What you’ve got to try and do is move your own arm now’. She does so and smiles at me as I give her the thumbs up. We move to the third turn and she does very well with the elbow and forearm movement (Oh, that’s lovely). I ask her to do a bit more practice here, but say that I admire her for putting in the extra notes, as I know she was a bit reluctant to do so. I ask her to go from the triplets, and I show her how to pedal directly. I caution her against being ‘so direct’ that the notes blur. I say, ‘it’s slightly indirect’, and laugh. I ask her not to overlap the fingers, lest it won’t matter if the pedal is good or not. I say that it doesn’t need to be that quick and I demonstrate at the second piano while counting the quaver (triplet) subdivisions. I ask her to play the right hand, asking her what fingering she is using. I ask to end on 345 so that the outward gesture of the elbow is easily achieved. Kelly corrects it and then applies the fingering to the others, though I do suggest otherwise on a couple of them. I write the fingering into the score. I ask her to copy me in add-a-note DC#, then DC#D. I ask her to make sure her elbow isn’t dropping. I encourage her to copy me, and ask her to ‘find a u shape with your hand’. As she adds the third finger, I ask her to let go of the tension in her wrist, but I see now that she needs to lead from the elbow here. I ask her to keep the wrist low and then ‘round and up’ on the last note of the phrase. I say, ‘good girl’ and we move to the next phrase, adding a note in the direction of travel. I ask her not to collapse her arm and drop her elbow when playing the thumb and she copies well. We continue with adding notes until the entire phrase is completed in one gesture. I ask her not to tighten the hand for a better blend of sound. I do a critical comparison, asking Kelly if she can hear the difference between when I drop the arm on the thumb and when I do not (she nods). I explain the first one sounds clunky – any extra (downward) weight with the arm will affect the sound. I say, ‘Try to think that the arm is moving across and up rather than down and in’. I demonstrate again and then ask Kelly how harp was today. Kelly starts to say something, but Jean explains that they didn’t go today as Sebastian was away. I ask Kelly if she had a nap instead and ask her if she practised (yes). I say that I used to practise a lot on the weekends when I was a student too. Kelly plays the phrases again, but there is a slight bump on the thumb. By demonstration, I encourage her to gesture upwards on the thumb. By demonstration, I encourage her to gesture upwards on the thumb. She does so and I say, ‘Very good, what did you do differently?’ I can see that she sat more upright and lifted her elbow higher during the phrase. She tries again but
is bumping the thumb again, so I ask her to play the first two notes to the left and the second two notes to the right before joining them together in one gesture. She has a better result this time. Kelly continues on to the next phrase and we play together. For the last phrase, I encourage her to lift the elbow and avoid stopping on the thumb. I say that she needs to do more practice on the gestures and sound, before adding pedal. I say that while it’s simple, it has its own challenges with sound. I say that if you’re not careful, ‘it sounds like a little kid playing’, as it will lack expressive tonal shape. Jean laughs and I do another demonstration of a clumsy version. I say that it needs to sound like god there (heavenly). I demonstrate again to the end of the section. I say that it can sound clumsy if not shaped well. I say, ‘The say that Mozart is easy for children and hard for grown-ups’. I ask Kelly if I’ve ever said that before (no). I suggest that the notes are ‘easy’ but the expressive interpretation can be challenging. I say that she is doing a good job overall, but can do a bit better there. I say that the first page has really improved. Sam comes in after finding a car park. I say that I came at 8.30 this morning. Jean says it must be a tough day. I say it’s ok if the kids have practised but yesterday was a ‘shocker’. I say that high school students can get distracted with exams at school. We continue to the next section and I help her with notes and the execution of the trill. We work on the balance between the hands, and I take Kelly’s hand and show her the gesture (drop and roll) to make the right hand louder here. I say that’s good, and then sit and demonstrate the passage including the following orchestral part (a powerful moment there). I say that it’s coming along really nicely and that I would like Kelly to play this piece at the mid-year Intermediate Concert. Jean gets excited when I say that I will play the orchestral part on the second piano. I say that we could perhaps to the Haydn Concertino at the May concert if it pans out that way. I talk about how well all the students have been doing lately. I say that Neil has started practising. I ask Kelly if she would like to be included in the practice prize. I say that boys especially need a prize. I show Kelly and Jean the test tube sheet. We laugh and I mention that I need to go and buy some Lego. Kelly starts playing Invention in B-flat Major. There are still quite a few missed notes and mistakes along the way, though the overall touch is quite lovely. The second page where the hands have the same material is quite untidy overall and the tempo slows. I clap when she finishes and say that it’s improved. Jean says that it seems quite a tricky piece. I say that it’s Grade 6 and it’s one of the harder ones. I say that the piece reminds me of Kelly (sweet). Jean says that it seems quite easy to learn, but ‘when it’s
combined together it sounds quite hard, when something’s not right’. I say that Bach and Mozart are quite transparent, and you can hear when things don’t go well. I go to the second page where the hands play in 10ths and ask her if she has done any drills there for coordination (I demonstrate and Kelly says no). I say that this is probably the hardest spot to coordinate because the hands keep going in different directions. I demonstrate by using add-a-note technique in the direction of travel. I narrate while playing, noting the constantly changing direction. I say that Kelly will need to get more comfortable with that. I ask Kelly to do some tonal splats (she looks nervously at Jean). I ask her to do pairs of notes gesturing in the direction of travel. I ask her to have the tips of her fingers nice and firm. We repeat the pairs of notes drill and then add-a-note with staccato for the final notes. I mention that sometimes Kelly’s left hand stops moving, and that will pull the hands apart. I ask her to do those same drills for each gestural fragment here. I say that she will need to get past the notes and into the overall gestural choreography now. I do a critical comparison, where one sounds ‘brainy’ and one sounds ‘body’. I repeat the comparison, explaining that I’m thinking of notes in one and gestures that group the notes in the other. I ask Kelly is she can see it on my face (yes). I suggest that the exercises that we just did can help ‘find that space in your head and body where the notes coordinate without any effort’. Kelly nods. I show Kelly where her progress is at on a sliding scale. I say that she has a fair way to go, but she is getting there. I encourage her not to ‘start cold’, using a preparatory movement instead. She experiments are does do better, but when I ask her if she noticed any different thought process, she doesn’t seem to know. I say that it seemed like she (inhales and blows gently) instead of (exhales quickly and suddenly). I say that she took an in-breath with her arms. I demonstrate saying that it seemed like Kelly, ‘rocked to the top and then …’ She does very well with a preparatory movement, so I ask her to do it without that movement, and she does notice it’s harder to achieve success here. I say, ‘that’s the secret to playing this piece … you can’t ever stop. Once you start thinking of notes and stop thinking of movement, the whole thing will start to sound “wrong”. Do you understand?’ Kelly nods and I say that she is getting there. Kelly smiles when Jean says, ‘Sometimes Kelly can play it really well, but sometimes it sounds really machinery clumsy sound … She plays the right notes, but it sounds different’. I say, ‘Don’t worry, that’s the challenge, to be able to put this away (music) and to not play notes, but to play shapes … You will get there’. I ask Kelly how much she can play from memory (unsure) so I ask her to try. I stop her and
ask her to do some tonal splats and then continue, which she does. I point out that she is starting to prepare and drop freely into the left hand now, which was missing before. She plays again, but when the rhythm becomes unsteady, I stop her and ask, ‘OK, can you hear it’s gone wrong just there?’ She nods and I say that it’s because she’s stopped taking the in-breath. I say, ‘OK, that’s pretty good’. Jean says that she thinks she has memorised most of it. There follows an interesting use of add-a-note technique, where I ask Kelly to clap her hands when they are moving towards the centre. Then we review the add-a-note sequence but with staccato stops this time, still moving in the direction of travel. I notice that both Jean and Sam are recording. I then demonstrate and Kelly copies chaining the bars together, with an exaggerated preparatory gesture between the two bars. We then move to the first bar and I encourage Kelly to use a preparatory movement with the left hand. She does well, but I say that she ‘forgot’ to do one of the preparatory movements. I show her and she copies again. We repeat this process, each time adding a couple of ‘run-ups’ with the second phrase where the hands are together in 10ths. I ask Kelly to move her left hand faster overall; ‘that’s better’. I say, ‘Try not to get stuck in the notes, just fly over them’. I use body movement to encourage this and then demonstrate at the second piano. I say that Kelly is doing a good job overall. I mention about Jean saying that sometimes it’s good, sometimes not, and I say that it depends on the level of confidence and preparatory movement. Jean says, ‘Yeah’. I say, ‘Usually the more confident you feel the more you can just let go of the notes’. I also refer to the ‘up breaths’ and how they also facilitate the playing – ‘If you want your playing to sound real, you have to use movements that are real. Anything that involves coordination one way and then the other, you’ve got to try and think of it not as notes, but as gesture … something that whips around this way … keep moving, don’t stop to think’. Jean asks for the new piece and I give Kelly Doctor Gradus by Debussy. I play the first page and then explain that, ‘you can’t think of notes when you play a piece like this, which is why I can’t play it properly’. I begin by reading the notes, and then gesticulating each beat, saying, ‘It’s starting to come back to me now, I can feel the gears in my head starting to shift’. I play a little more and then say, ‘you don’t think of notes … you roll through the notes and collect them’. Jean asks if memorising is helpful, and I agree. I suggest that by knowing the notes, it’s easier then to analyse what the arms, elbow and hands are doing, thereby avoiding twisting, which ultimately leads to a tight sound. I gesticulate and refer to it as ‘like stirring’. I
dramatise, saying, ‘Oh I better stir, it just sort of happens’. I say, ‘That’s the secret to piano playing … knowing the notes so well that they fall into a pattern of movement that becomes very natural. It is hard work getting there’. I then demonstrate adding notes in the direction of travel, building up the spatial pathway little by little. I say that some circles are smaller than others, and some are bigger. I say that it’s the same principle in *Invention*, which I start to play and then say, ‘I’m not even looking at my fingers’, referring to how much the rest of the body is involved in the playing. Quite interestingly, as say that as soon as I look at my fingers, the tone changes, and it is noticeable. I say, ‘The challenge is trying to get the right notes with the movements, and getting them to coincide’. I do a comparison where I have the right notes, and then with the correct movement, but the accuracy isn’t quite as good. I continue and experiment until they merge together, ‘That’s the challenge with piano playing … to not be looking but to be imagining feeling’. I say that Kelly is doing well as it usually takes a lot longer, and that she has improved so much in one year. Jean says, ‘Yeah, that’s true’. Jean reminds me about dinner at the restaurant.

*Lesson 7: 1 May 2014*

*Recording not available.*

*Lesson 8: 11 May 2014*

Reviewed 23 September 2016

- Jean says that Kelly has a cold due to the Australian weather. I suggest not moving back to Korea, as I want to keep teaching her. I talk about the possibility of Kelly playing with the Conservatorium String Orchestra. Jean is very excited, not sure about Kelly though. Jean talks about the Intermediate Technique exam. It’s in 3 weeks – I talk about the requirements, but I’m not sure if it’s such a good idea, given that she has just gotten back from Korea. Jean understands that it’s a goal driven exam more than anything. I mention there is another concert on 15 June, but they’re not sure about her participating. Apparently harp is going well. I mention that she looked a bit worried the last time I saw her regarding the small concert. I ask how she is going with her *Little Concerto* (good) and the Bach *Invention*, but I can see she isn’t enthusiastic. Apparently she hasn’t been practising it, but the Mozart concerto is going well in terms of practice. I pause and think. I say that I won’t be there for the exam, so I won’t be able to play the orchestral part. I ask to hear *Little Concerto*. Jean
asks if Kelly should memorise all of her pieces and I agree. Kelly adjusts the chair herself and I turn on the air-conditioning. She takes off her jumper, as she’s a bit hot. I show Kelly the hand model, pointing out how we don’t want her distal joints to be shaped. Kelly adjusts the chair again and then starts playing. She does well, though the beat is unsteady. I ask her not to slow down during the trill part. I ask her to make the left hand sound like it’s having ‘so much fun’. In terms of the G7 chord, I ask her not to play each staccato note with the same movement otherwise you’ll get the same sound. We experiment together to achieve tonal shape. Again I say, ‘So if you want to get a different sound, you’ll have to use a different movement’. Kelly carries on, and when we come to the three G’s, I coach her with crescendo, referring to three different movements from soft to loud. She continues playing to the end, and I coach her by demonstration with the drop and roll of the G7 – C chords in the final bars. I then coach her with the repeated C’s at the top of the C (first) chords. I coach her with rotating quick one side and slow the other side in order to bring out the top A’s. Then I ask her to use a gradual crescendo overall. We recycle through this process again in order to balance the notes on a micro level and the crescendo on a macro level. I caution Kelly against lifting up the fifth finger too much, as it’s not needed. I say, ‘In piano, it’s all to do with how you move on the keys and that’s what sound will be’. I do a critical comparison, advising Kelly not to ‘point out every note’. Using expressive gesture I ask her to look for the ‘main notes’. I ask her to mimic my face, and Jean laughs. I ask her not to worry and just take time to deliver the ideas without rushing. I ask Kelly to relax a little bit. She smiles and I ask her to move the chair back, sit on the front half of the chair, tilt forwards from the hips and breathe in with the arms. Kelly copies me. I do a critical comparison of breathing in and not breathing in before starting. With the following lyrical phrase, I coach her with add-a-note in the direction of travel in order to shape the notes within one gesture. I do a critical comparison where the notes are pressed. I say, ‘Just take your time and show us the shape’. I remind Kelly that most people listening to the piece will not have heard it before – ‘show them what’s happening … give them each note like it’s a delicious sushi platter’. Jean laughs and I dramatise using expressive gesture. I use humour to critically compare – ‘here’s your food!’ Kelly laughs and tries again. As she plays the ornament soon after, I ask her not to just ‘stop’ on the longer note, but rather keep moving through it with gesture. I suggest that otherwise it sounds like the playing has had Botox, meaning it ‘freezes’. Jean laughs when I say, ‘no Botox playing’. Kelly
plays again and does very well. I say that even though these are little things, they will transform the way the piece sounds. I ask Kelly to play louder on the second phrase. As we approach the ornament again, I ask Kelly to look at what my body is doing. I suggest that the movement will ‘make it happen’. When she is unable to play it clearly, I slow down the phrase and show her the gestural trajectory can be seen as smaller gestural fragments, including double rotary movement, all of which help to execute the phrase cleanly and with shape. As I play, I narrate the changes in spatial direction using my hand and then while playing. I explain that the double rotary movement gives the required momentum to execute the ornament cleanly. She does well, but then not and I say, ‘No, it sounds tight again’. She does better then adds the left hand. I suggest where the piece ‘starts’ and what is really just ‘introductory material’. We play together in ensemble – it sounds lovely! When she plays the middle section where there are two-note slurs, I ask Kelly to first ‘smile’ and then use a pelvic tilt when executing the two-note slurs. I ask her to repeat the passage with that movement and the difference is noticeable. Regarding the next part, I try to move her from the hips, but she is incredibly ticklish – we all laugh. Eventually, I ask her to move her pelvis with the playing. I demonstrate and Kelly imitates me very well, though we continue to experiment, combining movement from the arms with the hips. We come to the trill section again, and I ask Kelly to do some tonal splats in the shape of two-note slurs before adding the actual notes back into these gestures. Kelly does so and then continues with the recapitulation. I ask her to vary the dynamics of the Q and A phrases, we continue in ensemble. I ask for a different movement for crescendo in staccato, using the idea of tonal splats again (slow-medium-fast), before adding the actual notes back in. I say, ‘Sometimes the notes get in the way of the music … it’s just all gestures’. I do a critical comparison of moving freely and not moving at all when playing. ‘Everything’s constantly moving and just flowing out of you. As soon as you stay still, that’s when the music won’t sound any good. It will sound panicked’. I ask Kelly to take a big deep breath, which I dramatise. Jean asks me if Kelly should partial practise first and then play the whole piece, or play the whole piece first. I say that I’ve been saying to a lot of students to play the piece all through with maximum energy, and then identify the spots that don’t ‘work’. I suggest that that is usually where the energy drops and free movement is hindered. I suggest that she might practise how the lesson is run – I usually ask Kelly to play the whole piece first, before moving into detailed partial practice. Jean says that she could record it and
then play it back to Kelly, identifying which part ‘doesn’t sound right’ before doing partial practice there and I agree. I say at her young age, it’s hard to know what to do, but in the future, her ‘ear for detail’ will improve. For now, she probably needs guidance from me (and recordings) on how to spend her practice time. We go back to the open and I ask Kelly to use bigger movements for louder sound without speeding up the tempo in process. We play in ensemble again. I work with Kelly to stay loose when executing trills. I say, ‘the hard thing with piano playing is that as soon as you tighten up, it won’t happen. That’s why I conduct the lessons like I do, because as soon as I start to rage, everything freezes. Try to be as relaxed as you can … I know it’s hard because you’re trying to be a good girl and do the right thing’. Jean chuckles. ‘Try hard with your head, but not your body … Concentrate with your head, but not your body’. I to a critical comparison where I’m first loose when executing the trill and then ‘gripping’ the trill. I say that the first movement is improving and it will be good to hear it again next week. I ask Kelly if we can hear the second movement. I say that Kelly is a good girl and add, ‘I know it’s pretty detailed, but you can cope can’t you?’ Kelly nods and Jean laughs. I say that everyone is trying hard and be inspired by that. I suggest that Kelly play the second movement a bit slower than last time, and we play in ensemble. At the cadences, I coach Kelly with tonal nuance by conveying the movement that will result in such subtlety. As she plays the descending root position G chord with a down/up gesture, I ask Kelly to ‘think of a sunny face’. I play and sing the words, and this makes Kelly laugh. I ask, ‘To drop down, what do you need first?’ Kelly answers a preparatory movement. I ask Kelly what sort of preparatory movement a singer uses, and she answers ‘breathe’. I demonstrate this concept and Kelly copies me. In order to play softer at the end of the phrase, I demonstrate, and say, ‘Decorate it, like put a little bit of lace on the end’. She does very well, and I say, ‘Good girl … those little details are what make a truly great player. People usually think that it’s just talent, but it’s a keen ear and a keen sense of movement … it’s just so interesting to listen to’. I ask Kelly if she has ever had bad sushi and her and Jean laugh. I go on to liken musical detail in this kind of piece to an unscratched plate with a small piece of lemon (no seed), plump mayonnaise, a tiny piece of watercress, some shaved onion, bright and crisp coloured salmon – it looks really tasty. Jean is laughing when I contrast that to a scratched plate with pale salmon that doesn’t cover the rice, a ‘blob’ of mayonnaise, wilted onion, half dead and recycled watercress. I play again, making another critical comparison with sushi and
polite service and another - $10 bucks thanks! I say that in the classical style, the
music is very elegant. Kelly plays again and I ask her to soften her left hand. With the
two-note slur, I point out how much more she could nuance these, saying, ‘nice and
neat’ as I play. Between sections I ask her to ‘give me time to eat my sushi there …
give us some space’. I demonstrate and Kelly is quick to imitate. We work further
with the gestural choreography of the cadential material, lifting before the mordent. I
separate the musical fragments into 3 separate gestures for Kelly to copy. With the
two-note slurs, I ask Kelly not to come up so fast, ‘or you’ll get a tough sound’. I ask
her to come down and up first, and then down again while moving the fingers quickly.
She does quite well, but as she misses the clarity of the trill, I ask Kelly to find where
the bottom of the key is. I ask her not to push past this point. I do a critical
comparison where I say not to push on the keys, lest she will get a sort of ‘crunchy
sound’. Kelly plays the right hand well, so I ask her to add the hands together. On the
last mordent, I ask Kelly to move her arm up, followed by her head. Kelly smiles and
I say, ‘Move your soul up’. She moves quite suddenly – her and Jean laugh. I say,
‘good girl’ and ‘make us notice you … here I am … I’m here’ and then demonstrate
again. Kelly tries again. I ask her to copy me roll my wrists and forearms forward as I
final notes of the A section. We continue to experiment back and forth. I ask her not
to push, but think of rolling up instead. She does well, ‘lovely, good girl’. I say that
there is more space there now. I also remind Kelly that this is probably the first time
someone in the audience might know this music, so we have to make it ‘easy to
digest’. I do another critical comparison, where the first example ‘sounds like a little
kid’. The second example is far more sophisticated due to wider tonal nuance. I coach
Kelly with the gestural choreography here in order to reflect the phrasing. Kelly keeps
trying to add all the small elements together, so I review each gestural fragment again
with her. We rehearse the first two fragments together again, albeit with a slight pause
in between. We then ‘shorten’ the gap between these two fragments before adding the
left hand back in. She does OK, but I ask her to tap the left-hand thirds lightly while
simultaneously doing loud tonal slaps with the right hand. We then add the notes back
into this feeling. We continue to experiment, and I ask her to play the left hand right
to the bottom of the keys, but it is then too loud. Kelly achieves better balance so we
chain the fragments together. I say that without these tonal nuances and perfect
balance, the music can sound babyish, but alternatively, it can sound very
sophisticated. Jean says, ‘very different’, and I agree. I say that it’s difficult to
achieve, but as she knows her notes so well, it is time to go ‘in between’ the notes. I suggest that Kelly make the music sound elegant and ‘rich’. Jean laughs. I say that people who used to dance the Minuet were not poor people – kings and queens. ‘That’s what they used to do for entertainment’. I dramatise what it might have been like. As I play the harmonic outline, I say that it sounds simple, as the harmony was very simple, but it’s the small details that make it sound ‘posh’. I dramatise playing it ‘properly’ though very stiff, and then again with loose arms. I ask Kelly how she’s going with the third movement, referring to the tempo of each movement. Kelly and I play in ensemble, very fast. We take the broken sixth accompaniment, and I ask Kelly to use the fifth finger for each. We use add-a-note in the direction of travel, and then I ask her to rotate ‘around your watch’. I demonstrate how to achieve a louder tone on the first beat of the bar by rotating left faster there. Kelly plays and I say that I can tell she is rotating well, as her upper arm is wiggling sympathetically. I do a critical comparison, asking Kelly if she can notice my upper arm wobble/not wobble. I ask her to look for a ‘rebound’ of the upper arm. Kelly plays again, and then I review the practice technique here, throwing the arm quickly to the left. Jean asks me to clarify which pieces to practise, and also four Major scales and Major arpeggios (3 weeks). Kelly is playing in front of the camera and Jean says, ‘stop that’, but she doesn’t and laughs.

Lesson 9: 15 May 2014

Reviewed 16 September 2016

- Kelly asks me for a tissue as Jean waits, and I find some music. I ask Kelly what type of pieces she likes (exciting ones and concertos). I give her the copy of the Haydn Concertino. We listen to YouTube and hear Liszt’s Etude in D Minor, but I realise it’s unsuitable due to the size of Kelly’s hand. I ask her if it has to be a trickier piece – I suggest Puck by Grieg and play a little for Kelly. She is looking at Jean, but when I ask her if she likes it, she doesn’t seem to be too interested. I look at the syllabus again and suggest the Duvernoy’s Study in D minor. I look for the music, and then play a little of page one, before asking her if she likes studies. She doesn’t like it though; I can see that. Jean laughs and suggests the Czerny Study in thirds, but I say that she doesn’t like it. I suggest Schumann’s Fantastic Dance. I say that I’m glad Kelly told me, and I ask her if she thought I’d be annoyed (no), as she looked ‘sort of scared’. Jean asks if the Schuman is too hard to Kelly (no), it’s just very fast. Kelly
says it’s very fast, and Jean laughs, saying she thinks she’s a bit worried she can’t do it. I suggest that we look at the music, as ‘it might look worse than it sounds’, and we all laugh because I meant the opposite. I ask Kelly if she would like to see it in slow motion, and I play it for her slowly. What a great piece! I say that it’s not as hard as it sounds, ‘honestly’. I suggest that she listen to Burgmüller. I then say that I had purchased the music for *The Lark* for Kelly, though it’s a little too difficult for her just yet. Jean asks what level and both her and Kelly laugh when I say level 9. I play the Tchaikovsky *Lark* (not that well!), but Kelly doesn’t seem as interested. I mention that the piece Adelaide was playing is *Evening* and I play a little of it for Kelly. I say that it would be good to choose two pieces, a fast and a slow piece, and I remind Kelly of how she played *Snowflakes* and *Le Cou Cou*. I say that as she is already learning *Doctor Gradus*, it might be good to choose a slower piece. I ask Kelly what she thinks, but she looks unsure. She and Jean laugh. I ask Kelly if she wants me to choose for her (yes) and I say but what if I choose the ‘wrong’ piece and she doesn’t like it. I ask Jean for her opinion and she suggests the Liszt etude, though I say that it’s a bit big for Kelly’s hand span. I suggest that we could probably adapt the Liszt piece so that it is manageable, and I sit down and experiment, ultimately saying that it is a bit too big. I say to Jean that it can be tricky to find appropriate pieces for those who are advancing while still young. Then I say, ‘I know! What about Chopin?’ Jean and Kelly laugh. Jean says that Kelly loves Chopin, and mentions *Fantasie* and *Prelude*. I ask which Prelude, and they are unsure, as Kelly listens to the whole CD and likes them all. I sit down and start playing a little of *Raindrop Prelude*, saying that this is probably the most famous one. Kelly smiles as she recognises it, but when I whisper, ‘It’s too big for you’, both her and Jean laugh. I suggest that a Chopin nocturne that would be suitable. I say that I had had that up my sleeve for the coming months anyway. I also say not to worry about the technique exam. Jean mentions ‘failing’ and I say don’t worry, as we will say that Kelly has been in Korea. I say that Angela will be fine with the arrangement. I get the music, mentioning that the one Wendy did is too big. I start playing the *C# minor Nocturne* and Kelly seems to recognise it. I say that one of my students plays it currently. As I play Kelly looks at Jean and Jean gives her ‘the thumbs up’. I ask Kelly if she likes it, and she nods yes enthusiastically. I say that she will have a slow piece to go with Debussy. I say again that the Liszt is a study and she ‘hates studies’; we all laugh. I say that I have the same problem (hand span) with Adrian and Andrew too. I mention that this nocturne has no
octaves, it has sixths and it has the fioritura, which are fairly straightforward. Kelly keeps looking at Jean as I play. I say, ‘It’s like an E Major scale’ as I continue to play. Kelly is smiling and I say that it will suit her. I tell Kelly that it’s eighth grade and she drops her jaw playfully. I mention that the winner of 13 and under last year played this piece. I ask her if she is happy to practise these pieces (yes Mark) and I ask Kelly if she likes the bigger, more ambitious pieces; she agrees. I ask her why she didn’t like the Bach Invention and Grieg Waltz and while I lead her, she does seem to agree that she is a bit sick of them, though she liked them when she first started them. I say that it can be hard when you go away for a long time (to Korea) and then in effect, the need is there to ‘relearn them’. I suggest that we move on and learn something new now and I photocopy the Chopin Nocturne. I ask Kelly is she had practised Debussy and she says yes. Jean hands her the music, Kelly gets it ready and then she starts. Jean is whispering something but I can’t hear what it is. Kelly begins to play – it’s slow but the notes are coming. I sit down beside her and listen to sections 1 and 2, though the view of the keyboard is obscured. With section 2, I ask Kelly to place her left hand up further as I demonstrate. I write in the fingering and ask Kelly to sit down again. I ask Kelly what the chords are in the right hand and I write it in. I say that the clash of harmonies with the left hand is supposed to sound ‘funny’. Jean is recording on her phone. I talk about Doctor Gradus being ‘dedicated’ to Czerny (friend of Hanon – Kelly and Jean laugh). I help Kelly with her fingering and hand placement as she plays section 2. As she finishes, I say, ‘You’ve done a good job on this – Wow!’ Jean smiles, stops recording and sits down. I remind Kelly about the position of the hands and ask her to start from the beginning again. It’s slow but steady. I say that the right hand is excellent, and I ask her to play the left hand, noticing the tied C and the overall phrasing. Jean resumes recording. I demonstrate the phasing and tonal shape to Kelly, and she continues into section 2. Before she begins the excerpt where the hands cross each other, I ask her to lift her hand in order to generate the necessary momentum. Kelly plays and I say that fingering will help her with the sound and the required speed. Kelly plays again as I remind her of the left hand. The view is completely obscured, but I ask her clockwise or anti-clockwise for the elliptical movement inherent in the last two notes of the left-hand phrase (she correctly answers clockwise). I ask her to ‘drop down at 6 o’clock, around to 12 and up to 3’. She smiles and says yes when I ask her if she can see the clock. I write the gestural indication on the score and then stand – the view is only partially obscured by the chair now. Kelly
does very well and I ask her to start from the beginning of the left hand as I use expressive gesture beside her to prompt the choreography. I also guide her elbow for the final phrase. I ask her to stand up and I adjust the seat higher. I ask her if she felt too low (yes) and I encourage her to take charge next time. Jean laughs and Kelly smiles. I review the opening left hand with Kelly, encouraging her to hold down the low C. I ask her to practise each hand with the revised fingering. I say that once she is able to play a little faster, we can begin some drills and give an example taken from the section where the hands cross. I ask Kelly to copy my ideas. We then move to taking each pair of notes ascending, which Kelly copies. I say that to play a piece like this well, ‘you have to be in constant motion’ and I ask her what she will do as she is learning the piece. Kelly is unsure so I say, ‘Constantly be in motion, even if it’s slow’. I ask her to start to implement the direction that the notes will take, and get quite excited when she is able to play the excerpt with wonderful coordination. I asked her if it happened by magic (no) or if she ‘built up to that, teaching the arms which way to go’. Kelly agrees and I ask her to practise like that at home too (she nods). She says, ‘Yes Mark’ and we laugh. I then demonstrate the pairs of notes descending and Kelly copies. I then use my voice to cue her to chain the notes together, saying, ‘Wow, this is going to be such a good piece for you! I thought it would be’. I go on to say that I was a little concerned about her becoming stiff. I remind Kelly that last year when she was studying Le Cou Cou, there were occasions when she ‘stopped rolling’ which made the technical execution of the piece difficult; Kelly is smiling. I say that with a piece like Doctor Gradus, it’s too fast with too many notes to play with the fingers alone. I play the bars where the hands cross and ask Kelly to copy up and then down, shifting her body up and across in the direction that the notes travel. Using expressive gesture and my voice, I ask Kelly to chain up and down together. She does very well, though I point out a slight problem at the top. I say that she will no doubt ‘iron it out’ and show her how this might happen by isolating the last five notes to the top and then back down again. Kelly tries hard and has success, so I ask her to ‘add one note’, repeating that permutation until it feels comfortable. As she plays, I remind Kelly to remember to throw her arms in the direction of travel – ‘Good … you throw it so well you can play the next note’. I move the chair out of the camera view. I ask Kelly to add another note – ‘good girl … now faster. I ask her start from the bottom, and though she has improved at the top, I point out that she has a slight problem in the middle. I ask her to refine different parts
of the passage, and I ask Kelly what terminology we might use to describe that sort of practice. She is trying to remember, so I mention ‘add-a-note’ or ‘chaining’ and ask Kelly to describe what I mean. She says, ‘Doing one part and then another part, and then putting them together’. I demonstrate how that might be done, suggesting that add-a-note and chaining may well be the same thing, though I qualify, ‘Maybe add-a-note means you add one note whereas chaining might mean to add a group of notes’. I ask Kelly if it makes sense and she nods. I ask her to do both forms of practice here. I sit and demonstrate how it is likely to sound after this kind of practice, including the pedal. As I come to the end of section 1, I ask Kelly if she liked my gesture. I show how I might practise the ascending arpeggios that link sections 1 and 2. I ask Kelly, ‘What am I doing?’ She’s not sure so I say that I am trying out different fingering options in order to find a combination that will fit her hand. I start to write it in the score saying that it may well change, depending on how she goes. I show her the gestural choreography and how she might implement that during the week. I ask her to sit and play for my, which she does, reviewing the newer fingering. As I use the photocopier, Kelly continues to experiment. After a while, I say, ‘Good girl Kelly’. I mention that she wanted to ask me about staccato sixths – I ask her not to ‘hold’ her wrist, as she can let it bounce. I ask her to shift up the octave and play faster. I say, ‘I didn’t mean tempo, I meant vigour’. I review the accuracy of the top octave with Kelly before asking her to extend her spine to the ceiling while tilting across on her hips. I say that the elbow should be behind the hand – ‘rather than tilting your head, tilt your body’. I ask Kelly to push her feet into the floor. As she descends again, I ask her not to over-extend the middle three fingers when executing double sixths. Overall, they are going well. I ask Kelly what the staccato sixths are for. She doesn’t know so I say that they are preparation for octaves in the higher grades. I do a demonstration using octaves, suggesting that she cultivate the outside of the hand. I do another critical comparison by demonstrating what a supple wrist can do for the overall sound. I ask Kelly if she has seen my arm ‘wobble at the top’ as I play the staccato sixths. I ask her to watch for that clue, as it’s a sign that you are on the right track. Kelly sits down and plays, and I check for the arm wobble. I also adjust her body position, and she continues. I ask her to use the same movement though, and I encourage her to practise while aiming for greater precision. I ask Kelly what she will do for the next part of the piece. I suggest that I write some fingering in for her to implement. Jean clarifies which pieces Kelly needs to practise, and mention to keep up the practice for
her concertos. Jean asks me if Kelly will get to play with the orchestra. I say that I will make it happen one way or another. Jean says that Kelly has been very quiet since coming back from Korea. I sit and play and experiment with the fingering of the right hand, and then write it in the score. I also clarify what hand plays where, showing Kelly transition into the middle section (A-flat Major). I suggest that that will get her started, and I ask her where she will get up to before the lesson on Sunday (perhaps pages 1–3). I ask Kelly what else she can play for me. Jean says that Kelly hasn’t practised the Mozart Concerto as she was reviewing the Bach Invention and Grieg Waltz. Jean said that she realised that Kelly wasn’t enjoying playing these two pieces and gestures ‘lazy hands’ while laughing. I asked Kelly what Jean had said (do it properly) and then apparently Kelly cried. Jean said that she didn’t refuse to play them, though she could tell she didn’t want to. I say that I was wondering why she was taking longer to complete these pieces, and Jean says that she realised that she just didn’t like those pieces. I ask Kelly to perhaps tell me sooner if that happens again, otherwise I won’t know; Kelly agrees. When I say, ‘Just don’t get too picky though’, Jean and Kelly both laugh. I suggest that we hear some scales for the last part of the lesson. When I see how Jean has organised her scale book, I say to Kelly, ‘Look at this lovely Mummy, she must be really dedicated to you’. I ask Kelly to play B Major and mention to Jean that she can play just scales in the technique exam if she would like to still participate. Kelly plays B Major scale hands together. I move the chair back in the way, and then mention that with the right-hand ascending and the left-hand descending, ‘you’ll need to pronate the forearm better’. I do a critical comparison, showing Kelly the difference between a ‘flat top’ of the hand and one that rotates. I adjust the chair, suggesting that Kelly needs more height. I ask Kelly to keep her distal joints firmer. I ask Kelly what the ‘goal’ of scales might be – keyboard knowledge and tonal uniformity. I say that as her thumbs are too loud, adjustments need to be made. Kelly nods and I demonstrate, saying, ‘By doing this (pronation) it allows your thumb to come under further, so that you don’t have to struggle … when you struggle for it (the thumb) that’s when you usually come down too fast. So you need to hold your upper arm out, pronate the forearm … OK that’s heaps better’. The difference is apparent and Jean says, ‘Sounds much better. I can tell something’s wrong’. I agree, saying it was too lumpy and Jean laughs. I say to Kelly that she will need to slow down and aim for greater tonal uniformity, which I’m happy to show her how. I say that most people (other teachers) would just yell at you and Jean says that’s
what Kelly’s previous teacher used to do; Kelly laughs. I reiterate, ‘If you pronate your forearm inwards, the thumb gets extra room, so you’re more able to control how fast it goes down. Plus you add the slight upper arm movement and the slight trunk movement (adjustment), and you’re more able to place the thumb down rather than chuck it down and hope for the best’. I say that I spent the day examining today, and scale technique is not often well understood; I demonstrate. I point out to Kelly how my watch ‘turns’, saying that that is called ‘pronation’. I demonstrate the difference between squeezing under and placing under due to pronation. I ask her to note that while the thumb is played, the hand and forearm rotates over: ‘Place it under, use the bottom of that note to swivel, adjust sideways with the trunk’. I tell Kelly what the trunk is (upper body) and when I ask her if she knew that, she shakes her head no. I ask Kelly if she had Naplan today (no). Kelly plays again, and does very well, though I manually adjust her, pointing out that during the bottom octave, she will need to adjust to the left with her upper body. As she finishes, I say, ‘That’s how you play scales’, but go on to say that it’s slightly weird, as most passages are barely ever played tonally uniform. I explain that in scales, every note needs to sound identical. Kelly and Jean are nodding as I explain, and then Jean asks if chromatic scales are played the same (yes). I ask Kelly to play E-flat chromatic right hand, asking her to curve her distal joints and keeping her head tall. I tell Kelly that she has significant problems with the shape of her fingers. I ask her why we need rounded fingers (?) and explain that flat fingers don’t allow any gap between the fingers and the thumb, which causes a lack of control with the way the thumbs depress the keys – ‘If you have curved fingers, you can have your thumb more on an angle’. Kelly plays again and I say that that is better. I sit down, lift my arm up and show Kelly underneath my hand, explaining that when playing the thumb, use the joint alone, rather than ‘any extra arm’. I then do a critical comparison on the piano and then on Kelly’s head (‘just pop the thumbs in along the way’). I say that it’s better, but she is very tense – I ask her to let go of all joints while keeping the arm out. I feel her arm again (that’s better) and ask her to strike the keys faster (play louder). I ask her to feel loose with the body, firm with the fingers, adjust with the trunk and keep the head tall. When she finishes, I say, ‘As soon as the fingertips flatten, you’ve got no control of the thumb descent, and that’s why you’ll end up with bumps (in the tone)’. Kelly and Jean smile and Jean says again that it sounds much better. They both laugh when I say that I write this information in exam reports but ‘no one ever listens’. Jean says that during levels 1, 2
and 3, Kelly’s scales didn’t seem to improve and I agree saying, ‘no amount of practice is going to help if you don’t have a strategy to fix them’. I say that there’s no point in saying, ‘just practise more’, as they won’t improve unless you stumble across the ‘answer’ by luck. I continue, ‘People work it out eventually, but by then it’s too late, you’ve got all this tension in your arms, and it’s really hard to work backwards. Tension is built into the pieces, into the scales, so you practise without tension in order not to do that’. I ask Kelly to ‘check’ herself now and then and scan her body for unnecessary tension. I suggest that she still ‘think hard’ while remaining relaxed in the body. I ask her how arpeggios are going but Jean tells me that she hasn’t started them yet. I say that it’s ok as the scales provide a good foundation for arpeggios, as they are basically the same, though more rapid lest ‘you get stuck’. I ask Kelly to stand up and I demonstrate E flat, saying that it’s my favourite to teach as ‘it naturally pronates the hand’. I do a critical comparison of ‘remaining flat’ as opposed to not doing so. I point out that there is a need to make constant rotary adjustments, usually ‘inwards’. I ask Kelly to try the right hand, coaching her with the fingering while pushing her feet into the floor, keeping her head high and loose, and remaining firm with the distal joints while pronating the forearm. I ask Jean to put a sticker and she laughs. I say that to learn a good technique does take up a lot of time, though it is worth the effort and time spent. Jean asks me how many arpeggios are required for the Intermediate exam (one is fine). After Jean suggests the two concertos, the Chopin and the Debussy for the mid-year recital, I suggest that the two concertos will be a more realistic within the time frame. Jean agrees.

Lesson 10: 18 May 2014

Reviewed 24 September 2016

- Sam says that it’s cloudy outside and I say that it feels cold. I ask to hear the concertos, but Jean says that Kelly has been practising the new songs and I agree. I ask to hear the new Chopin Nocturne first. I ask if she has a recording (no) so I suggest that I will send her one. I mention that there is a 5 year old on YouTube playing this piece, ‘Kids are getting better and better these days’. Kelly adjusts the chair and I ask how harp was today. Jean says it used to be on Saturdays but is now on Sunday mornings. Jean says that Kelly chose a very difficult piece (Fantasy) for the upcoming harp concert. It was 14 pages, but it has been reduced to 10. I ask Kelly if she knows Chopin’s Fantaisie Impromptu and I play a little – she recognises it. Kelly
begins playing the right hand of the introduction. I mention the double sharp and write in the score. I explain the meaning and Kelly nods. I show Kelly the fingering that I would like her to use and write it in the score. I start to adjust her position, and Jean asks if she is sitting too close, saying, ‘She has a habit of sitting too close to the piano’. I agree and then ask her to ‘sit up on your fifth finger’ as she plays the chair. I show her using the wooden hand model. It’s very difficult for her – Jean says that in harp, she only uses 4 fingers. I suggest, ‘that’s just the way you are, though you can improve that … she does have very subluxations joints’. I ask Kelly to keep trying her best, and say that I didn’t have perfect fingers and they still turned out OK. Kelly tries again, but it is very difficult for her to form the hand shape. I ask her to activate the muscle in the right side of the hand. I adjust her head and ask her not to get tight in the shoulder. I caution her against sitting too close and twisting the wrist/hand. I sit at the second piano and play the introduction, first freely and then sitting too close, too far to the right and with a tight shoulder. I sing the melody line and then encourage Kelly to voice the top notes, hold the tied C#, and taking out the C# to work on the top thirds using gesture. I sit down next to Kelly and manipulate her elbow in order to achieve the required gesture of the hands, and encourage her to pronate inwards as she lifts upwards. After this I ask her to put the C# back in; it’s tricky for her so I ask her not to squeeze the notes but rather ‘just roll up’. She continues to experiment and I ask her to ‘bring it around and up like that’. I say, ‘Well done, now try and do the same thing but hold on to the thumb’. She does well and I say, ‘Good! That’s it, that’s the sound’. I sing and use expressive gesture, saying, ‘You don’t want a pokey sound’. At the second piano, I play both using critical comparison and expressive gesture, singing, ‘I’m sad’. I demonstrate and sing sadly. I come back over to Kelly and summarise, ‘So it’s a down movement and a roll to the side while holding down the other part’. Kelly does well and we move on. I ask Kelly to replay the E’s while rolling to the lift. I say, ‘Bring your elbow out and around Kelly’. She experiments a few times and does get there. I show her the next gestural fragment with the G# chord. As she plays it, I use a pencil to prop up the knuckles and the right side of her hand. I say that it’s getting there, though it won’t happen in two weeks. I ask her to show me the left hand, which she does, though she is still unsure of the notes. I write in the fingering while she plays and she implements it. As she plays I coach her with the fingering and expressive gesture. I ask her to use finger four on the penultimate note so that she can roll. After she plays the phrase with good tonal shape, I say, ‘Wow
that’s great’. Kelly nods as I suggest that to play Chopin well, you need a wide tonal range/palette. I ask her to show me the next part with the left hand. While she plays I ask Sam if he likes the piece too, and both he and Jean laugh. I say that it’s very famous. Kelly continues to play and I watch. I suggest that she start using the pedal, and I sit and demonstrate, after which I write in some fingering which Kelly tries. I say, ‘You’re probably thinking how am I ever going to stretch that Mark?’ but she shakes her head no. We continue to with fingering before I sit down and suggest, ‘With a piece like this you drop into the first note and collect the others like a little basket of flowers, and then you go again … You never sort of stretch, you just roll’. I continue to demonstrate this concept. I suggest that it’s hard to do that when the song is slow and you’re just getting to know it, but what you can do is … (I demonstrate pairing the notes together with two-note slurs that overlap each other). I suggest that Kelly start to practise it this way in the meantime, which she starts to do as I coach her with the gestural direction of the notes, adding in the occasional fingering and asking her to ‘throw your hand’. I use body movement and expressive gesture to coach these gestural fragments, suggesting, ‘If you do this, you’ll get the end result a lot sooner … don’t waste time stretching’. We continue this process as we move further on with the left hand. I ask Kelly to ‘swing up’ when the intervals become wider, sitting down to demonstrate and suggest that she may need to let go of the bottom note. I say, ‘To get that sort of sound, that’s the movement you use’. Kelly continues to experiment each adjacent pair of notes as I check the fingering, demonstrating occasionally. I use the second piano to ‘check’ the fingering before writing it in; Kelly continues to the end of the first section. I ask to sit down and check it so far, writing in more fingering. I ask Kelly if she likes the piece (nods yes). I say, ‘You’re very quiet again today’ and Jean laughs. I ask Kelly to try out a slightly revised fingering towards the bottom of the page, while coaching some notes too. As I play the last bar of page one, I ask Kelly to write the fingering in while I play; she then tries too. I ask Kelly to learn all of the fingering and that the idea is not to stretch, but to glide across the keys. I sit down and start to demonstrate the pairing of consecutive notes, before moving to playing as written, and then each half bar in one gesture; Kelly watches. I ask her to show me the right hand for page. As she plays, I adjust the fingering explaining that the third finger is in the middle of the hand. I explain that the G# anacrusis belongs to the second section. I ask her to cover the octave distance by ‘throwing’ the hand. As she takes the top notes, I adjust her trunk
to the right, saying that scales are very good preparation for this as they ‘get you used
to the position’. I work out the fingering and write it in, coaching Kelly note by note.
She keeps up with me very well, and smiles afterward. I sit down and demonstrate the
sideways tilt of the trunk, saying, ‘Try and get your positions lined up early. When
you’re learning a piece, try and learn where it is on the piano. While you’re learning
the notes, learn the fingers, learn the gestures and the sound, but also the geography
… how should I sit?’ I sit and play a high C# showing several different positions of
playing the note. I play an ascending C# Major scale, adjusting and arriving behind
the note, suggesting ‘that’s what your scales are for … to teach you about the different
positions of the piano’. I gesture and Kelly nods. I ask Kelly whether harp is similar,
but before she can answer, Jean says, ‘Oh yeah, sometimes low strings’. I say,
‘Sometimes have to shift? Piano is like that as well’. I ask Kelly to continue from the
D in the Neapolitan sixth bar, demonstrating the trill and ascending chromatic figure,
coaching her with the fingering, trying it myself, and writing it in the score. I also
coach her with the vertical aspects of the gestural choreography. I say, ‘The reason
I’ve chosen that fingering is because eventually you’ll go …’ and I demonstrate at the
second piano. I point out that Chopin hasn’t written any fingering in the score,
‘because he doesn’t want to give away any secrets. We have to work out the fingering
based on what sound and what gesture’. I say, ‘So does that get your started?’ and
Kelly nods. Jean reminds Kelly that she has a question to ask me regarding the double
sharp symbol, which I explained earlier. It seems that Kelly didn’t forget, as I
answered it earlier and perhaps Jean didn’t notice. I ask Kelly to prepare the second
page for next time – ‘give it a go first and then I’ll help you’. Kelly nods and Jean
says ‘yep’. I ask to sort out the fingering for each hand on page one. I explain that we
will then be able to go further with the gestural choreography. Kelly nods again. I say,
‘Yes Mark?’ and Kelly smiles, saying, ‘yes Mark’. Kelly puts her score away and I
say that I’ve been practising the second part of the Mozart. Jean says that she hasn’t
been practising the Mozart. I suggest that we hear the Debussy. Kelly is getting the
music out and Jean says, ‘Kelly move on fast … you’re too slow’. Jean laughs and
Kelly smiles. I ask Kelly how she went and she seems pleased. She plays hands
together quite fluently until the second line, whereupon, she speeds up when the
hands cross. I ask her to play the opening without any mistakes and a bit faster. I
smile and Kelly plays again. I say, ‘Nice job, good girl’. I caution Kelly against using
two different tempi for each section for too long in the learning process, and ask her
to match the tempi. I ask her to either slow down the crossing hands part or quicken up the beginning. When she plays the crossing hands part slower, I ask her if it feels good doing it ‘that speed’, but before she can answer I shake my head and say, ‘not really … the answer is? … You have to practise the first part so that it’s faster’. Jean laughs. I can tell that I’m a bit nervous and just ‘fitting in’ with what Jean expects me to say rather than thinking about what is really best pedagogically. As Kelly plays the crossing hands part, I sit and use expressive gesture to coach her with the sound before taking a seat at the second piano and demonstrating, asking her to put the right pedal down slightly. Kelly plays the crossing hands passage with the pedal, and I coach her with the ascending broken chords, slowly and then faster. I say, ‘OK, the next time I see you, I want this faster (page one) with no wrong notes’. Kelly nods and I smile; we move on to page two. She does quite OK, but has trouble with the return of the main theme. She plays the correct notes, though they are slow. I experiment while sitting and then write in some fingering; Kelly sits down and tries. I ask her to identify the right-hand chords (E minor or diminished). She is correct, and I explain the difference between minor and diminished by noting the semitone structure. I experiment with the left-hand fingering and then write it in in blue pen. I demonstrate the hands together. ‘It’s going to be a great piece … you’ve come so far already’. Kelly smiles. ‘It’s one of those pieces that sounds a lot harder than it is’. As Kelly plays hands together where the hands cross, I suggest a few fingerings and correct some wrong notes. I say, ‘Good girl, yay! You’ve come all that way in two or three days’. I say that’s good and Kelly smiles. I say, ‘What are you going to do for next time?’ Before she can answer I ask her to get through the middle (dreamy) section, which I demonstrate, adding in fingering as I sit. I also work out the choreography of left and right hands (over and under), writing it in the score. I also note the change of key (5 flats now), and continue narrating and writing in which hand plays where. I say, ‘Excited?’ and Kelly nods. I joke and say, ‘Don’t get too excited’ and Kelly laughs. I continue to work out and then add the fingering into the score. I also start to point out the free fall and gentle lift in the left hand, writing in the gestural choreography in pencil. I stand up and Kelly sits back down. I ask her to go through the notes of this page. I mention that there is a recording of me playing this piece that I will show Kelly. I say that the ending is amazing and I sit and demonstrate a little, albeit slowly at first. I say, ‘It sounds really cool’ and Jean laughs. I suggest that Kelly finish learning the piece is she is able to, and Jean laughs. I suggest that the
Chopin is a lot harder than the Debussy, and she can probably do quite a bit on her own. I say that the Chopin tends to make students ‘a bit stretchy’, whereas the Debussy fits under the hand a little easier. I say that it really depends on the individual and how much practice they do. I caution Kelly against sitting too close, and sit and demonstrate this concept. I say that if your arm is too close to the body or twisting, it’s more difficult to pronate the forearm inwards. I sit and demonstrate lifting up on my hip, rather than ‘sitting’ on the chair. Jean asks me to clarify what to practise. I say for the concert – ‘Little Concerto’ and Mozart ‘Concerto’. Jean says that Kelly has a problem with a few pages in terms of notes and asks me to hear it next time (up to page four is fine). I say, ‘Well I was hoping to do that today, but we’ve spent the time doing the other 2, that’s fine, I will need to help you with that next time’. Jean says, ‘OK thank you so much’ and Kelly says, ‘Thank you’.

Lesson 11: 22 May 2014

Reviewed 27 September 2016

- The lesson starts with Kelly playing Mozart’s ‘Concerto K467, and I remind Kelly to make the ornaments sound melodic rather than rushing through them and making them sound hard. I use expressive gesture and vocalisation to coach her, asking her to play without making mistakes. Jean says that Kelly has a problem with the A-flat Major part, which I play as Kelly watches. I ask to hear what’s happening so that I can direct her. Kelly plays the A-flat Major part with hands together. Jean is recording. I help Kelly partial practise the tricky spots, reminding her of fingering and chord names (E-flat7). I remind her that the 4 against 3 rhythm was used earlier in the piece and I ask Kelly what techniques were used there. She says, ‘Do the right hand and then the left hand and put them together’. I agree, but emphasise that we need to do a small amount before chaining those fragments together. I say, ‘Start with what you can do and then expand that out’. I mention that the electronic metronome ‘blew up’, so I put the old mechanical one on. I ask Kelly to play the right hand and then the left hand making sure that she lands precisely on one beat and then the next. I also ask her not to repeat over and over without having a space of at least one beat in between. I conduct her while she does these exercises with hands separately and then hands together – ‘fill up the space’. I say that the beat is like a big pillow and ‘you want to get the whole beat’. She plays hands separately again, but is coming in too early and not actually starting precisely with the beat. She starts to have some success, so I ask
her to repeat the process. I say, ‘It’s laborious and time-consuming, but you’ve got plenty of time’. I suggest that she do each fragment for 10 minutes or so. I caution Kelly against ‘going around in circles’, where she doesn’t stop between each attempt. We move to the next fragment and I ask her to ‘fill up the whole beat’ because she isn’t starting and finishing the beat precisely with the metronome. Jean smiles when I sing, ‘Take you time please thanks’. I ask Kelly to listen for the beat, but to think of it as not a sound, but as something that moves; ‘you move through the beat’. Kelly plays the left hand and I ask her to imagine the right hand, before ‘sliding them together’. We then swap, but Kelly has trouble and tends to slow down. I coach her with some stray notes and fingers and say, ‘listen for the whole beat’. I say, ‘You’ll get there’ and we move to the next beat. It’s unusual because she doesn’t seem to ‘hear’ the beat at first, but keeps trying and does get there eventually. When she puts the hands together I say, ‘No, if you don’t start with the beat, you won’t have a sense of the beat. Listen for a beat or so and then fall into it’. Kelly tries again and I say, ‘Good … It’s better to wait those few extra seconds and set it up properly, instead of doing it over and over randomly and not really know what’s happening … Yes Mark?’ Kelly smiles, but she looks rather timid and is hunched over. The next couple are a little easier, though I still coach her with where the beat starts and ends. I wind the metronome up and check the tempo (MM = 50). I ask her to play the right hand nice and clear, right on her fingertips. She does well, and I say that while we are rushing through the process a little, she should expand this process during practice, perhaps 5 minutes on each beat fragment. I say that it’s like ripening fruit – it does take time, but there are ways to speed up the process. I say that it’s like applying intense heat to each beat to speed up the development. Kelly nods and we get a tissue. I sit down at the piano and demonstrate the process myself – left hand a number of times, right hand a number of times, then hands together. I say, ‘Be intense and do it a lot, but take your … time doing it’. I remind Kelly of notes and fingers, and also to arrive on the next beat for reference. I say that this part is full of flats, so it’s quite intense and very dark (louder). I point out the significant change in harmony from G flat 7 to F7. I ask for more sound, but not more speed. Kelly keeps trying – left hand, right hand and hands together while I coach her along the way with expressive gesture to ‘feel’ the beat. I remind Kelly that, ‘we’re trying to get those tomatoes to ripen’. I ask Kelly if she is OK (yes) and ask if it’s not too intense (no) so we carry on. I point out that we are modulating to B-flat minor and that we need lots of sound. Kelly continues to play
and I say, ‘It sounds like you can already do some of it quite well, so that’s encouraging isn’t it?’ (Yes). I ask her if she feels good (yes). I ask her to play the half bar of the B-flat minor; I ask her not to rush and remind her of the down/up gesture for two-note slurs. I also ask her to breath in and generate tone by using momentum, and I liken it to if I wanted to speak loudly. We move to the next section with the left hand, and I can see that she has certainly improved during the lesson in her ability to arrive exactly on the beat. I say that it’s like a game of sport, where the bat meets the ball exactly on the beat. She tries several times, and does show improvement with her precision. We move to the right-hand semiquavers before sliding the hands together. I ask her to ‘try not to check it’, but ‘throw yourself into it’. She tries a number of times and does get there in the end (good girl). We move on to the next part of the left hand/right hand and I write some fingering in the score. I remind her again to always arrive on the next beat when working with the metronome. I leave Kelly to cycle between right hand, left hand and hands together while I move the computer and I say to Jean, ‘It’s quite intense isn’t it? I think she can do it though I really do’. Jean agrees. Kelly stops to use a tissue and I ask her how harp was this week. We talk about all the DVDs I need to watch and the video camera. Kelly resumes practising the gestural fragments and I mention that she is starting to pick it up faster now. I talk about getting softer on the appoggiaturas, rolling either left or right after dropping on the louder (first) note. We continue on and I coach Kelly to ‘fill up the space’ and ‘grow the sound’. I use lots of expressive gesture here as I count the beats/triplet subdivisions. I ask Kelly to stand up and I demonstrate a double rotary movement to increase the volume of the top notes in the sequential triplet passages. Kelly sits down and plays as I count the subdivisions. I say that Classical music has to be perfectly balanced, like a building – ‘Don’t let the building topple’ (due to incorrect/unbalanced rhythm). I do a critical comparison while singing and conducting, saying, ‘there’s a crack there’ when the rhythm is wonky. I mention that the electronic metronomes are more perfect than the manual ones. As Kelly plays, I clap the triplet subdivisions with the metronome, helping towards greater accuracy. I complement Kelly on her trills, and then help her towards playing the left hand tonal splats on the beat while continuing with the trills in the right hand. Kelly tries herself and I remind her to start on the upper note for trills. She works on her trills first and then I ask her to add the tonal splats back in. She does much better. We take the trills, and I say that she is doing too much arm and not enough finger action. I take Kelly through some drills for
the trills, adding a note each time. I ask her not to press past the bottom of the key, saying, ‘Sometimes I think you either press too hard or not hard enough … try to find the middle ground. You feel the bottom of the earth, but you don’t press past that … walk on top of the earth’. I say that her trills are pretty good, but not perfect. I take Kelly through two, three, four and five notes, ‘just one extra note’. The trill becomes a little untidy at seven notes, so I take her back around again, and then again. I encourage Kelly to do a quick impulse with her body and hand, before putting such energy into the trill itself – ‘like a blast on energy’. I ask Kelly to practise her trills in this way – ‘It’s like a burst of energy plus one more note’. I say that it’s starting to sound quite good, before sitting down to demonstrate the pedal. I ask Kelly to listen carefully – she sits down and plays and I coach her with further changes of pedal. I caution her not to overthink the trills. She does much better, though the pedal needs further work. I sit and demonstrate, encouraging her to listen for a clean sound. I talk about practising with the two pianos this Sunday. I ask Kelly to play the fifth C louder with greater downward momentum and omit the octaves for the final right-hand notes (using the third finger). I give Kelly a clap and suggest we start ‘from the top’. I correct her rhythm at the end of the first phrase, first right hand, then left hand and then hands together. I ask Kelly for more sound and then ask her to listen to the beat ‘and then fall into that’. She repeats it multiple times while I conduct and has success about 50% of the time, but does better when we start from the beginning again. As she plays I say, ‘I’m flying!’ in an effort to get her to expand the dynamic width of the phrase. I draw her attention to the pedal, and maintain tempo during the trill. I dramatise, saying, ‘Imagine you’re looking down at your Mum and Dad, saying look Mum and Dad I’m flying!’ I say that it’s a soft song, but don’t play softly. I ask Kelly what the relative minor is of the home key, helping her find it answer by counting down the three semitones. Kelly seems to have heard this before, but I give her the circle of fifths sheet anyway, briefly explaining the key relationships. I ask Kelly to play C Major scale, then G (1#), then D (2#), then A (3#). I also give her handouts that detail the primary and secondary chords of the key. I ask Kelly to play each of these chords in C Major. I ask Kelly to write in the chord names for the capital letters. I also talk about capital letters for Major and lower case for minor. We continue through each chord and I ask Kelly to identify the name of each chord, including quality. She stumbles a bit with B diminished and I start to teach her to write a circle for diminished, but she remembers from a previous lesson. I ask Jean if she ‘minds’ if
I do this with her (Yeah, yeah). I say that keyboard harmony is an important part of learning to be a skilled musician. We go on to G Major, and I ask Kelly to write in all of the chord names as she identifies each one. I ask Kelly to memorise ‘chord 7 is always diminished in a Major key’. I talk about the primary chords of the key, playing K545 briefly; also Le Cou Cou. I teach Kelly about secondary chords and review the quality of primary and secondary chords. I give Kelly a plan to review the 12 Major keys during the remainder of the year. I refer to the circle of fifths sheet again, talking about ‘cousin keys’, as seen in the Mozart (F Major/D minor). I ask Kelly if she enjoyed the detour into keyboard harmony. Kelly has cello in the morning and she gets up at 6.50am. I ask her when she practises: 7.30 – 8.30am and piano in the afternoon. I ask Kelly to play from the start of the D minor section. She does well, though I caution her against over pedalling. With the ascending ‘turns’, I say that sometimes it sounds as though she is squeezing, which ultimately causes inaccuracy – ‘When it’s tight, that’s when you’ll miss the notes’. I ask Kelly to listen, count and roll over the notes, being sure not to blur adjacent fingers together. Kelly plays until the end of the section, and I ask her where we have modulated. Before she can even think of an answer, I give her the answer – modulated to the dominant. When I ask her what the dominant is, she also doesn’t get any time to think before I give her the answer. I mention about theory classes with Yvonne, but Jean says that Kelly is probably too busy already. She says that harp is 1.5 hours practice and piano is 1.5 hours practice (both per day) and cello too! I talk about the importance of theory and Jean says perhaps during the school holidays. I remind Kelly not to use too much pedal in Classical music. I sit and do a critical comparison, using the pedal quite sparingly.

Lesson 12: 25 May 2014

Reviewed 27 September 2016

- Jean says that Kelly has a cold and laughs. I say that I have a bit of a cold too, and I wind the chair up. Kelly plays the opening of her Chopin Nocturne. I help her review some fingering and some basic gestural information, especially in terms of two-note slurs, albeit with chords. My first impression is one of very little progress since the last lesson on this piece. I coach her with fingering, demonstrating first and then pointing to the score while she plays. I ask Kelly to curve her distal joints, and I give her praise for good alignment with the higher register. I demonstrate and Kelly plays.
I ask her to notice the phrasing towards the end of page one – ‘Make sure you lift there so you’ve got weight to come down on the following note’. I mark the score with a gestural symbol. In order to convey a decrescendo on the last three notes of page one, I sing, ‘I’m so so sad’. I ask Kelly to play smooth and connected, and to roll between the notes. We continue to add the gestural choreography, and I write in the indications in the score. As Kelly plays I help her to deliver greater accuracy of rhythm. During ‘con forza’, I ask Kelly to ‘give a little rock’ and become quite animated when she imitates so easily. I show Kelly and ask her to pair the notes together on the ascending chromatic scale, aiming for greater volume. Kelly has a short break to blow her nose. We talk a bit about the recent trip to Korea. I ask if it was a good trip (yes). Jean says that two weeks is probably enough otherwise, there isn’t enough practice time. I talk about dummy keyboards that were often used in the olden days when going on long trips. I sit down and play some more of the right hand, chaining all gestural information together. I ask Kelly how she generates sound there, but I answer for her (double rotation). I remind her to keep moving, even on long notes. I say, ‘That’s pretty good actually, well done’. We start again and I encourage Kelly to come in with the fifth finger and out with the thumb. I say, ‘We’re getting there aren’t we’ and I feel her forearm; ‘nice and flexible’. I say, ‘that’s good … it’s improved … yay!’ and I ask Kelly to show me the left hand. She starts playing as I get the score out of my bag. I help her correct a few notes (B#) and some fingering, but it is very slow and she doesn’t use pedal. When I demonstrate the left hand quickly, she seems to find a better ‘gear’. I say, ‘OK good, nice job’. Kelly blows her nose again and I sit at the second piano. Jean asks me if she is doing this piece for the exam, and I say no, she is doing the Haydn Little Concerto. Jean says that they were very worried, and I say that there is no way I would put her in that situation without being prepared. Jean says, ‘we were thinking it was quite harsh, there’s only one week left, how can we do it?’ I say that you must have misunderstood me. Jean asks if one piece is enough with scales, and I say yes, as I’ve already spoken to Angela. Jean is laughing and refer to my computer, where the requirements for the technique exam are listed. I ask them to check their email. Jean asks me if she will play Little Concerto by herself, but I say that I have organised to go in and play it with her. Jean says, ‘Oh OK, fantastic’. Jean seems relieved and says that this song (Chopin Nocturne) is quite hard, and I say that Kelly needs at least two months to prepare this piece. Jean says sorry if she got mixed up as I give her a spare copy of the technical
exam requirements. I ask to move on to practise the concerto. I suggest that we practise both concertos today, reminding Kelly of the performance dates for both pieces. I explain that we will do the Debussy and Chopin later in the year. Both Kelly and Jean seemed relieved. Jean says that Kelly is enjoying her new songs. I get the music for the concertos as Kelly sits and waits. I explain the list of priorities for the short and long term. Kelly and I play the Haydn *Little Concerto* together. Kelly gets a bit confused with the Minuet and Trio movement in terms of repeats and the da capo indication, so we spend time reviewing these details. I say that we can go for more detail next lesson, but today we are rehearsing the ensemble. We move on to the third movement. I say that she has really done a good job. I mention regarding the string ensemble opportunity, but it hasn’t yet eventuated. I explain that the title is actually *Concertino*, meaning little concerto. I ask that we play the last movement together once again. As she finishes, I say, ‘Good girl’. I suggest that she use her arms more vigorously when playing loudly. We do some add-a-note drills for the right hand, reviewing staccato and terrace dynamics. I also take Kelly through pairs of notes drills for ascending arpeggio and I liken the gestural shape to driving a car, ‘that’s lovely’. I say that piano playing is lovely when it feels good. I ask how her Mozart *Concerto* is going. Kelly says, ‘um’ and Jean says that she is still working on it. I suggest that we make the most of the opportunity to use the two pianos and start rehearsals, and ‘get it happening’. I mention that I rewrote some of my part and show Kelly. Kelly asks me what page, and I say that we should start from the beginning. I give Kelly a bar introduction and we start; it’s rather messy and I’m too dominant. Kelly is having some difficulties with the rhythm and her entries, so I coach her with the D minor entry. The D minor section has really improved since the previous lesson. I show Kelly the underlying D7 chord that leads to the G minor section, as she wasn’t too sure where to come in. It’s much better the second time, from both of us; we continue. I coach her with the rhythm of her part in the diminished seventh triplets, and I compare the tempo with the previous triplet section. I continue to demonstrate, combining her part with the orchestral bass. I suggest we go from her G minor entry, giving her one bar in. After correcting a wrong note we carry on, but soon after I help her with the rhythm. The diminished seventh triplets are much better this time around. I correct a wrong note in the bass and her rhythm, counting and writing in the score. I suggest we go from the top of the page, which we do. My part is still rather loud and I play some incorrect notes, but it hangs together reasonably well overall. We arrive at
the A-flat Major section and I ask Kelly if she enjoyed that – ‘yes’. I coach her briefly with the rhythm of ornamentation and some fingering of the A-flat Major section before the lesson finishes. I say, ‘We’ve got a bit of work to do, but we’ll get there’. I ask Kelly what happened with the first section.

Lesson 13: 29 May 2014

Reviewed 28 September 2016

- We talk about how important it is for parents to ‘drive’ them towards success. Jean says it’s hard for parents to understand that kids can’t do it all themselves. I say that I like parents that are ‘a little bit pushy, but not too shouty’. Jean says that sometimes she can be ‘shouty’ and a little bit mean when she’s angry. I talk about how frustrating it can be when students don’t give their energy freely in the same way the teacher does. Jean says, ‘The good thing with Kelly, she has the time set up for when she’s practising’. I ask to hear Kelly’s scales for the technique exam. I ask Kelly if she’s looking forward to showing Angela her skills, but she seems a bit nervous. Jean says that she thinks scales are really hard. I hear B Major hands together, E-flat Major right hand. I ask Kelly not to ‘reach’ when descending with the right hand, but rather ‘roll’. I do a critical comparison with the right hand, but the view is obstructed. I ask Kelly if she noticed how I ‘lifted’ her into the higher register. I say that as she matures, it will become easier, as the piano is really and adult sized instrument. Jean is recording. Next is A-flat Major left hand, and I ask Kelly to imagine she has the mop from her bottom right through to the top of her head. The left-hand descending is tricky for her. I ask Kelly not to overlap the third and fourth fingers on the black notes, noting that these fingers share the same tendon. She does much better this time. I ask her to play a little slower generally and Kelly agrees. She does improve and I lift her elbow into position as she finishes. Next up is G-flat Major – I say that they have improved a lot, though there is a real need to play slower (Angela won’t mind). I hear Kelly’s staccato sixths, and she plays them separately very well. I asked Kelly if she would consider doing staccato for the other scales too, but Kelly seems worried. I say, ‘Why not?’ and ask for B Major staccato. I suggest that with staccato, there may not be a need to pronate quite so much, as it’s more of a forearm action. I ask her to play a little faster with just a little pronation towards the bottom – ‘That’s better, good!’ I say that staccato will be good for her overall finger strength. I ask her to play B-flat Major staccato hands together, F# Major right-hand staccato. I nurse Holly and pat her
staccato; Jean and Kelly laugh. I advise Kelly to play staccato faster and legato slower. We move to contrary motion – B Major. I suggest that she play slower and aim for increased tonal uniformity. I ask to sit down, saying, ‘It’s certainly better than it was, well done’. I suggest that Kelly ‘pop the thumbs down a little bit slower’, so as to avoid ‘jarring’. I say that I wouldn’t call it perfect, but she is improving, and I show Kelly her progress on a sliding scale. I reiterate that the aim is to control the sound rather than aiming for speed. ‘Get the sound right, and the body position right, and the speed will come’. We move to chromatic scales – F# legato and staccato – ‘Nice and bouncy, throw those arms’. I ask Kelly to be more vigorous with the left hand, taking her arm to demonstrate. She is doing very well. I say that she is welcome to say no, but I think that the staccato would be good. I say that learning the notes of the scales facilitates layering the technique over the top. We talk about ‘the old days’ when teachers would put a penny on the back of students’ hands, and Kelly tells me that she used to have a rubber on her wrist. I say that this idea is a bit old fashioned now. I sit down and ask Kelly to test my chromatics. I ask Kelly to use her whole arm with her fingers. I suggest that the staccato chromatics are going very well, and that she is ‘getting quite good’ with uniformity of sound in legato. I say that Kelly is doing well, and remind them both of how far she has come in a year. Jean says, ‘It’s very different’. I say that Kelly needs to always remember how scales actually sound. I sit and demonstrate C# Major, and how the movements blend. I ask Kelly not to focus on speed, but to focus on posture and sound. I say, ‘Your Mum’s right … they are much more difficult than people think’. Jean laughs and says, ‘It’s really hard’. I demonstrate the descending E-flat Major from the Saint-Saëns second concerto, noting that all micro-movements are absorbed when the tempo is faster. I say that a good foundation has been laid and needs to be continued, but preparation needs to be slow and consistent. I remind Kelly that skills are added individually over time, and I say that I often see people from higher grades that play with a ‘lumpy sound’. We move to the Debussy. Kelly plays hands together, but the view is obstructed. She stops at the end of the first section, and I ask Kelly to be more disciplined with the rhythm of crossing hands. As she plays, I tap the beat and count the rhythmic subdivision. I suggest that she play LSLS and invent some other little exercises to keep her mind agile. She does well. I say that the beginning has improved, but I ask her not to play with mistakes and she plays again. I demonstrate each gestural fragment of five notes, arriving on the next of the bar. I ask Kelly if we have done this
here before (no). Kelly continues and I ask her to do two bars at a time. I suggest we do the same thing but a little faster this time. I ask Kelly to drop into the note (like staccato) so that momentum isn’t lost. I suggest that Kelly spend about five minutes doing each bar. When she makes mistakes, I ask her ‘not to stop’, meaning don’t stop, as momentum is lost. I say, ‘If you practise stopping what are you going to do?’ (‘stop’). I say, ‘We don’t want to stop … we want to keep everything rolling like a spinning wheel’. I dramatise the movement of the wheel, asking Kelly if she knows the story of sleeping beauty. I say that when the wheel comes to the top aspect, it doesn’t stop. I demonstrate briefly, saying that the notes ‘keep rolling out of your hand’. I mention that these exercises will lessen the likelihood of becoming stiff. We start again, and I encourage Kelly to fall through the first pair of notes within each group, demonstrating and saying, ‘stay in the air until you think of what the next pair notes are’. Kelly goes again, asking to repeat any that ‘don’t work’, which she does. I say, ‘Basically, you’re trying to speed up your reaction time. Playing fast is not about playing fast (with the fingers) … it’s about playing fast (with your mind) … you’re trying to speed up your coordination’. Kelly plays and I point out that some are more awkward than others, taking the ABFAG as an example and analysing the interval shifts required. I use expressive gesture and say, ‘If you get the wrong angle, you’ll make a mistake’. I encourage Kelly to keep experimenting until she can get it spot on. ‘If you get a wrong note, it’s not a wrong note, it’s a wrong movement’. Kelly nods. I ask Kelly to continue, perhaps slowing down a little for the next section, as it’s more complicated. I say, ‘That’s the kind of practice I want to see you doing this week’. I ask her to do ‘add-a-beat technique’ and then ask her what might happen next – ‘two-beat-technique’. Kelly correctly adds, ‘three-beat-technique’ and then I say 4, and then a whole bar. ‘Speed doesn’t come from speeding up slow notes’. I reiterate that a small amount fast is the way to do it, after which you chain those small amounts together. I say that the challenge will not be playing quickly, but too quickly. I ask to check the second section, and Kelly plays. I say that it’s good and all the notes are correct. I sit down and show Kelly how to practise in a similar way (add-a-beat technique before chaining the beats together). I also demonstrate and suggest playing the left hand as written as then the right hand with chords at the same time. We swap places and Kelly tries; she adapts quickly. I show her how she would apply the same idea to the bars that lead into the return to the main theme. I say, ‘we’re trying to clump it altogether … It’s going to take a while, but we’ll get there’. Kelly sits down
and plays left hand with block chords. Kelly smiles when I dance and vocalise, saying that it sounds like a little elf. I encourage Kelly to think of that passage as left hand with chords, rather than lots of notes in both hands. I demonstrate and ask Kelly to play ‘add-a-beat’ as before with the previous section. I ask her to shape the left hand – the second note with more movement. I try to tilt Kelly forwards from the hips but she laughs. I say, ‘Try to move your body into those G’s’. She does very well. I say, ‘Build in the expression now as you are learning the notes, not when you can play it’. Kelly laughs when I dramatise the ‘elf’ using my voice and gesture. I say, ‘use your trunk to help the movement, and the audience will understand what’s going on’. I sing again using critical comparison to show Kelly how important gesture is to understanding what is happening musically. I say that that part of the piece can turn into a bit of a mess, without any clear definition of what is happening. I caution Kelly against using too much pedal in this piece. I ask Kelly to continue, suggesting some alternate fingering for the left hand. The playing is slow and hesitant, but the notes are there. I suggest pedal during the daydream section and continue to suggest and write in fingering for both hands. I ask Kelly to be strict with the rhythmic detail early in the learning process. I mention five flats here. I say to Kelly that she will need to be more familiar with her notes during the middle section before we can do much with it. I say that there is practising and then there’s *practising*, and she is ready to do the latter with the first couple of sections now. I liken the former to learning and mention that she has already learnt the notes, so she can carry on with practising. I say, ‘There’s learning, practising, and … playing’; Kelly finishes my sentence. As I sit and play, I work on the fingering for the daydream section, writing it into the score. I ask Kelly what we are going to do after her exam on Sunday (practise Mozart). I ask Kelly if she has learnt any more Chopin (no). Jean says that she loves the piece, and I mention that Wendy also plays a Chopin nocturne. Kelly seems to know that Chopin wrote quite a few of them. I talk about pianists travelling around the world playing Chopin *Nocturnes*. I suggest that I could write some fingering in for the end of the Debussy, and I sit down and experiment while Kelly looks on. After a while, I sit and start to write. I ask Kelly if she can identify the chords (augmented) but I show her. I say that Debussy loved augmented chords, whole tone scales and pentatonic scales. I ask Kelly if this is her first piece by Debussy (yes). I say that Debussy and Chopin are probably my favourite composers. I start to experiment with the final section, before writing fingering in the score. This process takes quite a while. I suggest that we
move on to the Haydn Concertino. After a while of looking, I show Kelly a DVD recording of me playing the Debussy. Both Jean and Kelly say that I look different (very skinny). We listen and I say, ‘Build the fluidity into the piece now rather than later’. Kelly laughs and Jean says, ‘Wow’. They laugh when I ask, ‘Do I look old?’ I say that I’ve learnt a lot about teaching since that time. I say, ‘If you’re not loose, you’ll never get there. I think that you’ll be good at it though, I really do’. We laugh about the turkey hat/puppet. Kelly and I rehearse the Concertino. I play the keyboard, Kelly the piano. We both think that the first movement is a bit slow. I encourage Kelly to flow forwards now, and we start again. I caution her not to rush, lest it sounds hurried and ‘doesn’t speak’. I do a critical comparison of slow, fast but rushed, and fast but articulated, ‘So you can hear what’s happening’. I ask Kelly if she sets up the tempo in her mind before beginning (yes). I say that I will follow you, and we begin again. The playing and ensemble work is beautiful. When finished, I ask Kelly to feel the quaver upbeats as literal upbeats, where an up gesture is used to create a softer sound. I ask to try again before saying, ‘Otherwise it doesn’t go anywhere. Keep it moving forwards by using tonal contrast’ (I sing and conduct). After a couple of minutes, I ask Kelly to replace the downbeat with a tonal splat. We review the slower up movement and then add notes back into the downbeat. I say that most of Kelly’s short notes sound a bit like a hiccup. I ask Kelly to use them to ‘get into’ the bar. Kelly tries and does better. I remind Kelly that while the upbeats are staccato, it doesn’t have to sound brittle. We move to where there are, a ‘couple in a row’, and then continue to play. When delivering scales, I ask Kelly to ‘make those fingers work’. We do some rhythmic drills here, also staccato, legato, and chaining. I say that Kelly’s arms are lovely, but the fingers still have to work well. In summary, I ask Kelly to sit ‘on the beat’ rather than before on the anacrusis. We play the second movement. As we play, I coach her with Q and A ideas and dynamic contrast. I change the registration to strings towards the end of the movement. I say, ‘I really like how you play that … it’s lovely. You like it?’ (Kelly nods). I suggest we start from the end of the Minuet and follow with the third movement. When we finish, I ask her to speed up the left-hand broken chord section. I ask Kelly if she feels excited (yes).

Lesson 14: 1 June 2014

Reviewed 28 September 2016
- The lesson starts with me giving Kelly her medal! She seems surprised, and perhaps a bit shy. I say that she has been trying very hard lately, and that she deserves it. Jean says that she heard Adrian ask Oliver if it’s real gold (laughs). I’m eating the ice-cream that they brought. We talk a bit about the boys and Sam asks if the brothers compete with each other (not really). We talk about the practice test tube and Jean says that would be great. Jean suggests that every step can be two hours. Jean says that Kelly is practising about 1.5 hours per day. I talk about Andrew, Adrian and Kelly loving trophies and medals. Jean says that the medal is really nice, and ‘You work hard Kelly, OK?’ Sam mentions the competing brothers again. I ask Kelly if she was happy with the exam. I ask her what scales she was asked, but she can’t remember. I say that the next challenge will be getting the two concertos ready for the upcoming concert. I ask Kelly to start her practice with some scales and arpeggios each day and Jean agrees. I talk about arpeggios being a whole body activity. We practise the one bar introduction and then begin playing on two pianos. It goes well, at least until the A-flat Major section. Angel comes in and drops off the key. I ask Kelly if she would like some help (yes), so I advise no pedal, and slight stretching of the time heading into the A-flat Major section. She has really improved with her cross rhythms here, though I still coach her with hands together heading into B-flat minor. I say that using the pedal will mean a louder right hand, as the pedal makes the middle and lower registers quite thick. We return to the opening theme, and I ask Kelly for a louder sound in the right hand. I suggest that double rotation might be best to generate tone, and I sit and demonstrate. Kelly is reasonably quick to imitate. I say that it probably feels quite weird, but she is the soloist (the celebrity). I talk about concerto soloists being the movie stars of their day. I say, ‘You’ve got to play above the orchestra and fill up the whole hall with your sound’. I demonstrate and talk about the need for greater extroversion in concerto playing. We discuss tonal balance between registers, a ringing touch and a slow upward gesture when rounding off the two-note slur. She does well so I direct her towards pedalling for a more fluid sound in the left hand (half-pedalling). I explain that, ‘you get rid of some of the sound, but not all of it’. I do a critical comparison – no pedal change, full pedal, half pedal. I mention that half pedal is often a good idea and Kelly continues to play. I point out full and complete pedal change down in the bottom register. I slow down and show her each pedal change. I say, ‘that’s better’. I ask her to play a little softer with full pedal – ‘Oh, that’s lovely, good girl’. I remind her not to lift the foot on the Ic cadence. I
encourage her to use her hand like a cat – ‘Pull the notes up and out’ for the 4 semiquavers preceding the trill. I demonstrate and ask Kelly if she can feel the rhythm in the left hand 123-123, pushing it on. We practise the takeover between F Major and D minor sections and then continue on. Kelly is playing too slowly in the D minor section, so I ask her to play for me. I copy her, advising against using pedal. I liken the brightness of the top A to ‘a knife through butter … slice the note’. I suggest that the music is quite dramatic here and we play in unison before returning to ensemble from the start of the D minor section. I ask her to start the ornament sooner so that the F falls right on the beat. We return to the start of the D minor section. I ask Jean if it sounds nice and Jean agrees. I suggest that it was a bit too soft and blurry earlier. Jean says that Kelly’s right hand was a bit too soft and I agree. I demonstrate again the difference between pushing and rolling when playing loudly, pointing out ‘the wood’ in the sound. I play for Kelly, showing her different tone qualities, depending on the level of flexibility in my wrist and use of rotary movement. I do a critical comparison of the D minor section, pointing out that we don’t want ‘a coffin sound … like its dead’. I continue on with the demonstration, pointing out that the pedal can add ‘gloss’ but it can also create blurring. I ask Kelly to use her body more to create a full sound. I point out how Kelly can learn by watching other students and how they play. Some are better at using their bodies than others. I ask Kelly to copy me as I ‘lean’ on the keys before transferring that feeling into the piece itself. I encourage Kelly to lift her arm up further in order to create a big sound. She does much better thereafter. At the C7 bar, I coach Kelly with using double rotary movement in order for the music to flow forwards more authentically. Jean says, ‘very different … You can hear that Kelly, it’s very different’. Kelly smiles and nods. I say, ‘It sounds like you’re more in charge now … you’re more expressive, the sound is clearer, it’s louder but it’s not bangy … it’s louder, but it’s still sweet’. Kelly nods. I summarise how this was achieved – Kelly dropped onto the B flat, and as she held that note, she rolled to the right before continuing back to the left. I show Kelly how the vocabulary used in this sequence while holding her arm – ‘up, down, roll to the right, roll to the left, roll to the right …’ I continue to move her arm while narrating the gestural movement overlaid with the melodic line. Kelly and Jean laugh. I say, ‘You’re actually not playing notes … you’re playing movement’. I ask Kelly to try from the C7 chord, and as she plays I intermittently lift her elbow. After that, I coach Kelly further with the gestural detail ‘hidden’ between the notes. There are many combinations of up, down,
drop, and roll and she definitely seems to understand. I say that the audience will think that she is so clever. Jean says again that it sounds very different. When I ask Kelly to play the G minor triplets louder, I ask her what it was that she did differently. I say that the orchestra and piano are in a duel here and she needs a bigger sound. I ask Kelly what she notices about the way I play. I demonstrate what it sounds like when I myself don’t use gestural movement to play. I say that if feels very restricted. I ask Kelly to come again on Thursday and work hard in the meantime. I reiterate that Mozart and Haydn concerti are the priorities for the next two weeks until the recital.

Lesson 15: 5 June 2014

Reviewed 28 September 2016

- The recording starts and we are looking at the Mozart Concerto, broken diminished seventh section. I help Kelly to analyse and identify the chords, even when ‘disguised’ in inversion. Thereafter I suggest that it’s really interesting how a song is ‘made up of chords’ and I ‘narrate’ the harmony while playing block chords for the passage. While Kelly tries, I write in the fingering and chord names. Kelly takes off her jumper as we talk about how warm it is inside compared to outside. With the right hand, I encourage Kelly to ‘take the notes as you go’, in other words, use a single gesture with an upward lift to the right for the broken diminished seventh chords. I use add-a-note at a fast tempo and then ask Kelly to use the same gesture at a slower tempo. I use body movement and gesture to caution Kelly against using sudden or jerky movements that might produce a jerky tone. I sing and gesture, ‘Nice and smooth for me’ while Kelly plays. I then demonstrate and Kelly applies the same concept to the next phrase using add-a-note technique forwards and backwards. I ask her to keep practising, listening for an expressive sound. I say, ‘the way that you shape the phrase really depends on what movement you do. You know that now don’t you?’ Kelly says ‘yeah’. I mention that Angela said that Kelly has really good rotation, and using an Alberti bass with the left hand, I show her what I mean. I ask Kelly if she would like to show me the next part, which she does (leading into the A-flat Major section). There are a few wrong notes, but the rhythm really has improved so much! It’s almost there, and I say, ‘that’s improved so much! I can tell that you’ve done a heap of practice … have you?’ Kelly nods, and I say that I can tell. I sit down and direct her towards one of these, justifying the fact that the harmony calls for it (missing G flat). I ask her to make a big sound on the bottom F of F7 (leads to B-flat
minor). I direct her to do the same with the G7 chord that leads to C Major. I say, ‘you’re a natural! I can tell that you understand what I’m saying’. Kelly nods, smiles and coughs. I say, ‘You’re talented’. I ask her to practise the left hand there and then add the right hand back in. We move to the A-flat Major section and with the right hand, I ask her to ‘sing like a bird’. Using expressive gesture, I suggest that she use double rotary movement to lift the sound out of the piano. She does very well and I say so. I ask her to stand as I demonstrate the A-flat Major passage, emphasising the free fall into the keys at moments of expressive importance, particularly in the bass. Kelly sits and plays, as I say, ‘bass’. Where there are semitone appoggiaturas, I suggest that she use two separate pedal changes; Kelly responds quickly. I say that while we ended up in C Major, along the way we went to (plays) B-flat minor. I ask Kelly whether B-flat minor or C Major would be louder. She is unsure so I rephrase whether the higher or lower key would be louder, and I agree when she says C Major. I sit down and play, pointing out the pedal changes and increasing dynamic level when approaching C Major. I suggest that she could play the following passage a little softer, as the piece starts to wind down in intensity. I ask Kelly how to not play softly (to drop freely), and after playing the passage, I ask her how to drop freely, and she says, ‘preparatory up movement’ and I agree. I caution her to ‘not squeeze’ and aim for ‘a true ring’. I ask Kelly to start at the beginning of the A-flat Major section. I remind her of the extra pedal, citing the semitone clash as the reason. As she finishes, I say, ‘Not too bad … good girl’. I explain that because of the added layer of complexity, neither the preparatory movement nor pedal is as refined as before. I suggest that we might be reaching overload and she just needs time to digest and practise the concepts. Kelly smiles, but when I ask her if she understands, she isn’t sure, so I ask her to play again from the start of the A-flat Major section. I interrupt saying that I liked the bass that time. I show her the pedal change again, slower this time, aiming for ‘no break in the sound’. I explain that she isn’t lifting the foot all the way up, and she responds. She continues before I demonstrate the next such instance of this pedal. I ask her to pedal with the right hand (be guided by the right hand, especially with a semitone). Jean says, ‘It’s getting hard isn’t it?’ and I agree, adding that it’s very detailed. Kelly smiles. I say that pedal is very important to the sound. I ask Kelly to drop freely into the appoggiaturas – I demonstrate and Kelly copies. We find other instances and play them too. I ask her to lift the foot with the note when the modulation to C Major occurs. I say, ‘The more detailed you can be with Mozart, the
more pristine and magical it will sound’. I say that it’s Classical music and ask Kelly what that means. She doesn’t respond except to smile, so I say, ‘balanced, refined, elegant, aristocratic (like kings and queens), rich, wealthy’. I say that it’s not music for homeless people and both Jean and Kelly laugh. I talk about patronage in the 18th century. I caution Kelly against blurring and playing without refinement, and not dirty or homeless. I say that the section we were practising is good, but it needs a shower; Kelly laughs. She smiles proudly when I say, ‘I’m surprised that it’s come on so much, well done’. I suggest that we need voicing (the bass), what else? Kelly smiles and says, ‘Practise more’. I laugh and say, ‘Good girl, correct answer’. I sit down and summarise that we have spent the last half hour exploring voicing, pedal, and refined dynamics on appoggiaturas using gesture. I play a little more and say that there is lots happening, but she will get there. I talk to Jean about an extra rehearsal for two pianos, perhaps at the Conservatorium on Friday night. Jean suggests Saturday and says to Kelly that she is a bit worried and she needs to practise more. I suggest that she could come on Sunday at 5 pm for ensemble practice; also tomorrow night. I say that the Haydn *Concertino* was good at the technique exam, though Kelly forgot to repeat one section. She seems surprised and smiles. We all laugh and I say that it really didn’t matter anyway. Kelly plays the last section of the Mozart, from the descending triplet sequences. I suggest that she needs to do more work there (especially left hand), and Kelly agrees that she doesn’t know it as well as she could. I ask Kelly to stand and I demonstrate, ‘coming right down to a pin-prick and then up again’, referring to the implied crescendo here. I use expressive gesture and critical comparison, saying, ‘a bit grey and dull … a bit homeless’ otherwise. Kelly responds well. I say that it was much better, though the left hand does sound a bit clumsy, as she is unsure of the notes. I ask her to keep practising there. I suggest a more dainty sound, like Cinderella rather than the ugly stepsisters. We laugh and I say that the left hand is a bit ugly, though Kelly herself is good. I demonstrate how Kelly could play the last sequence much softer before coming back up again when the theme returns. I explain that it makes the crescendo that much more powerful this way. Kelly plays and I coach her. I say, ‘That’s much nicer, very good’. I demonstrate and ask Kelly to project the bass line, rather than the full chord. I suggest that the bass is very charming, like the prince, and the melody, is like Cinderella. I say that the more she can bring out the duet, the more the audience will think how pretty the playing is. I ask Kelly to continue, but I point out that her pedal is cloudy. Kelly plays and
responds quite well and I ask her to be subtle with the pedal – ‘come up and go down quickly so as to avoid hiccups’. I ask Kelly to observe the longer rests here and coach greater clarity of the pedal. I also ask her to play a single note in the right hand at the end rather than the full octave. I sit down and ‘narrate’ the story of Cinderella as I play. I ask Kelly if she can see them waving in the final bars. Kelly smiles as I dramatise Cinderella and the prince getting into the carriage, and then waving goodbye. I ask, ‘Can you see it in your head?’ Kelly nods and I say, ‘I can too’. I suggest that the whole piece is the story of Cinderella, as I sit and play. From cleaning, to the wicked stepsisters, I hate my life, I could be a pianist, to go away you stepsisters, I suggest to Kelly that there could be a hidden meaning beyond what is on the page. I suggest that the godmother casts a spell and suddenly she is dressed for the ball (A-flat Major section). Cinderella gets excited as she modulates to C Major. The ugly sisters return, and Cinderella feels sad, but then she spots the prince across the room and they dance together. I fill out the harmony with orchestral part to add to the drama here. We all laugh and I can see that Kelly really enjoyed this part of the lesson. I say that the music fits the Cinderella timeline too, when they had the ‘big puffy ball gowns’. I reiterate that the music goes through different moods, depending on the different keys. I sit and play a little more, narrating the D minor section when the stepmother demands that Cinderella ‘stoke the fire, do her hair in lovely curls, make me look beautiful!’ Jean says that she can tell that Kelly was very excited during the story but Kelly appears lost for words. I remind her that it needs to be very polished, like you are going to a grand ball, and that there is no room for wrong notes, blurry pedal or ugliness. Kelly nods when I ask her if she likes the style of music. Jean says that she has dry skin. I ask her how the perfect pitch is going – she gets them all correct bar one (A flat). Randomly, I play a little of Chopin’s Fantaisie-Impromptu, pointing out the right hand rotation. I ask Kelly to play from the very beginning. I ask Kelly if she has cello in the morning (yes) – Is it good fun? (yes) Jean says that she loves it. Kelly plays and I ask her to play a louder softer here, as ‘we’re just at the beginning of the movie where Cinderella is quietly scrubbing the kitchen singing to herself’. I suggest that she’s just daydreaming and isn’t that excited yet. I remind Kelly that the pedal will magnify the sound, so she should aim for the bass notes most of all. I say that she can move off the C for the C7 chord if it’s too stretchy. Kelly starts again, and I coach her with textural balance, bass definition and pedal. I remind Kelly to use preparatory up movement to create a louder bass.
Lesson 16: 8 June 2014

NA

Lesson 17: 10 June 2014

NA

Lesson 18: 19 June 2014

Reviewed 29 September 2016

- Kelly tells me that she got Distinction + for her technique exam and what some of the other students achieved. Jean suggests that some students don’t like scales and I say that I find them interesting. Jean asks Kelly if she likes scales and she shakes her head no. We laugh. I show Kelly and Jean some photos of famous pianists on the computer. She puts up the music for Chopin and I ask her if she’d like some help. Kelly shows me where on the score, pointing to the A Major section. I sit and demonstrate suggesting that it’s good that she has done quite a bit with cross rhythms before. I ask Kelly why cross rhythms – ‘to make it sound improvisatory’. I ask Kelly to start with the basics of where the hands coincide on the beat and demonstrate the right hand in triple time. I remind Kelly that anything is possible, and she knows that now, referring to the cross rhythms in the Mozart Concerto. I write in the fingering and beat subdivisions. I say that the sound is probably the most important thing, demonstrating the melodic line; Kelly plays. I write in the phrasing here and Kelly plays again. I complement her, saying, ‘Wow you’re really getting good at your sound isn’t she?’ Jean agrees. I say that the next step will be to ‘get your technique sorted out’ by doing scales and Bach, perhaps Haydn. I show her a little of the D Major one (Grade 7). I demonstrate, asking Kelly to add in the bass note now. She does well and I say, ‘very good girl’, and then point out the ‘pp’ marking, referring to the previous ‘con forza’ section. Using expressive gesture and narration, I point out the contrast between forceful drama of the previous section and the dreamy middle section. Kelly is coughing again (into her elbow). I suggest that’s why Chopin uses cross rhythms, to create a dreamy effect. I suggest to coincide the top note of the left hand, asking Kelly to notice how I ‘brush’ the notes. Kelly does well, and I say that we will use the thumb for each of these left-hand notes. I say that I wouldn’t do too much more than that for now. I ask Kelly to identify the A major chord in the left hand here, and I write them into the score. I say that the colour changes when playing in F# minor, and
I narrate this as I play. I help her with fingering in the ‘easier’ bars, cautioning her to get the rhythm correct here. We try 5-4 with the top notes of the sixths, but it’s too big, so she goes back to 5-5. I ask her to voice the top notes, working on the knuckle shape of the fifth finger. I suggest that the joint will develop eventually, though tone and pedal is probably more important at this stage. I say that Horowitz (mentioned earlier) was famous for playing with flat fingers, so deviations from the norm are possible. I review some more fingering, trying a few options that might or might not suit Kelly’s hand. We move on to the F# minor phrases, and we experiment with some options here; I write these in. I coach Kelly to roll to the left (‘pull you along with a string’) saying, ‘It’s almost like you roll up and bring your elbow as well’. I remind Kelly not to reach for the bottom note as this tends to tighten the thumb muscle and makes it shorter. We work backwards, adding notes into the overall gesture as I encourage Kelly to ‘roll around the hill’. I tell Kelly to start accelerating the speed of the gesture towards the last two or three notes in order to cover the intervallic distance. She continues to experiment and I ask her to notice how the movement produces a lovely, rounded sound. I then ask Kelly to ‘hang on’ to the bottom note, before rolling back to the right. I say that there is a bit of practice required there, adding ‘if you use movement, it will help you shape it as well as making it easier to play’; Kelly nods. I say that these pieces are too big to stretch, so gesture is imperative, otherwise the piece is ‘too big’. I show Kelly Chopin’s Etude in F minor Op. 12 to demonstrate this point. I say that it’s a grade 10 piece, and that the piece is impossible to play without studying the underlying movement. I ask Kelly to show me how the introduction is going and she plays hands together. It’s hesitant and there are many wrong notes, which I help her to correct. As the hands span wider apart, I remind Kelly to lean forward so as to align her elbows with the notes. I ask her to play the right hand downward chromatic run on page one, suggesting that she will eventually use pronation when turning the fourth finger over, but ‘for now can you rock and roll?’ referring to the top three or four notes. I say, ‘good girl’ as she copies me with an extreme pronation to the left, rolling onto the top of the right hand. I demonstrate, asking her to add the thumb, and then the following G#, suggesting it will probably be a bit easier now: ‘the movement comes from the elbow … lift your elbow up and the forearm pronates’. Kelly does well and while demonstrating in the air, I ask Kelly what she will need to do when she wants to pronate (lift the elbow). I demonstrate further using a sticky note pad on the top of my hand; it falls off as I
pronate. I caution her against stiffening the muscles in the forearm while doing so, asking Kelly to feel my forearm to check for undue tension. I remind Kelly to align herself behind the notes when in the extreme registers, so as to avoid any stretching or twisting. I say, ‘That’s pretty good actually, I definitely feel that you will get there’. Kelly says, ‘maybe’. I add, ‘I think you will. You wanted to do it … you must do it’ and she laughs. I ask Kelly to stand and I demonstrate how the opening trill is usually executed, trying a few options and saying that I will listen to a few recordings to check. I ask Kelly to start using the pedal (she hasn’t been yet). I play the introduction, saying that without pedal, it will sound quite dry. I teach Kelly about ‘direct pedal’ and then ask Kelly what the top notes are, which we want to hear more clearly. I coach Kelly further with the pedal and fingering (at least one hand legato here). We move on to improving the voicing and knuckle shape of the right hand fifth finger, and I ask Kelly to support the side of the right hand with the left hand. I say, ‘As you fall, support that joint and have a rounded tip’. I ask Kelly to take away her left hand and if it’s possible to move the right hand in any further. I ask her to flatten out the left side of the right hand and become very excited when she achieves a balanced hand shape. ‘Whoa! That’s it!’ I reiterate that she needs to round out the fifth finger, otherwise the hand will collapse and twist and ‘you won’t get a clean sound; it will be hard for you to voice’. She plays the first chord again – ‘Oh wow! That’s awesome, that’s a breakthrough’. Kelly smiles at Jean and I say, ‘That’s the best hand position I’ve seen in a year and a half’. Kelly and Jean laugh. I say, ‘I knew it would happen eventually … you’ve just got to do one thing at a time’. We move to the next two chords, taking the top notes in a down/up gesture, dropping fast. I ask Kelly to then add C# and G# to the first chord. I then suggest that she could omit the G# for now, and spend time practising C#-B and F#-A for now. I say, ‘Without that free fall, it’s unlikely you’ll get a sigh’ (I sing and gesture). I ask Kelly to put the G# back in, and I saw that it sort of complicates things a little. I suggest that she take it out again for now. We move to the last few chords of the bar, and I ask Kelly to review the tied notes, legato and fingering (F double sharp with fourth finger). I ask her to play the last two chords, getting the left hand to support the knuckles of the right hand. It is tricky for her, but she is ‘coming along’. I remind her that, ‘the further in you are, the easier it will be’, but then I suggest she move back and try that option. The take away is that she should keep experimenting to find the optimal shape for her hand. I say, ‘The keys are very long, and you don’t have to stay in one position, you
can use all of the key surface’. I suggest that youngsters are often taught to stay on the edge of the key, but I love it when they are comfortable ‘inside the keys’, as this often precludes twisting in the early stages of learning. I summarise this week’s tasks for Kelly and I ask her if she has been to the end of page two (yes). She says that she has started on the right hand for page three. I ask her if she would like some input in terms of fingering here (yes). I sit down and experiment briefly at a quick tempo. I say that most of the scales are in E Major and we talk about the relative relationship between C# minor and E Major. I write in fingering, ‘pretending’ it’s E Major for the most part. I point out the 18/35 notes for the fioritura, and demonstrate the flexibility of these. I say that these passages are decorative rather than ‘exercisey’. I give Kelly a couple of fingering options in a couple of spots and I continue writing in suggested fingering. I mention that one of my other students plays this but she is in Grade 12 (17 years old) – Kelly is in Grade 4 (9 years old). We laugh and I continue writing in the right-hand fingering in small amounts after singing and ‘checking’ it on the piano. It takes quite some time. I caution that the scales at the end are usually played rather clumsily, and need to be ‘beautiful’, and I demonstrate using a glissando (like a harp). When I pretend to poke the harp notes, Jean and Kelly laugh. I say, ‘We’ll just keep chipping away at it … it’s a big piece. It probably won’t be playable for quite a while, so you’ll just have to work up to that’. I use the house analogy, building from the ground up, rather than simply ‘redecorating’. I suggest that it’s not a hard piece to play, but it does take time to learn it. I ask Kelly to show me how her Debussy is going. She starts from the return of the main theme. I help her correct a few incorrect notes and I note that, ‘it’s a bit lumpy’. Jean and Kelly laugh. I say that she is ‘landing’ on the thumb, when a slow movement is required to the left and a quick movement to the right. We start to build in these details using add-a-beat technique. I keep encouraging Kelly to roll more quickly to the left allowing her to ‘brush’ the thumb. I ask Kelly to play the top note ‘on the way to the left’, rather than playing the note and then moving to the left. In effect, I demonstrate and say, ‘play to the left … collect’ without reaching for the thumb. I ask her to say, ‘play to the left … collect’ three times. I show Kelly how my upper arm is involved in the process too. I say that it’s starting to transform now due to knowledge rather than repetition. I suggest that people often get it eventually as people often ‘fiddle around until it feels right’ during practice. I reiterate how important it is to play the note/s while moving. I suggest that most of this piece is like that, ‘like watching tennis … you look as they take the shot’.
I suggest that it’s a tricky piece to understand hence it is a harder piece. We talk about the ‘jumps’ between grades, and how it can be easy to underestimate the time required for good preparation. Jean talks about how people ‘stop’ in high school. I suggest that Grade 7 is probably the hardest grade of all. We talk about Holly and how the tablets she needs to take make her feel sick. I ask Kelly if she can play an octave (not really). I talk about the pieces for Kelly’s Grade 7 exam and then look them up on YouTube. I start with Bach’s *Prelude and Fugue in G Major*, Book 2 (Angela Hewitt). I suggest that it may be a little ‘big’ so I play the *Prelude* from *Partita in G Major*. Jean and I both say that the *Prelude and Fugue* is beautiful. I say that it’s important that Kelly chooses something that she likes. When I ask her whether she likes that one, she seems reticent. I play the *Prelude and Fugue in D Major*, Book 1 and ask Kelly what she thinks of that. Jean seems a bit worried. I show Kelly the B-flat Major one from Book 1 (the one that Khoa played). Jean says that I should go to the shop before it closes. Kelly says that she likes (maybe) the second one and then I play the C minor one from Book 1 – both Kelly and Jean seem excited, but I caution them against the inherent ‘boredom’ of the unchanging rhythm. Kelly seems to really like the Fugue. Kelly reminds me that she also likes the D Major from Book 1 and I find it again. She says that she likes the C minor one more. I also suggest a study and we all laugh. Kelly seems to settle with the C minor Book 1. I say that it will be necessary not to squeeze and stretch, but rather throw and roll.

*Lesson 19: 21 June 2014*

Reviewed 29 September 2016

- Jean comes in saying that it’s very hot outside. Kelly has brought the technical workbook with her and we open up to see the similarities between Grade 6 and 7 (D-flat Major is new). Jean says we don’t have to worry too much, but I say yes we do; we laugh. I go to the bathroom and get a drink; Kelly and Jean talk to each other in Korean off camera. Kelly adjusts the stool, and they are laughing and smiling. Kelly finds the page that she needs and starts D-flat Major with the right hand. Jean says that she needs to think and listen more carefully as there are unwanted accents. She plays a few times and then swaps to the left hand. Jean says to Kelly that she seems a bit close to the black keys and stretching. Kelly smiles when I come back in. I ask her what she’s been doing (D-flat Major). I say that D-flat Major is probably my favourite. I ask Kelly how many flats (5) what the relative minor is, but she forgets,
though I think she miscounted the descending semitones. I explain the musical tick or cross (diminished fifth). Kelly seems to enjoy it. Kelly plays right-hand legato and then staccato. I wind the chair up further for her, reminding her to be higher rather than lower. When descending, I ask Kelly not to ‘reach’ for all notes, but rather stand up on the fourth finger. I caution her against reaching with three and four – ‘aim for four and then three will fall into place. It’s a small adjustment, but it does make a big difference to the tone. I explain to Kelly that reaching for the notes will cause undue tension in the forearm and I get her to feel my forearm. I say that it gets very tiring for the arm to do that a lot. I demonstrate, showing one note at a time, rather than trying to cover all the notes. She plays the left hand for D-flat Major legato. As she plays the last two octaves, I encourage her elbow to sit higher and pronate her forearm inwards. I say, ‘As you turn (pronate) try not to grip any muscles inside the wrist’. I get her to do the last octave a few times, saying, ‘no squeezing there’ and ‘that’s better’. I make some straining sounds with my voice, saying, ‘lift your elbow and rotate more’ (instead). Kelly coughs and nods. Kelly plays the bottom octave again and shows a big improvement, so I ask her to play two octaves from the bottom. I ask Kelly to rotate the thumb under without turning the muscles of the upper arm off – ‘very good’. I ask Kelly what happens when she turns her upper arm muscles off, and interesting, she turns them off for me, and her elbow drops. I ask her what happens to the thumb when the elbow drops (she drops) – ‘you’ll get a bump’. I go on to say that it probably doesn’t matter so much when the tempo is slow, but it does when the tempo is fast. I demonstrate at the second piano, both slow and fast, and with turning the upper arm off and on. I say that the big muscles in the upper arms can cope with it, whereas squeezing in the forearm and wrist isn’t a good idea. I refer to weightlifters and their big muscles. I turn to Grade 7 material and I say that Neil was really envious of Kelly doing Grade 7, as he’s doing Grade 6. I look for new material in the Grade 7, referring to staccato double octaves. I ask Kelly to try, but she can only barely reach. I get Kelly to ask me a random double octave scale, which I do (C harmonic and C chromatic). We turn to D-flat Major arpeggios, p. 96 and refer to the D-flat chord. Kelly plays the right hand and I guide her arm and trunk. She plays the left hand, referring to the book for the fingering, and I guide her arm and elbow towards the bottom register. I say that octaves might best be left for 6 months of so. I refer to first inversion and Kelly does these in harp. She plays the left hand in first and then second inversions, and I remind her not to reach, but move. I adjust her head,
spine and elbow, and liken these to being a ballet dancer at the bar; ‘you need a lot of height’. Kelly says that she doesn’t like ballet, and I ask why not. Jean says that when she was around 3 years old Kelly said, ‘Mommy, I don’t want to tippy-toe, it’s too tiring’. We all laugh. I ask Kelly to use the right hand in first and second inversion, and I remind her to push both feet into the floor and align her forearm and elbow with the top note. I point out that there is ‘a fair bit of stretching going on there’, referring to Kelly reaching for the notes. I suggest that down the track, when the arpeggios are faster, it will probably be a bit easier to ‘roll’ through the notes. We move to diminished and dominant sevenths, which I demonstrate (she hasn’t done these before), and I give her a plan. I ask Jean to get some more ‘markers’ for Kelly’s technical workbook and we laugh. Jean says that she is Kelly’s administrator and scheduler too. I give Kelly the Bach Prelude and Fugue in C Minor – two copies. Both Kelly and Jean find the coloured copy amazing! I go through the Fugue in B flat, talking about the subject in orange, the answer in green, both of which sound identical though in different keys. I say that’s what Fugues are, ‘all the voices are woven together’. I go on to demonstrate, making the answer louder than the countersubject, etc. I demonstrate the subject of Kelly’s fugue with the left hand, before continuing with the answer and countersubject. I also point out the codetta and the appearance of the subject in the bass. I say that fugues are great study pieces. I ask Kelly to try some of the right hand, and ask her what key we are in (C minor). I refer to the ascending 3 semitones to find relative Majors. Both Jean and I tell Kelly to memorise these. I refer to ‘picture a sheep’ and how easy it is now, but that was not always the case. ‘Sheep have wool … C Minor has three flats’. I help Kelly with the fingering, writing it into the score. Kelly plays the left hand. The answer appears and I refer to it by name. I say that ‘fugue’ means to fly, and I use expressive gesture to demonstrate this concept. I say that it’s a very intellectual kind of piece, and the challenge lies with balancing the volume of each voice. I say that the coordination is the challenge with the prelude and demonstrate a little with hands together. I ask Kelly to watch how my arms move to help the fingers find the notes. I say (and demonstrate) that there will be a lot of add-a-beat technique used in this piece. I say that there are 24 bars, so basically 24 patterns to master, and coordinate. I say that most people play the first part well, and it gradually gets worse. We all laugh. I ask Kelly to play the right hand and she seems to see the challenge ahead, in terms of not stretching between notes. I work her with different fingering options, first the right hand and then the left hand. I
ask Kelly to play the hands together, and then ask her how many Major keys and how many minor keys there are. I tell Kelly a little about the Well Tempered Klavier, with Bach sitting in his house writing these pieces in 1722. I show Kelly the index and how the keys work, and then tell her about Book 2 in 1744. I mention that only a couple of them are Grade 7 level, as most are very difficult in terms of voicing and tonal tidiness. I show and tell Kelly a few that I have played and a few that my students have played. We move on to bar 2 with the left hand, and work out a couple of options for the right hand. I ask Kelly what it feels like, but she is undecided, so I decide for her, after trying all options. I write it in the score, saying that for another student, it may not be ideal. We move to the third bar, trying a couple of different options. I ask Kelly to write in the fingering, which she does. I give her a copy of the Haydn Divertimenti and ask where Sam is (working). Apparently, the staff are giving him a hard time, as Sam finds it hard to be tough. Jean likes that Kelly is writing in the fingering. I mention that holidays are coming up and it’s time for a rest. I suggest that Kelly could try to write in some fingering herself and they seem to think that it’s a good idea. I show Kelly the flags of the world, and I ask her to point to the Korean flag.

Lesson 20: 29 June 2014

Reviewed 29 September 2016

- I mention to be careful because the camera isn’t steady. I laugh because Jean has organised Kelly’s technical workbook. I say, ‘Your Mum must want you to do well’ and we laugh. I say that Kelly has a lovely jacket and we talk about the school dance. It’s school holidays at the moment. Jean says that Kelly is very busy, even busier than during school term. I ask Kelly what she’s been doing and she says, ‘practising’. Jean says that she has a morning and afternoon schedule. I suggest that we do some technical work. Jean says that there is a lot of work to cover. I say that we could start with arpeggios and I ask for F# Major. Kelly finds it in the book and I ask her if she has tried it already (yes). She plays the right hand and then the left-hand two octaves. I remind Kelly to contact the black notes while pushing her fingertip slightly forward in order to round out the distal joints. I suggest that Kelly could do octave-by-octave, or two-octave by two-octave so that we can cover more material in the lesson. She plays right-hand first inversion and I remind Kelly not to stretch the right-hand fingers, lift the elbow and pronate inwards. I ask Kelly to feel my forearm activate
when my fingers extend, and I advise against this position for inordinate periods of
time. We move to left hand first inversion. We move to second inversion right hand
and left hand, and I adjust Kelly’s left forearm and elbow. I adjust her thumb too as
it’s quite stiff. I say to Kelly that it’s better if she lifts her elbow and pronate more
rather than squeeze and stretch the thumb under. I mention that F# Major is probably
the hardest one and Kelly’s hand is smaller than mine. I ask if V7 – I sounds familiar
(yes) and then I label it for Kelly. I ask Kelly what dominant means, but I end up
answering for her as she takes a while. We review the technical names of the scale
degrees; she has done them before. Step by step, I explain how to build the dominant
seventh chord of F# with Kelly. We work out the dominant seventh of C Major
together, with Kelly doing most of the work. I review the process with Kelly and she
nods. I write in the actual notes into her technical workbook, demonstrate the
fingering and then Kelly plays the right hand. I ask her if it’s tricky (a bit). We move
to the first inversion and Kelly is quick to tell me the starting note. The second
inversion is next, and I show her how to start with the fingering derived from root
position. Kelly continues and I coach her with the fingering and top notes; it’s slow
but accurate. I talk about why I like using non-traditional fingering here, due to the
wide stretch between fingers 2, 3 and 4, especially for a young student. I sit and
demonstrate root, first, second and third inversions with hands together and how I
might practise them. I say, ‘Welcome to the world of dominant sevenths. The other
world is diminished sevenths’. I ask Kelly to tick off what she knows and has
practised. We move to the diminished seventh of F# in the book. I ask her what note
she would commence on and why, and I explain, writing this in the technical
workbook (a series of minor thirds built on the leading note of the key that you are
in). I take her through F# diminished, building the chord step by step with the right
hand. She practises in pairs and then swaps to the left hand. I remind Kelly to keep
her elbow high in the lower register. She has some difficulty so I coach her. I smile
and say that her fifth finger shape is improving. I do a diminished seventh
demonstration in a few different contexts; Kelly nods. I say, ‘Enjoy the journey!’ I say
that I can’t remember when I learnt diminished sevenths. I ask Kelly if it’s exciting
learning new things (yes) … sometimes tiring? (no). We laugh because I tell Kelly
and Jean that Andrew said that he likes piano because you learn things and get
entertained. I point out that there are only three kinds of diminished seventh chords to
learn, as they ‘overlap’. I ask Kelly how many dominant sevenths there are, and also
arpeggios, but she isn’t sure. I say, ‘If you can understand the movements behind the notes, you’ll always be able to do it, even if you don’t practise much’. I ask Kelly to think of how her whole body contributes to the ease of the playing, not just the fingers. I give Kelly a new piece – Mozart’s *Rondo in D Major*, saying that it’s suitable for her hand size. I sit down and demonstrate a little, mentioning that my student Mediha used to play this piece too. I play it quite slowly and then at tempo for a couple of passages. I ask Kelly why it’s called *Rondo* and she seems to know. Jean asks me how many pages (7). I suggest that when she is a bit bigger, she could try some Beethoven. We talk about the pieces that she will play and the longer-term plan. I remind Kelly of *The Clown* and how far she has come. I give Kelly a copy of the highlighted Bach score. Kelly says that she has highlighters at home. I ask Kelly to read it, as I will refer to the terms as she is learning the *Fugue*. We refer to the term ‘subject’ as we look and play from the score – I show Kelly where the subject appears and what key it’s in. Then I do the same for the term ‘answer’. I refer to real fugue/tonal fugue and give the definition and example of each, referring to the subject and answer here. I refer to the yellow episode, what their function is, and where the material is derived from. I say that J. S. Bach is one of the true geniuses of Western Music, and talk about the fact that they were probably teaching pieces. I say that they are very important pieces, and while mathematical, they are very beautiful. I ask Kelly to play the opening statement of the subject, and thereafter I coach her with the gestural aspects of the articulatory detail. I also start to write in the fingering, but suggest she transfer it from the older copy. I experiment with the fingering at the end of the subject, and then suggest to Kelly 432123. I mention that the fingering written in is very minimal usually, and often not ideal. I caution Kelly not to drop down on the thumb. I identify and play the countersubject in two different places. I say that it’s very clever. I ask Kelly to work on each subject, answer, and countersubject, matching the tonal shape and articulation. I ask her to concentrate on hands separately. I ask to hear the *Prelude* and Kelly plays the right hand. Kelly asks for advice on a particular bar, so I offer an alternative fingering. I remind Kelly to keep an eye on where she is sitting (more to the left), so as not to twist the hand. I ask her to show me both alternatives, suggesting that it is difficult to know unless it’s played faster. I sit and play both at a faster tempo and suggest that she change it. I say that we will leave the old fingering there, but add the new fingering too. I work with Kelly to round out her fifth finger, asking that she take a ‘mental picture’, noticing where the
fifth finger sits on the keyboard (in) and where the thumb sits on the keyboard (out) and notice that the hand faces the left corner of the room. I caution her to be very careful with this piece, as it can be the wrong choice if not studied carefully from the beginning. I add, ‘the more twisting there is, the harder it will be to coordinate’. I sit and demonstrate how the hand adjusts laterally, and how the fingers sit at different places on the keyboard, some further in, some further out. I say that this piece is not often played during examinations, as it’s too hard. I say, ‘For most kids, it’s too hard’. I caution her against twisting, and demonstrate a stiff version and a version that employs rotary movement of the forearm. I point out why these are different and ask Kelly which one sounds better. It leads me to say that these adjustments will result in a better overall tone and increased technical efficiency. I say, ‘Most people stretch, squeeze and push’, and then point out the arms are usually doing different things and are at different heights, despite the perpetual nature of the rhythm. I ask Kelly to go slowly with this piece and develop her technique. I say, ‘Technique is having the right efficiency of movement so that you’re not twisting and therefore squeezing … once you start doing that, the sound won’t be any good’.

Lesson 21: 12 July 2014

Reviewed 30 September 2016

- I ask Kelly if she has had harp today (yes). Apparently the teacher comes to the house now and I say to Kelly that he must think she is special. I move the chairs around and Jean asks me how my holiday was. I say that I went to ‘Planet of the Apes’ last night and Jean says that they like to watch cartoons with Kelly. I ask Kelly how her progress has been and she nervously says ‘good’ while looking at Jean. I ask Kelly what she’d like to look at first (Debussy). We talk about the general knowledge information that I sent Kelly, mentioning that I want Kelly to study it early in the learning process. I say that the Debussy piece is from the Impressionist period, and I talk through the characteristics of that style. I also demonstrate a couple of other pieces by Debussy. I mention the Impressionist painters and suggest that they could look it up on the Internet. I suggest that Kelly could listen to some other pieces by Debussy for homework. I suggest that Kelly needs two lessons a week, but they have cello on Tuesdays. I say that it’s better to have more time to do things well rather than rush. Kelly plays quite well until section 2 where she starts to rush. She slows down during the return of the main theme and the playing loses confidence and momentum.
Nonetheless, the ‘daydream’ section is now known and quite fluent and she has the notes all the way to the end. I smile and say, ‘That’s terrific’. I ask Kelly if she enjoys playing the piece (yes). I encourage her to ask questions, but she seems reluctant to do so. I say that the piece has improved immensely, despite the rhythm being a bit off at times, perhaps due to her being a bit cautious. I say that it seems Kelly is getting around the notes without undue physical strain. I ask again if there is any part that she finds awkward, but she doesn’t answer. Jean asks Kelly if the chair is too close and Kelly agrees. I say that it’s important not to be shy and to adjust the seating position. I ask Kelly if she’s tried sitting a little to the left, and she moves. I ask her to see what it feels like now and she starts playing. I ask her to move to the right about 10 cm and she plays again. I ask her what she notices (it’s harder), so I ask her to take time to sit where it’s going to be easiest to play well. I say that it’s ok to adjust, even after starting (not like the old days). I say, ‘If you’re not comfortable, the piece won’t sound right’. I ask Kelly to move to the left and begin again, and then a little more to the left. I ask her what key her belly bottom is in front of (E), and ask her to sit there no matter what piano she is playing on. I suggest that if necessary, she can always tilt on her hipbones. I ask her to add the tied G at the beginning of the return theme. I suggest that Kelly partial practise and I show her how, ‘otherwise you’re repeating all this without really needing to’. Kelly and I take turns in the partial practice, with both hands gesturing towards each other. I encourage Kelly to free-fall with the right hand, and then add-a-note to the left. I sing and write the gestural choreography into the score, suggesting, ‘It almost goes like this doesn’t it’. Kelly plays again and I smile, gesture and say, ‘See that snakey movement? So make your arm do that and it’ll be much easier’. We continue to partial practise together at the two pianos, and then return back to add-a-note technique in the direction of travel. I say that to Kelly that she has probably done a bit of this here before, but she’s unsure and looks at Jean, who says, ‘She practise a lot’. I say, ‘Yeah, I can tell’ and suggest she does a little more directional practice here. I ask Kelly, ‘Why is it important to do that?’ but I can’t make out her answer. Nonetheless, I agree and add, ‘So that it doesn’t become a strain’. I demonstrate using fingers only and point out that it becomes very tiring. I say to Kelly, ‘You don’t actually do that, but in a couple of spots you do and this is one of them’ and she nods. This time I demonstrate partial practice using add-a-beat from the beginning of that line up to the cadence in C Major that we have just been doing together. I say, ‘Can you do that for me?’ and Kelly starts. She does quite ok,
and I say, ‘Not too bad, it’s all right … not that good’. I suggest that she repeat each gestural fragment at least a couple of times and ‘experiment with the movement’. She does the first fragment multiple times and she agrees that it sounds good. We move to the next one and I verbalise which direction the notes are going in, writing in the score. Kelly experiments and does well. I say, ‘When you have exactly the right movement, you’ll have exactly the right sound, and it will feel exactly the right level of comfort. As soon as one of them becomes a bit stiff and you don’t move further enough, it will stop, it will sort of sound this this …’ I demonstrate where the notes become a bit inaudible. I continue, ‘… you’ll have some sounds that don’t come out properly. When you’ve got everything working (I demonstrate), it will come out really confident and clean’. I suggest to Kelly that she continue the chaining technique, but advise her to make each gestural fragment clear, comfortable and confident, rather than ‘going through the motions’. I ask Jean and she says that she has been doing that, and I say that is why it has improved. I ask her to continue to do this type of practice. Jean says that when Kelly plays the whole piece, she tends to stop, but when she practises small amounts she is ok. I agree, and suggest that Kelly then chain two gestural fragments together. She does well, so I ask her to add three (good), and then four (good). I say to Kelly that she is doing very well there. I caution Kelly against playing the whole piece and to continue to partial practice in this way, but I think that I’m not seeing that Kelly hasn’t been playing the whole piece yet. I say to Kelly if when she is playing larger sections, if there is anything that doesn’t feel comfortable, it’s a sign to break it down into gestural fragments before chaining those fragments back together. I say that she is doing well, and to keep checking for a feeling of comfort. Kelly says, ‘Yes Mark’. We move on, and I mention the tied D, going into the second section. I ask Kelly to get the ascending broken E chords really exact. She plays it again and I ask her where the problem is. I say that it sounds like she’s ‘a tiny bit scared’ going from root position to first inversion. I ask, ‘So what are you going to do?’ before launching into partial practice. Kelly copies me. I say, ‘Part of being expressive is being self-expressive, and usually people who are self-expressive are self-confident … so, if you can get really good with the notes, you’ll be more expressive’. I ask Kelly if that makes sense, but before she can answer, I demonstrate with slight hesitation in the sound and say that if there is a mistake, try and sort it out the best you can. I go on to say that a performance is never completely perfect, but during your preparation you plan as best you can for complete comfort.
and confidence. Together, we partial practise the gestural fragments and I encourage Kelly to tilt forwards to ‘show the audience’ what is happening, and that ‘you’re connected to the piece’. Before the last gestural fragment, I ask Kelly to take a big deep breath, which she does. I then demonstrate chaining the last two fragments together – ‘that’s lovely’. I then chain all fragments together and Kelly copies me. She plays a second time (good) and then I ask her to play it without worrying. She doesn’t seem to be able to deliver it cleanly so we repeat the process of the last two and then last three fragments. She does better so I demonstrate the gestural activity of the left hand, showing Kelly how it prepares with a preparatory movement. It takes her a little while to orientate herself around the notes, but does well when she gets there. She correctly identifies the E-Major chord correctly, and I say, ‘After you’ve done all of your hard work (partial practising), let go of your arms and let it roll out of you’. She does much better this time; about 90% clear now. I ask her, ‘Was there any part that felt uncomfortable?’ (no). ‘Was there any part that was a little bit off? (I don’t know). I seem surprised so I ask her to play it again and listen closely. I ask Kelly to listen hard, but keep moving too. Kelly keeps trying, and while it’s good, she seems to stumble more now. I say that this often happens – the more people listen the worse it can become. I ask Kelly to play again but without listening so closely, and paradoxically, she seems to play more accurately and clear this time. We both stand up and start to walk while talking. I encourage Kelly to keep moving while she is listening when playing too. She sits down and plays very well this time. I say, ‘Very good Kelly. That’s a little exercise … usually when people start moving and connecting to the piece, they stop listening, and usually when they’re listening very hard, they go a bit stiff’. I suggest that we move on, but not before I summarise and place a couple of stickers on the parts for Kelly to partial practise. I dramatise and say, ‘because it’s such a fast piece, your ears need to be like a dog … they need to be really listening, but you still keep moving’. I dramatise the concept further, summarising the above. Jean clarifies that Kelly should do the important parts, then play the whole thing, and ‘keep mixing’. I agree and say, ‘Yeah, keep mixing it up’. I notice that Kelly has a Band-Aid on top of her hand and I check to see if she had been caned for not practising enough. Jean laughs. Kelly explains that she scratched herself on the harp’s top strings. I tell Kelly that in the olden days, children were canned for playing the wrong note. Jean says that her teacher was like that and she laughs. I laugh and say, ‘Imagine how many more people would be now playing the piano if
they hadn’t been caned’. I point out a missing G and Kelly fixes it up. In the lead up to the middle section, where there are descending semiquavers, I ask Kelly how she might practise that. I sit down and start to do add-a-beat technique, and Kelly copies. As she plays, I ask her to ‘give it to me’, meaning throw the arms towards me to the left. I ask her to smile and take a preparatory movement. We move to the next gestural fragment from beats 2 to 3, and I encourage Kelly to move her left hand towards her as she plays. We then move to beats 3 to 4, and then chain beats 1 and 2 to 3. After this I ask Kelly to copy me in pairing all the notes together quickly, overlapping each semiquaver in turn. Kelly tries again, and does find it a little tricky. I ask her which pair is the most awkward. She says, ‘I don’t know’, so I answer the pair that connects the right to the left hand. I demonstrate and Kelly copies, and then I starting adding notes around that pair back in. She does well in terms of clarity and evenness now, and I ask her to ‘do a U’ with her left hand. I explain that such exaggerated movement isn’t necessary when ‘playing’ the piece, but during practice it can be useful in order for the motor system to learn the gestural choreography. Kelly does very well, and I say that that is kind of practice that this section needs, and I suggest that she apply that idea to the next two beats. I say to Kelly, ‘Don’t leave it to luck’. I say that she probably knows that that section isn’t so good yet, but doing this kind of practice will give her results sooner. I sit and dramatise ‘aimless’ practice and then show how to practise the last couple of beats in that section where there is a shift in the right hand. I do ‘a couple of mistakes’ so that it’s ‘realistic’, saying to Kelly that results don’t always come quickly, but if you have a strategy, you can ‘build it back up from where the hard bit is’. I say that the whole piece is challenging, and you can’t get through all the challenges one by one. I look at the music and I see that Jean has sticky-taped all the sides together neatly. I say, ‘Your Mummy spends a lot of time doesn’t she? Wow, I feel impressed!’ I ask Kelly if she has learnt the Mozart *Rondo*, and she has learnt the first page. I ask her to play it – ‘Let’s have a listen’. She plays well. I say, ‘Even when you’re learning it, can you put make-up on?’ Kelly is confused, so I say, ‘You can put make-up on your piece’. I demonstrate with expressive tonal shape, and say ‘I want you to slow down a bit and put more of Kelly into it … don’t leave it until the dress rehearsal, put some make-up on now’. I play again from the beginning with more expression. I ask Kelly if she can be more excitable and extroverted when playing, more like she was when we went to dinner recently – ‘I want you to be a bit more self-expressive … Be a bit more bubbly, like you are at dinner. Don’t be quite
so subservient, like is that ok Mark? Don’t worry too much, I’m not going to shout at you’. Kelly tries again, and I say, ‘Well Done, OK? You’ve got more mistakes than before, but that’s better playing. I want you to start getting into the habit of not waiting until its perfect before wearing make-up. Put make-up on as you go … you’ll actually improve a lot faster’. I ask Kelly if she understands and she nods yes. I say that this is not the type of piece where you will need to do a lot of drills. I say that the Debussy is like a construction site, and we haven’t put much make-up on yet. I ask Kelly to start putting make-up on the Mozart now and she nods when I ask her if she understands. I say that different pieces go through different stages of learning and I want her to start making good sound now. I talk about how the opening is similar in terms of balance to the Mozart Concerto. When Kelly plays the opening of Rondo with a full tone due to free-fall, I clap and say, ‘Hey, that’s it … you’ve got lovely lipstick on now’. I demonstrate again and say that it’s like someone winks at you. I play it flat again without any tone. I ask Kelly to not just be expressive, but be self-expressive, referring to how bubbly she was at dinner. I say, ‘we can get rid of the mistakes through drills, but self-expression is not something you can teach someone. You can encourage them, but it needs to come from you’. We move on to the next two phrases, explaining that there are few different movements there, and I help Kelly group the notes into gestures according to the upbeat notes. Alter she plays the scale the joins the two statements together, I say, ‘Oh that’s lovely, see now you’re being self-expressive (Kelly smiles) … I can feel your body connecting to the sound, and then that will connect to the audience (Kelly smiles and nods) … If you just play the piano though, people won’t get it. You’ve always got to be reaching further than what’s on the page. It’s not just a scale that goes down and then up … it’s music that goes up and down (I use expressive prosody and gesture here). I can teach you how to make it sound expressive … can you get softer Kelly as you go down and then louder as you go up?’ (Kelly plays) I say, ‘that’s expression, but it’s not self-expression. Now play it going louder and softer, but put yourself behind every note … put a little bit of yourself behind every note’. Kelly plays again and it does sound different. I say, ‘Yes! That feels more like I can hear your personality through your playing now’. Kelly nods. I go on to say that she’ll never win competitions, not that that’s the be all and end all of everything. ‘Kids who win competitions are the ones that can connect to the notes on a deeper level (Kelly nods). People call it talent, but I prefer to think of it as self-expression. It’s like you care about every note … every note is a friend of
yours. It’s like oh, these are my friends, I just love these little notes. Rather than, now my teacher told me to get softer and louder, and then I’ve got to move my arm like this (I dramatise using gesture). It’s very thinking. You’ve done enough of that sort of thing with me, like you know … we’ve done a lot of the movements and stuff. Now I want to take you to the next level, and you’ll do that by just opening up a little bit more. I think you’re really good though and by the way, winning competitions is not everything, but I’m just giving you an inside knowledge. Kids who win competitions, it’s called the X-Factor’. I mention the TV show and ask Kelly if she has watched it (no). I continue, ‘People go on there and they go, oh my god, you’re so gifted and talented! It’s not really that, they have a connection to the audience. The audience gets what’s happening, because the musician puts something of themselves into the piece – more than just getting louder and softer’. I play a little and then continue, ‘Every note rings and every note sounds like a gift, and if you can put that into your playing as early as possible in the learning process, you’ll have a better outcome. Yeah? (Kelly nods) It’s not something you can teach someone necessarily. You can encourage people to do it though, but it really has to come from you. You know, I’m quite a shy person, but I sort of turn it up a bit for the classes (I gesture), because I want you to learn that (Kelly nods)’. I dramatise a teaching scenario where I play and the student copies, with me saying ‘no’ in between each attempt. I say, ‘I want you to learn how to be expressive … self-expressive … because the way I teach is very self-expressive (Kelly nods). Rather than (deadpan voice and face), yes Kelly, I think you’re good at it, but you need more practice, OK?’ Jean chuckles and I smile. I then go on to suggest that despite this, the left hand does need more practice and I ask Kelly what a ‘duple feel’ means. She answers ‘two’ and I say, ‘Good … so make the piece feel in 2’s’. I conduct and sing, and ask her how we do that – ‘by using a magic wand! No’. I show Kelly how using gesture can create a LSSS LSSS over the eight left-hand quavers per bar. I say that no amount of self-expression will replace the need for practising. I explain to Kelly that we work on the mechanics – I sit and play, saying, ‘So I’m rotating on the thumb (quavers 4 and 8) so that I land faster (on quavers 1 and 4)’. I ask Kelly to imitate me and she does really well. I say, ‘that’s a purely mechanical thing. No amount of self-expression is going to cure that if you’re going …’ (I start to play the left hand with all quavers equal in volume and an expressive face’. Jean laughs. I continue, ‘… so we balance the technical with the expressive and the self-expressive, and you’ll get a really glorious result’. I demonstrate, asking
Kelly to notice how the second example ‘doesn’t move … it sounds like it’s stuck in one spot’. I demonstrate again, moving my trunk forwards with the apex of the first phrase. I do the same again, but this time while gesturing with my arms and I ask Kelly is she can imitate me. I ask her to pretend she is a bird, opening up her wings. Then I ask her to copy me as I tilt my head upwards too, saying, ‘Stretch your beak up … stretch up to the sky’. Kelly does well, but I can tell she is holding back, so I ask her to pretend she is a clown at a children’s party and you want everyone to laugh – ‘Go!’ Kelly does really well! I laugh and say, ‘that’s it! That’s what your playing needs a little bit more of at times’. I caution Kelly that even though she’s a hard worker, make sure you ‘don’t work yourself into the corner … you’ve got to be a musician who’s a hard worker … You’ve got to be a little bit sort of … (I pretend to be cheerful and a bit silly)’. I continue, ‘Yeah? (Kelly smiles and nods) The kids who can balance the two …’ I go on to say that Andrew is probably not as hard a worker as Kelly, but he is more extroverted in his playing, and Adrian is probably too much the other way. Jean laughs. I suggest that everyone can learn from each other. I suggest to Kelly, ‘you’re probably the hardest worker of all the kids that I teach. What you can do is be a little bit more childlike … a little bit more, yeah! Can I have noshi?’ I ask Kelly what the ice-cream that she likes is called (moshi) and then I play the Mozart while smiling and saying, ‘can I have moshi?’ in a childlike voice. I encourage Kelly to be a bit more like she was at dinner when she is playing. I say that I hope Kelly got something out of this lesson, and if she can take on board what I’m saying, the need for me to go through every bar and ‘inject personality’ into it will be dramatically reduced. I encourage her to start thinking a bit more for herself and say, ‘So if I’m playing this, what would Mark say?’ I dramatise a scenario where I’m Kelly practising and thinking, ‘Mmm, I wonder what I could do here. What would Mark say?’ I ask Kelly to notice how I’m writing in the score and using my head and body to create the sound. I explain to Kelly that because she’s got so many pieces on the go and because she is doing so well, ‘I’m trying to save you some time, and also encourage you to take more ownership in the self-expressive aspects of your playing. Not just expression, but self-expression. (Kelly nods) How can I make this piece sound like me? Mark will tell me what to do, but how can I make it sound like me, not Mark, me. I’d certainly like to be involved. (Jean laughs) As you teacher, I’d like to help you, but I’d like you to sort of think, ok, what would I (Kelly) do? You’re a smart kid, and I think you’re starting to get the hang of it now (Kelly nods)’. Jean
says, ‘Yeah, Kelly let go a little bit of the way you teach. It’s amazing that you point it out, I try to explain to her, but I don’t know how to explain’. I say, ‘what do you mean? Tell me, what you mean?’ Jean say, ‘I mean whenever I hear Kelly’s sound (yeah), even harp at the beginning she’s quite plain, like a kid playing (yeah). There’s a certain level, more than half way, she’s starting to put in herself, her way (yeah), but I think with piano, because when she was so young, the teacher was so strict, so sort of she’s not really, expressive, you know’. I say, ‘She’s a bit scared to … (yeah) yeah, I understand that’. Jean continues, ‘The harp is a bit better than piano for showing her style, but piano is getting really hard (yes), so I was keep telling her you should feel it, but I can’t I don’t know how to explain (yeah). In a way when you were teach that kind of thing I was, yeah that’s what I want to say!’ Jean laughs. I ask Kelly if she understands what I’m saying (yeah). I say, ‘so you’ve got to inject a little bit of Kelly behind every note, and if you do that, you’ll go further in your playing generally. You’ll start to play even better than what you are. As I said, you’re the hardest worker, but what you could develop more is your own sense of self-expression at every stage of the learning, not just when it’s concert time. (Kelly nods) But, when you compare where you were a year or two years ago it’s quite remarkable (Jean says amazing). There’s something still not quite right, and that’s what I think it is, to me’. Kelly nods. I remind Kelly to ‘listen and walk at the same time’, I caution her not to always listen to make sure it’s all perfect, and to be a little bit childlike too. I say, ‘If you can combine the two, your playing will really take off’. Kelly nods. I say that because she’s done Mozart before, she will ‘know’ a lot of what to do already. I encourage Kelly to ask herself questions as she is learning the piece. By looking at the articulation, I encourage her to question ‘what movements would I do? What gestures? How can I get the duple feel throughout the piece?’ Jean asks me which piece to prepare for the next lesson on Thursday and I suggest Chopin and Bach, and then the lesson following Mozart. I ask Kelly to aim to go further than learning the notes. I say, ‘I want you to start thinking, OK, now as a musician, what would I do? What would Mark do? What would I do? What would Mark and I do? If I (Kelly) was teaching this to someone, what would I say to them to encourage them to be expressive? What drills would I ask them to do to get rid of that pesky lump in the right hand? How would I … Oh! I’d do the chaining thing! I’d do directional practice’. I gesture and sing, dramatising add-a-group practice. I continue, ‘The same things will start coming up over and over, and the quicker you can catch on to that,
the further you’ll go. (Kelly nods) Obviously, you’ve had to be taught, because you
came from somewhere where you didn’t really know what to do, and you were sort of
told what to do. I’ve shown you a lot of things, and they’re things that you can apply
for yourself. (Kelly nods) Don’t worry, I’m not going to sit in a chair and go … Yeah,
that was good, but you need to do more on your own though. I will still help you …
you’ll need my help for the Bach Fugue especially, not much though’.

Lesson 22: 17 July 2014

Reviewed 1 October 2016

- I ask Kelly how she is, and she smiles and says ‘good’. Jean tells me that Kelly went
to theory and it was really good. Kelly smiles and Jean says that Yvonne talks really
fast. I ask she can understand her and what she calls her (Yvonne or Mrs Anthony). I
say to Kelly that she used to be my teacher in Mackay, and they are surprised. I
explain that I grew up there and moved to attend the Conservatorium. Jean says that
she’s really nice and that she can tell that she knows what she’s doing. I say that she’s
very through and I trust her. I ask Kelly and Jean if they plan on entering the QPC this
year (no as she is doing a harp concert at school in September, end of this term). Jean
mentions the Grade 7 exam for next year and asks me if she thinks doing the QPC is a
good idea or is it too much. I say that it really doesn’t matter, as I was thinking that it
might be a good goal to work towards, but she may not necessarily need that. I ask
Kelly what she thinks. I say that she did it last year, and need not do it every year.
Jean suggests that next year is good after she finishes the exam. I ask Kelly if she will
play the Bach Fugue first. I ask them if they like my new chair (yes). Kelly plays the
subject, and I wind the chair up. I ask her to play the subject slower and ask her to
think of a really fat man, much more pompous. I ask her to ‘stay in the air and then
drop, drop’. Using gesture and critical comparison, I say that it’s not really a soft,
lyrical song – ‘Have you seen my coat, and my walking stick?’ I ask Kelly to use big
movements in her arm, and ask her to emphasise the A flat. I work with Kelly on the
shape and articulation of the answer. I say that it’s not a gentle piece, each piece has
its own character, this one being a bit serious: ‘Get out of this house!’ I ask Kelly to
roll on to the third note of the subject faster so as to generate momentum, and I play it
on her shoulder, asking her to take note of the different speeds of descent. I ask her to
transfer that feeling on to the piano. I ask Kelly to make the staccato notes shorter –
‘Good, that’s what I’m looking for!’ I say, ‘Short staccato, lots of rotary movement
and a pompous attitude … not too Mozarty’. Kelly plays the answer well. I say that it’s more important to develop the character of the subject and answer than to put the hands together at this stage. We move to the subject in the bass, and I ask Kelly to notice how I’m using lots of arm movement, as opposed to not. I ask her to shape the subject even more. I ask her if it’s a tonal or real answer (tonal). I say that I heard this for their Grade 7 exam today (C+). I talk about how important it is to play Bach well, and respect his position as ‘the father of western music’. Jean says that Kelly asked her if she plays well, ‘can she be like Mozart?’ I ask Kelly and she says, ‘Well, not exactly’. Jean clarifies, ‘That popular, that well known’. Kelly laughs. I say that I would be pleased to help her achieve her goals, saying that it’s a combination of hard work, and putting yourself behind every note, referring to our talk last lesson. I say that I could tell when she started today that she was trying to do that more, which was really good to see. I say, ‘Don’t wait until you know it all before you start to get creative, do it now and you’ll be closer to Mozart’. We move on, looking at the countersubject, and Kelly plays left hand. I ask her to what key we modulated (G minor). I ask Kelly to ‘show the listener’, suggesting that the countersubject is slightly more lyrical in character. I ask her to play the scale ascending and then descending again. I point out that ascending in the left hand tends to promote fluid rotation, so I ask her to ‘un-rotate’ when descending. I say, ‘It’s sort of like you’ve got to get the muscles to do the opposite. We repeat the above sequence again, adding a note/s to the left this time. I ask Kelly to ‘try and let go of the thumb muscle’. I ask Kelly to blend the whole scale, and keep experimenting, trying to make the scale sound like a melody. We repeat the process again, using add-a-note to analyse and blend the descending C minor scale. I ask Kelly to play it faster and then slow it down; she does better and we continue. Using gesture and expressive singing, I ask Kelly to shape to shape the next phrase, using ‘sandpaper’ to refine the sound without ‘hard bits’, so that it’s ‘smooth and round’. I ask Kelly to keep everything moving. We team play the subject and answer on the same piano, and it works really well. I say that the aim is to contrast the boisterousness of the subject and answer with the more lyrical countersubject. I say that the episodes need to give relief, explaining what I mean using dramatisation. I ask Kelly to think of the overall structure of the piece and suggest that she could try the first little bit with hands together, but there is no rush. I ask to hear codetta, and Kelly plays right hand, and I suggest uniform articulation with the subject and answer, as the codetta is formed from the first limb of the subject,
explaining what I mean by ‘limb’. I say that part of the skill with this piece is to make it creative, yet precise. I encourage Kelly to increase the volume with each ascending sequence, asking her to illustrate this to the listener. I explain that in the codetta (if there is one) or episodes, there are usually many sequences that either become louder or softer, whether up or down. I demonstrate, suggest she start a little softer, perhaps the ‘lady version, J. S. Bach’s wife’. I help her with some fingering, writing it into the score and encouraging her ‘is there anything to be gained by using fingers 3 and 4. Don’t just do what they say, unless you can think of a reason’. Kelly plays again after I’ve demonstrated. I give her some more help with notes, fingerings, and shaping of sequences. I ask her to use double rotation on the top note for greater volume. I tell Kelly that I watched a recording of the Intermediate Concert, saying that Kelly’s Haydn was good, but the Mozart concerto was too loud, perhaps a little too forced, and too much the opposite of she used to be doing with it. Jean laughs. I say that it’s probably better to be confident, and then ease up a little, as opposed to the other way around. I say that it was still good though. I ask Kelly if she has watched the recording (yes). I suggest that it was still a relatively new piece, and at last she’s learnt one movement of the three. I ask Kelly if she will go into the ‘ABC Young Performer’s Award’ in the future, explaining it briefly. I say again that the touch in the Mozart was probably a little bit bright, and would more suit the Bach perhaps. I say that each piece and period has its own unique sound. I suggest that when learning the Bach, Kelly will need quite an academic attitude (very studious and intellectual). I suggest that the Debussy piece is more ‘athletic’, and each piece needs a different approach. I say that the Bach (at the moment), is more of an articulatory exercise, and getting the sound right. Kelly nods. I ask Kelly to focus on the first page, perhaps two lines hands together with the right sound. I say that she will need a lot of hands separately in a piece like this. I mention that Khoa that Kelly heard at the previous Intermediate Concert used this approach too. I point out the left hand sequence and demonstrate, asking Kelly to try, suggest some fingering that will better suit the phrasing. I write the fingering into her score. We experiment, and I say, ‘What would it sound like with five there?’ I say to Kelly that her hand shape has really improved, though the fifth fingers are still a little bit flimsy; Kelly laughs. I explain how to tell which hand plays what and write it in the score after Kelly tries. I say that it will probably take 3-6 months to get this piece ‘under his belt’. I say that List A and List B are the biggest pieces for Grade 7, hence their early start. I say that preludes and
fugues are similar in their approach – ‘voicing, articulatory uniformity, colourful sequences, and defining the structure using character’. I suggest that the Prelude sounds like ‘getting through a rainstorm’ and is in the toccata style. I play a little of the famous *D minor Toccata and Fugue*. I say, ‘Each prelude and fugue has its own character and this is one of the most well known’. I ask her to show me the right hand of Prelude and I watch, checking notes and fingering for most of page one. I ask her to show me the E-flat Major bar, and I direct her with add-a-beat practice. I say that it’s easier to play faster, and will require chaining to learn the ‘shapes’ of each group of notes. I work on her hand shape to support the thumb joint by keeping space between the thumb and second finger. I ask her to feel the balance between gripped and floppy in my hand. I encourage her to play the thumb diagonally rather than flat.

Kelly and I take turns with add-a-note and I caution her against ‘reaching’ unnecessarily and twisting. She has good success and I get very excited. I ask her if she really needs to open up the whole hand to play one finger. I ask her to start to become like an athlete, working on technique. I define technique as ‘freedom to play’, without undue tension or floppiness. I say, ‘The fact that I’m standing here means that some muscles are switched on’ and I point out that I can feel my hamstrings and thighs. I use that to say, ‘So you want to roll to the note, but you don’t want to over-roll and over-rotate and over-stretch’. Kelly nods. I ask Kelly to be like a scientist and demonstrate the way that Glen Gould plays it (all staccato). I show Kelly how it’s often played ‘still’. She sits down and plays, and I encourage her to keep her hand ‘open’ between the thumb and the second finger. I encourage her to come further to the fallboard with the fifth finger in order not to twist the hand, all while keeping the knuckles rounded. I mention that she seems a little bit hyper-flexible in the joints. I ask her to use a little elbow movement to propel the hand as well as pronation when turning over the thumb. I point out how her hand doesn’t naturally cover the sixth from C – E flat, so we need to play the fifth finger while moving to the thumb. I encourage Kelly to switch on the muscles around the fifth finger knuckle, while not getting stiff inside the wrist. I say, ‘you’ve got to have the optimal balance between a bit of tension and not too stiff. Without that, it’s unlikely that you’ll play the piece really well’. I say that when the fifth finger joint collapses, the hand will supinate instead of pronate, and you actually pull yourself away from the notes that you need’. I demonstrate in the air how you would hold your hands and arms to ride a bike – pronating instead of supinating. We take the C – E flat again, and she seems to be
improving, and I ask her to do it staccato. I then ask her to play the fifth finger
towards the back of the key while coming across with the arm rather than opening the
hand. We move on to the next bar, and I encourage Kelly towards a rounded knuckle.
I say that I really admire Kelly and how hard she tries, saying that while she has a
couple of physical challenges to work through, she will get there with her piano
playing. Jean says that in the car, Kelly works with the ladybug that I gave her and we
talk about (and do) different ways of using it. It is challenging for her to maintain the
stability of the fifth finger joint, as seen on camera. I ask her if it is challenging (a bit)
and I caution her against getting stiff up in the arm while trying so hard with the hand.
You can see how hard it is for her and Jean says that she has trouble maintaining
stability in the fifth finger in cello too. Kelly laughs and say, ‘It’s like physiotherapy
for pianists’. Jean suggests that everyday ‘we’ need to practise. Jean asks me whether
Kelly should stick with the right hand, but I say do the left hand too, but concentrate
on page one with good posture of the knuckles and fingers. I suggest that we move to
the Chopin. Kelly tells me that she’s having trouble towards the end of the middle
section. I ask her to show me the right hand here, which she does. I help her with
correct notes and also reviewing fingering, thinking in terms of which finger would
help the hand to roll upwards at the end of the phrase for a natural decrescendo. I
write in the fingering, coach her with rhythmic detail and where to lift for phrasing. I
suggest that she keep the hands separately to work on the fingering and sound. I say
that it was good how Kelly came in to the lesson and had an idea of what she wanted
to work on; I say that I like that. Kelly shows me the left hand and I help her correct a
couple of notes, playing it to get a feel so that I can write in the fingering. I give her
advice with regard to the fingering, gestural shape and tonal shape. I reiterate that
progress in the upper grades is a lot slower. I say that she probably needs about
another 50 hours of practice on the piece – Kelly looks very surprised. I say that it
sounds like a lot, but it’s really only about 3 months. Jean asks me when Kelly should
aim for the exam, and I say perhaps early next year, but progress will be slow and
steady, probably at least 6 months. Jean says that 6 months is still quite short,
considering she took about 10 months for Grade 3, by which time she was sick and
tired of the pieces. Jean says that the pieces then were short and these ones are much
more challenging. I ask Kelly if she likes the challenge and she says ‘yes’. Jean tells
me that she enjoys the challenge of winning against someone good in chess. I caution
Kelly against rushing the process, and liken it to a board game, where you often move

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up in small increments. Verbally, I summarise what Kelly would most likely be aiming to improve this week in Bach and Chopin. We talk a little bit more about how she may find the Mozart a little easier than Bach because she has studied Mozart before. I say that she has improved a lot with all of the pieces already, though there is some way to go. Jean says that Kelly has some ‘good news’, and tells me that Kelly got 9 A’s, and 1 B for sport. We all laugh and I say that my school results were similar. Kelly says she got a C for swimming and a B for athletics. Jean says that last year she got a C, but this year, she got a B, and her and Sam are, ‘so happy with it’. Jean says that she is improving. Jean checks with me that Kelly should slow down a bit and avoid bad habits; I agree and say that it’s for the best rather than ‘fixing everything’ during the lesson. Jean says to Kelly that it’s like mathematics and fixing up wrong ones, and ‘that’s very annoying’. Kelly smiles and agrees.

Lesson 23: 20 July 2014

Reviewed 1 October 2016

Jean says that she has run out of recording room. Sam is here today too. Jean says that whenever Kelly practises, she uses the iPad to direct her. I suggest that we do some technical work. I ask Kelly to play D-flat Major (the newer one). I ask Kelly to tick the scales that she knows. She plays D-flat Major hands together. I ask her to put the chair up, asking her to be slightly above the height of the keyboard (‘so that you’re sloping down slightly’). She plays again. I remind her to lean on her hips bones as she plays the register extremes. I ask her to play the left hand – there are many tonal ‘holes’ here. I suggest to Kelly that she needs to review the pronation of the forearm with the left-hand descending. I ask her to come up onto the tip of her left thumb in order to make ‘a nice wide C’. She continues to play the bottom to octaves while I encourage the C shape. Jean shifts the chair so she can get a ‘side view’. I encourage Kelly to tilt over on her hips as she approaches the bottom register so that the arm isn’t ‘heavy’. I ask her to pronate inwards with the left hand and play with ‘nice strong stomach muscles’. I say that scale playing is ‘very athletic’ in the upper grades. I ask her to play D-flat Major in contrary motion. I ask Kelly to sit up tall and lift her arms high while maintaining the ‘C’. I adjust her body to tilt forwards, pronate the arms inwards and lift her head high. I work with Kelly to explain that she needs to adjust her body so as to maintain alignment of the elbows and fingers. After she’s finished, she sits back in the chair. Jean asks me if she should be playing slowly, as at
home Kelly plays ‘faster and faster’. I say that speed isn’t important, as the speed will come with a good technique. I say to Kelly that she should concentrate on the bigger picture and not speed only. I reiterate that the rounded C’s will keep her knuckles rounded and give lots of space to pronate the forearms to help with the thumb passing. I say that at the moment, the tone is a bit smudgy because the hand position is too flat. Jean says, ‘So make her slow down?’ and I say, ‘Can you slow down a bit?’ Jean asks me what speed is better and I find the metronome and say 60 four notes per beat while concentrating on the postural aspects of the scale. I say to Kelly, ‘You’ve been doing it a bit fast I think?’ and Jean says, ‘I keep telling her, but she doesn’t listen … you should say it … she’ll listen’. Jean laughs, I pretend to scold Kelly and Kelly smiles. Jean says that she tends to rush at home. I sit down at the second piano and do a critical comparison of smudgy versus clear with a rounded ‘C’. I say, ‘Because you’re sort of reaching for the notes instead of rolling onto them’. Kelly nods. I ask her to play C harmonic minor right hand. I ask Sam what he thinks (‘just go with the flow’). Jean says that she notices that Kelly stretches out the fingers, and when she can’t stretch it, that’s when she notices an accent; I agree. I stand and dramatise, ‘That’s because you’re not pronating enough, you’re sort of reaching and stretching, and when you do that the muscles (in the forearm) will tighten and that’s what produces the thump’. Kelly and Jean both laugh. I sit and demonstrate both ways, saying that she has been doing it better, but we need to review it. I say that she’s still doing fine but do not speed up (foreign accent). Kelly and Jean laugh. Jean says, ‘It sounds really different’ and I nod in agreement. Kelly plays right hand C harmonic minor. I coach her the nice C and a free pronation, saying, ‘You roll to pass the thumb, not stretch’. I ask her to move the upper body across and brace the stomach muscles’. I ask Kelly to start the octave lower, and then lower again. I say, ‘Notice you’re going nice and slowly?’ and then stand up, saying stop and then adjust her upper body to the right. I ask Kelly whether going up or down is easier; she says up. I ask her why and she says that it’s strange going inwards. I say that I would have said the opposite. I say, ‘Don’t focus on speed, focus on the movements, because the movements will make it faster in the long run’. I say that practising all day is not going to make it faster, but awareness of the little tiny adjusts will. I sit and demonstrate, saying that when I’m playing faster, I’m doing the same as slower, but the movements become smaller and smaller. I say, ‘If you don’t, the faster you go, the tighter it will sound’. I sit and demonstrate using Beethoven’s 32 Variations, with and without ‘the movements’. I
say that it’s very athletic and you’re still learning. I ask Kelly to show me her pieces.
Jean asks her what she practised (all of them). I stop and ask Kelly what she should
show me based on what was covered in the previous two lessons. I encourage Kelly to
start asking herself, ‘OK, what do I want to ask Mark, what do I want to get out of the
lesson’. I say that on the way in the car, she could think ‘hmm, what’s on the menu
today? (Like at a café) What do I feel like having?’ Kelly nods. We look at the
Mozart, I remind Kelly to ‘play it with lots of expression, even if you’re just learning
it’. The basic sound is good, though the uniformity of pulse isn’t so good. As she
plays, I coach her with voicing, and then when she finishes, I ask her not to slow
down. With the minor phrases, I ask her to drop into the middle of the phrase. We
work on this aspect with both hands, and then apply the idea to the next phrase,
playing the ‘skeleton’ notes first then ‘putting the other notes in around that’. I say
that it’s a bit tricky, but keep trying. I ask Sam if the employees are behaving
themselves, and he laughs. I sit at the second piano, and encourage Kelly, to copy my
‘face decrescendo’. She does and then plays the skeleton much better. When we add
the other notes in, I ask her to do it via add-a-note with an upward float of the hands.
We cycle through this process, including a free fall with both hands at the start of the
phrase. I ask Kelly to ‘use motion’ to coordinate the hands, otherwise it sounds softer,
but not free as well. I ask Kelly to use her arms to coordinate everything, and
encourage her to do a free fall into the keys without pressing the fingers. I ask Kelly
to play the 4 quavers and then ‘rock out’ to play the next notes of the new bar, which
she does (very good). I then ask her to finish the phrase. I ask her, ‘It feels easier
doesn’t it?’ Kelly nods. I say, ‘So use your motion to rock to the notes’. I ask Kelly to
apply the same idea to the next similar phrase, and I say, ‘It’s improved already
without doing anything’. Nonetheless, I ask Kelly to have the hands come together to
‘give each other a kiss’ before they roll away from each other. I ask her to play each
phrase, saying, ‘Oh that sounds delicious, it’s like really tasty’. I ask Kelly, ‘did you
think a piece could sound tasty? (No) I can smell the piece … it smells really nice’
and then ‘play the phrases with flavour’. I ask Kelly not to think of only what the
notes are, demonstrating a flat sound. I explain that I was thinking in a box, rather
than how each note moves ‘from one to the next’. I demonstrate and narrate how the
notes ‘flow around each other like … (I make wind noises) That way you get a really
human type of sound’. I ask Kelly to try, though there are some ‘holes’ in the left
hand touch. I say, ‘Good girl, now when the notes don’t sound, it means you’ve
stopped rocking’. I demonstrate this concept, saying that even though I’m soft, I’m still rocking. I explain that if I only use fingers, that’s when it won’t sound. I ask her to try again. I explain to Kelly that even though she uses a rocking motion, it doesn’t necessarily mean that she rocks out to the edge of the white keys, and I encourage her to ‘stay in’ with the left hand, so as to avoid twisting. I help Kelly deconstruct the movements again, but rocking in to the corners of the room with each fifth finger, rather than out to the edge of the key. She tries again, and I stand up and show her the left hand alone, asking her to notice how the fifth finger rocks inwards to set up the next note (the thumb on a black note) without needing to twist or come in quickly. She copies very well, so I encourage her to rotate around the notes as loose as possible. She does better, though there are wrong notes. I take Kelly’s hand and rotate it from side to side while she plays as well as in and out. Jean laughs. Kelly continues to experiment and then I ask her to rotate quickly to the fifth finger, but then release the thumb muscle and roll back to the right slowly to play the thumb softly. Using expressive gesture and song, I ‘explain’ that the louder left hand fifth finger will support what the melodic line is doing at that point. I demonstrate again and Kelly does even better this time (good). I deconstruct it further, asking Kelly to play the three notes in question – the soft (slow rotation) thumb, a loud (fast rotation) fifth finger and then inward with a soft (slow rotation) thumb. She does really well this time, though there are some wrong notes, which is in a way to be expected. I demonstrate the hands together, and ask Kelly to play, which she does well – ‘Good girl’. I say that it’s tricky and demonstrate ‘random’ Alberti bass, analysing the quick and slow rotations that produce the desired sound. I demonstrate the passage in the Mozart Rondo again, narrating the ‘quick rolls’. Kelly nods and I say that she will get there. I say that she’s done well with the duple lilt, demonstrating the difference with and without. We move to the right hand cadential notes in the high register, and I encourage Kelly to project the top D’s with her whole body. I encourage Kelly to play the following phrase with tonal shape by ‘wailing’, using supination and pronation of the forearm/hand on the key surface, and then fingers. I ask, ‘put yourself behind each note’ (very good). With the chromatic fill, I say that it’s really important to remember your scale technique, demonstrating a round C and high arm/elbow as opposed to lifting up and down and dropping onto the thumbs. I take Kelly through this using add-a-note technique and a high position of the thumb. I notice that when she ‘does something extra’ with her arm, it’s when she is unsure of the notes and looks at the
page. I ask Kelly to ‘play with your elbow’, and we continue adding notes without tightness anywhere. The further on we get, the more she needs to look at the score, so I say, ‘So you’re not sure of the notes there?’ Kelly says fingering and I say, ‘I can tell, because sometimes the movement stops. Once the movement stops because you’re worried about the fingering, you won’t get a good sound. This (type of practice) … can help you learn the fingering and practise the movements (simultaneously)’. Kelly nods. I suggest that might be enough notes so we go down and then up without adding any extras. I caution Kelly against ‘thinking’ of the individual notes and fingers, likening it to a conductor who would use a single gesture, rather than a choppy one (I dramatise). Jean laughs. Kelly imitates me again, and gets a good result. We go again, down and then up. Kelly goes again, but seems to have trouble with the actual notes this time, though she does get there. I ask Kelly to notice how I’m rocking from side to side, and I encourage her to do it with me: ‘Come on, don’t be embarrassed … just do it’. Thereafter, I ask her to copy me adding in the descending scale while rocking to the left and the ascending scale while rocking to the right, and then both chained together. I ask her to stay still with the body and move with the arm, but I quickly realise that I myself can’t do it without some body movement. I ask her not to ‘stop to think’, saying, ‘just think of the gesture’ (rather than individual notes). I then ask her to play descending and ascending in one whole gesture, but she struggles with this. I take her back to adding a note/notes to the descending scale, but I can see now that she is gripping slightly and jerking her elbow during the change between descending and ascending. I can see that she is coming out instead of in with the ascending thumb, though I do pick up that she is dropping the elbow slightly and I ask her to try to not use so much movement. We partial practise the five notes involved in the turn, and I ask Kelly not to come down on the thumb. She continues to experiment and I say, ‘Elbow up’ and it’s telling to see how much it has dropped here. I ask her to join the descending scale with the five notes of the turn back up and say, ‘Whoo! Good girl’ when she gets a good result. I say that it’s in there and to Jean, ‘Did you hear that?’ She agrees. I apologise for the intensity of the lesson, but qualify, ‘So sometimes being expressive isn’t about being expressive, it’s about being technical. If you haven’t got the right tools, it’s very difficult to go … (I gesture and sing expressively). I play the passage with expressive shape and technical ease, saying, ‘I don’t even know that bit, I just practised it with you’, trying to explain to Kelly that the notes can get in the way if you don’t know
them, as I didn’t a few minutes ago. I this kind of technical analysis of finger shape
and arm movement as ‘digesting’ the notes, and then regurgitating them as one bigger
gesture, rather than ‘itty bitty notes’. I say to Kelly that she’s like the conductor,
telling the notes how to sound. I go on to liken the piano bass in the next phrase to the
cellos, whom ‘you want to inspire’ with movement. Kelly plays the left hand again,
quite flat and I say, ‘is that how you’re going to conduct them?’ Kelly plays again, but
with more arm involvement and consequent tonal shape. I stand and do a critical
comparison of how Kelly might conduct ‘them’. I say, ‘ready’, and then conduct
Kelly whom is ‘conducting’ her left hand. I say, ‘That’s it, put yourself into it … like
a conductor would’. I ask Kelly if she has ever seen a really good conductor (no) and I
start to dramatise how they use their whole body, before sitting down to ‘conduct’ my
hands; I play from the ‘cello’ part. I say, ‘They’re really like right into it, rather than
…’ I play the piece with a flat sound, saying, ‘… there’s nothing there, it sort of feels
false’. I ask Kelly to show me, but first we dramatise, saying, ‘come on cellos!’ At
first Kelly is very shy but not unhappy, but with encouragement and me saying, ‘like
you did at dinner’ she gets more exuberant with her words and gesture. Jean laughs. I
get up and pretend to play, saying, ‘Make their bows nice and fluid’. Kelly tries a
couple of times before I take her hand and ‘bow’ while she plays, also encouraging
her to tilt forwards from the hips. I say, ‘Good girl Kelly … you have to use your
upper body a little bit more in your piano playing’. I say that she has improved a lot
and Kelly smiles. I say, ‘Remember last year, you didn’t play with much expression I
didn’t think … you sounded nice, but there was this sort of disconnect, that I think
you’re getting better at now, definitely in the last week. It sounds like you’re much
more aware of the sound already, and you’ve only just started the piece. It’s good, so
you need to keep going with it all right?’ Kelly smiles and nods. I show her how the
turns are to be played later on the next page, and also ask her to start looking at the
right-hand Alberti chords, saying, ‘That’s going to be fun’. I say that it’s not an easy
piece, though it’s not that hard and I think she’ll do a good job with it. I sit and
demonstrate the right-hand Alberti, showing her how it relates to the left hand rotation
that we explore earlier. I write in some fingering for the following E7 chord (2545
2545). I say that it was a bit of technique lesson in the end. I say, ‘Technique and
expression go together … you can’t sort of have one without the other’. As I
demonstrate I say,’ It’s no good having all the imagination but not the tools, and
there’s no point having tools, but there’s no feeling … they sort of go together’. Kelly
nods. I say, ‘as you learn the piece, you learn the technique and the expression, and they all roll into one. Believe it or not, those rotary movements help the technique and they help it to sound expressive, so you’re actually cutting down on half the work … so even though it seems painfully slow, in the end you won’t have physical problems that will hold you back’. I ask Kelly how the Debussy is going and Jean says that it’s sounding really good.

Lesson 24: 24 July 2014

Reviewed 2 October 2016

- I say hello and then ask Kelly to play the left hand of her Bach Prelude (view is obstructed). She gets to the end of page one and I say, ‘Yay, good girl’. I quiz her about the fingering in a couple of spots. I ask her if it’s her idea (!) and then suggest an alternative, but not dismissing her effort to try. I talk to Jean about her birthday while Kelly writes in the score. Jean says that Kelly loves museums and can be there for 5 hours. I say that I love them too but Shaeed doesn’t. I say, ‘It’s fun isn’t it? It’s like learning … you like learning?’ (Kelly nods) and Jean says, ‘she loves it’. I say, ‘I like learning too. One of the best things about piano is that there’s always something to new to learn’. I demonstrate the left hand and ask Kelly to notice how I’m rotating, but when she does it, I caution her not to rotate too quickly, lest the tone is bumpy. I encourage her to rotate from the upper left forearm and elbow, saying, ‘That’s where the movement comes from … up here’. I explain that when the rhythm is wonky, it’s because the rotary movement isn’t exact, and I ask her to keep experimenting how fast to rotate to ‘get it in time’. We start to implement add-a-note in the direction of travel, and then add-a-beat as I say, ‘It’s much easier to get them in time when you do a smaller segment’. Then I ask Kelly to chain the groups together. She does chain them, but the rhythm is still unsteady, so I ask her to ‘go back a step’, and we return to add-a-group technique. After which I ask her if she can ‘see’ a little man in the choir singing, and I sing and use expressive gesture. Kelly nods. She does very well this time and I remind her that if the rotary movement is spot on, use add-a-note drills, similarly to Debussy. We move to the next bar where she continues add-a-group drills. In bar three, I question the fingering, which I compliment Kelly on trying for herself (Wow!) I suggest that she try an alternative, but agree that her option is better. I say to Jean that it is good that she is thinking for herself, and Jean says, ‘Yeah she spent several hours, looking at it and changing it again’. I say that I really admire and
like that sort of attitude. I ask Kelly to continue the rest of the page in the same way, using add-a-group technique to ‘train your rotary movement’ before chaining the groups together. I then say to Kelly that the next step would be to chain the fourth beat of one bar to the first beat of the next bar, explaining that is usually where people get stiff and ‘twisty’. I use the analogy of the snack food, saying that we don’t hard and crunch playing or arms. I demonstrate the above-mentioned technique, which Kelly imitates. I ask her to chain the two together, after which I use body movement to illustrate the concept of stepping into to the back of the keys. Using Kelly’s hand I show how twisting can be avoided by adjusting gradually, note by note. Kelly nods her understanding and tries again, and there is some improvement. I acknowledge that and then show her again. She does very well, and I say, ‘You adjust one note at a time into the new position’. I ask her to apply the same process henceforth. We try the next one, explaining that the harder ones are where the thumb is played on a black note. We move to the D7 to G minor which I help her to deconstruct. I explain that those movements are especially important to those that have small hands where momentum rather than stretching is the goal. I explain that once you stretch, all the muscles stiffen in the forearm, which I get Kelly to feel using demonstration. I say, ‘The more you do that, the more tired your hands become, and if you play like that for too long they (the muscles) start to burn’. I say to Kelly that like sportspeople, you can become injured from playing the piano ineffectively, especially if practising for two hours a day. I say that people sometimes can’t play in the upper levels because of this problem. Kelly shakes her head no when I ask her if she knew that. I say, ‘If you follow the basic alignment of the body and make small adjustments (I gesture) as necessary, and use gesture and movement, the likelihood of that happening is dramatically reduced’. I say that thankfully, it didn’t happen to me. Jean says that sometimes people can get pain after 20 or 30 minutes and I agree. I say that I used to practise 6 hours a day, and never used to have to ‘rest’ or ‘ice’. I say that the best way to avoid injury is to lay effective technical foundations early on. I suggest that effective technique allows for good sound too, as those who ‘stretch and pull’ tend to sound ‘a bit bangy’. Kelly nods. Jean says, ‘I can tell, just then it sounds different’. I agree, saying, ‘When you stretch and pull, the muscles in the forearm freeze and that means you have less control of how you land on the notes. If the muscles are tight, the movements tend to be clumsy’. I sit and demonstrate how it might sound if the muscles are tight and movements become jerky or ‘last minute’ before comparing it to
an example that is more prepared in terms of micro-adjustments. I explain that the whole piece follows the same principle and I ask Kelly to continue practising in this way. I ask Kelly if she could show me the right hand; she plays. I say that the concepts covered in the left hand will apply here too, as there is some stretching and unevenness with the rhythm. Kelly starts to play and I say that her hand shape is improving (she’s been working on it in the car). I sit and demonstrate add-a-group technique, asking Kelly to notice how big my preparatory movements are bigger. I ask Kelly to exaggerate a bit more. When she plays a wrong note I say, ‘Good, when you make a wrong note like that it’s a good sign … it means you’re thinking about movements and not notes. You lay the notes into the movement, rather than practising the piece until it gets loose. It will never get loose … you have to make it loose, by practising it with looseness’. I use gesture as I talk. I ask Kelly to return to the drills, asking Kelly to play the notes 1 and 2 of the bar as you move, not after. She continues, and does well, though I caution her not to twist (‘good, wrong notes are good’). When she has some difficulty with accuracy, we deconstruct the gestural fragment into individual pairs of notes, which are then chained together – ‘Oh, you are terrific. It’s so simple, but not everyone (students) will do that though … he’s just making me do more work’. Jean says, ‘She practise a lot, but that is certainly so different now’. I explain that we work as a team, and we rely on each other, and Mum and Dad do all the driving. We all laugh. I say, ‘don’t practise it slowly … practise it quickly with movement, but in smaller amounts. Some notes will take a faster movement than others’. I ask Kelly if she knows what I mean (not really) and I demonstrate, saying that a bigger intervallic distance requires a faster shift, which is not always understood by students. Using gesture, I simulate one hand being ‘slower’ while the other is ‘quicker’ and vice versa. I say, ‘The notes are flying around everywhere at different speeds, and the way you get to know what’s what is by chaining it like that. Not everyone will do it though … maybe if I play it over and over it will get better … it won’t. It will get a bit better, but it will never be truly really good’. I show Kelly the new Book 2 of the Well Tempered Klavier I received today in the post. I explain to Kelly and Jean the dates for each book. I question whether Bach had highlighters for his students in the Fugue. I remind Kelly that last lesson we were unifying the shape and articulation for the subject entries. Kelly asks me hands separately or hands together for lines 1 and 2, and I suggest hands together. When finished, I say, ‘Yay! Good girl that has really come on’. Kelly smiles shyly. I
work with Kelly to refine staccato versus slight tenuto in the subject. I suggest that that may help the subject sound cheerful, yet a little bit serious. I also suggest, using gesture and my voice other ways that it could be done, as there are ‘many ways that people do it … it’s good to question these things’. I ask Kelly to try for something different to ‘see what comes out’. I then ask for another option, after which we work together, experimenting with tempo, articulation and tonal shape. Eventually we arrive at two options and I ask Kelly to choose the one that sounds more convincing. She chooses the first option and I say, ‘I think so too, though last week I think I suggested something different … these things change’. We try and remember, and I say that I think I suggested all boisterous, as it was a bit too soft. I say that we are going ‘deeper’ now, and we work further on the tonal shaping, and I use the analogy of 5 6 7 for increasing volume, like the volume increasing on a stereo or similar. Using expressive gesture and my voice, I ‘explain’ the shape and articulation, which Kelly ‘matches’. I talk about the first limb of the subject matching the second limb, and I use Kelly’s arms to analogise the concept. She plays the subject, and then the answer, and then hands together. I ask Kelly to practise with hands separately and then hands together and a bit faster, at the same time keep going with the hands together for more of page one. I sit down and we talk about the articulatory options for the countersubject, and that will have ramifications for how the hands are divided. I suggest slurring into groups of 4, and then we work on the fingering for the right-hand thirds from there (view is obscured), and also what works for dividing the notes between the hands. I ask Kelly to slur the right-hand thirds in groups of 4. I suggest and write in fingering for her (view is still obscured). There is an instance where the stretch is quite large, so I stand and experiment with Kelly, suggesting that she take a note with the other hand. I say that Bach is cheeky in that he doesn’t give many hints (Kelly nods). I sit down and experiment and then ask Kelly to play the answer while I play the countersubject with the revised phrasing. I say that while I’m not convinced it will need to be this way due to Kelly’s hand span and the need to keep the articulatory detail uniform. I say that it doesn’t matter overall, as long as it’s consistent. I ask Kelly to play the countersubject in this way and then I coach her with the tonal shape without accenting the first note of each phrase. We team play again to check. Kelly shows me the top of page two, asking me which hand is which, and I suggest that we experiment together, working on fingering to match the articulation. I try multiple options and then ask Kelly to try 3 different options, but we need to settle
on a fingering that doesn’t follow the slurs due to her hand size. I explain that the (green) answer will be the focus anyway. I ask Kelly to write some of the fingering in. I remind Kelly and Jean that it is very mathematical and academic and ‘steady does it’. We continue on with the top of page two, working on options for fingering that gives articulatory uniformity. I mention that Khoa came for a number of 2-hour lessons in the holidays and it was slow for him too. While I play, Kelly writes in the fingering. I demonstrate for Kelly, saying that it will need the same shape, phrasing and articulation as previous entries. I say that this part is probably one of the hardest parts in the whole piece. I ask Kelly if she has cello in the morning (yes). I ask Kelly how her Mozart is going (OK) and if she has any questions she wants to ask me. I ask her what rondo means, but she doesn’t know (I act defeated) and I write in the form in letters ABACA, etc. I say that ‘A’ keeps returning, albeit in different keys, which I demonstrate. I identify some of the ‘ingredients’ for Classical style, Baroque style, Romantic style, 20th century. I project into the next 6 months, and ask Kelly if her Debussy is going. Kelly says ok, and Jean says that it’s sometimes very good, though sometimes stiff. I say that sometimes it’s difficult to remember how quickly to move from one note to the next, and it’s an ongoing process to ‘remind’ the motor system of the choreography while building a ‘map’ of the piece. I say that when I play, I don’t see ‘notes’, but I see ‘shapes’. I say, ‘If you don’t know it (the note), you can’t roll towards it at the correct speed, and then that’s when you’ll get a bump and stiffen up. All the notes have to be so well known so that we can focus on how we get there’. Jean asks me about memorisation. I say, ‘Once you memorise the notes, it’s easier to memorise the movements. The notes go on top of the movements’. I talk a little bit about how the origin of performance anxiety can be due to a lack of comfort and automation caused by haphazard preparation.

Lesson 25: 31 July 2014

Reviewed 3 October 2016

We sort out where everyone will stand/sit to record the lesson. Jean sits in my chair and Kelly adjusts hers. We talk about Holly’s T-shirt. I ask Kelly if she thinks Nocturne is a love song, or a sad song, or perhaps a song for someone whom you love who has died. Kelly plays the hands together for page one, though it is slow, it has improved. I say to change the pedal every minim beat; she tries again (it’s better). With the upbeat for the part 2 of the A section, I ask her to roll and we review the
fingering. I explain that that gesture will make it sound legato, and I mention the ‘McGurk effect’, explaining that the sound of something can be affected by what it looks like: ‘things that we hear are sometimes influenced by what we see’. I explain to Kelly that using gesture isn’t just about sound production, but its use also extends to how the audience perceives the piece – ‘Oh, so that note goes with that note’ (It’s hard to tell where one phrase stops and the next starts). I ask Kelly if she has ever thought about that concept before (no). I ask Kelly to keep going, saying that she has improved. I sit and demonstrate how to coordinate the first scalic run. I ask Kelly if she likes the piece (yes) and I say, ‘me too’. Kelly copies and then I sit and show her how to coordinate the next fragment. I move her arms for her, encouraging Kelly to fit the notes into that same gestural movement. I coach her not to stretch, before omitting the middle left-hand note. I encourage her to use the same movement but adding the one extra note, thereby omitting the ‘jagged’ sound. I rephrase it as beat notes/off beat notes, which she then ‘slides’ in while I click the beat. We move to the next gestural fragment, and I say that we need to fit five notes. I ask Kelly to notice the ‘con forza’ indication, likening it to ‘why did my pet die?’ suggesting the music is a little angry there that Kelly could put into her arm. I say that it’s a sad song, but there are bits of anger there too. I ask Kelly if she can think of any other emotions like anger or sadness and I suggest guilt and embarrassment. I ask Kelly if she can think of more positive emotions like gladness, pride, and love. She says yes when I ask her if it’s hard to switch from feeling to feeling, and while I agree, I say that it’s a bit like being an actor, and getting into the right character is something that can be practised. I say that you can imagine what those feelings might be like, which can be put into the playing, suggesting that that feeling may then be transferred to those listening. I sit down and demonstrate how body language can be a powerful communicator, without using facial expressions. I suggest that Kelly could think of a nasty kid at school in order to feel a little bit angry, and she could then apply that to that part of the piece. I suggest not to slow down so it sounds like (I shout), ‘I’m very angry with you’. I let Kelly know that ‘I’m pretending’, suggesting that its’ like being a bit on an actor. She plays and then I direct her to add-a-note, ‘putting angry into every note’. I ask Kelly if she has ever shouted at any one (no), and I seem surprised. I ask if she has ever shouted at Jean (no), and Jean says that she thinks Kelly has shouted at Sam. Kelly laughs and Jean laughs. I ask Kelly if she has every felt angry (no) and I ask if there are any bullies at school. She says ‘yes, there are boys’, so I suggest that the song
could be her telling the bullies to leave her friend alone – ‘Stop it!’ I ask her to put that feeling into every note, and we chain the notes one by one. As we get towards the bottom, I say, ‘Rack off! Leave him alone!’ I suggest that as more notes are added, it becomes more difficult to think of the overall sweeping gesture and then feeling of ‘Get off him!’ I then suggest that she start halfway through the long gesture, adding a note each time until she reaches the bottom. We then work backwards, staring higher and adding a note closer to the top each repetition. It seems that the longer the scale, the more that caution ‘enters the equation’. I ask Kelly to play the whole phrase, noting that it’s certainly better overall now. I summarise, ‘I want you to inject a bit of anger into that song … it’s like a pet dog that died, or some mean kids at school who bully younger kids’. I ask Kelly if she would stand up to a bully, and I say that it would be hard to, but it’s something that she could imagine ‘what it might feel like’ so as to enhance her playing. In summary, I sit and demonstrate how I would like Kelly to practise these bars where the cross rhythms are (add-a-beat technique/add-2 beats technique/whole bar). I encourage Kelly to try being a little bit ‘over the top’, pretending that ‘no one’s watching’. Kelly sits and tries, and I ‘throw’ her arms in the direction of travel (to the middle), asking her to move from the hips. I ask Kelly to move her head from side to side, saying that she is quiet and obedient, but could be a little more extroverted at times. I say not to wait until she’s finished the piece to do that though. I sit and demonstrate too much, and not enough, and caution her to start this part of the learning process early on, lest the piece is very nice and pretty, but it doesn’t really ‘say’ anything. We move to the introduction – I demonstrate the pedalling and ask Kelly to try. She does and then I ask her to copy my free fall into the first chord, ‘with a little ray of light at the top’. I continue to coach her with the gestural aspect of these two bars, in effect asking Kelly to either use preparatory movement or ‘stay in the air’ in order to drop into the keys freely. I sit and demonstrate, singing ‘Once … I lost … my pet fish’ and helping to correct Kelly’s rhythm. Kelly plays as I conduct and sing. I add some more lyrics about ‘Nemo’, suggesting that the piece could be about Nemo (‘I’m very angry about losing my pet fish’). I suggest that the middle section could be about all the special memories, before we went to the pet shop and got a new one at the end, or perhaps Nemo went to heaven due to the tonic major ending. I also suggest that the boy in Prep who was bullied grew up to be school captain, because Kelly helped him. I ask Kelly if she could use her imagination at every stage of the learning process. We work on the
fingering and rhythm for the last couple of chords of the introduction. I ask Kelly to ‘bring out’ the left hand here. While playing, I ‘narrate’ the expressive gestural detail for Kelly, including preparatory breath in, stay in the air, drop and roll quickly. Kelly tries, but I ask her to drop into the second chord for more sound while using a slower upward movement. Kelly then adds the hands together, after which I show her how to manage the pedalling. I ask Kelly why it is that some people would avoid dropping into the keys faster and Kelly answers, ‘because they’re scared to the notes’. I suggest that she can ‘train herself not to’, and there follows a deconstruction of the down/up gesture with minimal notes working up and out. Kelly has good success, and I ask her to add hands together without worrying so much. I say that it has improved since the last lesson, and even in the lesson today. I say, ‘If you want to worry less, practise not worrying (Jean laughs) … How do we avoid less worry? By stripping it back and doing the piece one note at a time. You inject non-worry into the part that you are practising … so rather than practising, and practising, and then not worrying, practise it with not worrying’. I ask Kelly if she understands, but it doesn’t seem so. Nonetheless, I demonstrate again and Kelly plays really well this time with plenty of freedom and tonal shape. We move to page two in order to answer Kelly’s question. I summarise what was covered – pedal every two beats, start putting some feeling behind each note, chaining the cross rhythms, and general practising in order for greater familiarity, important in being able to flow from note to note more easily. I take a small amount of text about Eugene Goossens and read it aloud, suggesting that ‘the more I get to know it, the more I can play with it’. I give an alternative, this time with enhanced expressive nuance. I explain that I was more comfortable with the material the second time – ‘the more comfortable you are with the notes, the more you can do with it’. I ask Kelly how she can become more comfortable with the notes, and she answers, ‘practise it at home’, and I agree. I tell Kelly that she has done an exceptional job with this tricky piece thus far. I say that the piece is meant for an older player, and while there are many seven-year-olds on YouTube playing the piece, it’s still a special achievement for Kelly. I ask her if she feels special (‘maybe’). We move to the top of page two and Kelly plays hands together, though it’s very hesitant. I correct a couple of notes, writing them in the score. I say that she is doing fine, ‘it’s just hard work through there … I wish I could say something that would make it improve faster … you’ve just got to do more practice through there’. Kelly nods. I say that once it’s a bit more ‘sorted out’, I will be able to help a bit more. I ask Kelly to
show me the left hand, after which I say that she will probably need to be more familiar with hands separately for hands together to improve. I suggest that we write in the fingering, reviewing a couple of choices. I ask Kelly how the harp teacher asks for what he wants, and Jean says that he and I are very similar. I ask Kelly to practise the left hand here until it’s totally … (Kelly says ‘comfortable’). I agree and say how much I love that word and the way that it sounds. I sit and demonstrate, saying, ‘Ah … I really understand the shapes’. I ask Kelly why each bar/half bar has a different shape, but answer for her (the notes are different and that makes the movement different). Using gesture, I suggest that Kelly use add-a-note technique to ‘learn’ each gestural fragment, while imagining that she is ‘looking around yourself, getting a mental picture of what your arm looks like as you play’. I remind Kelly to use a preparatory up movement before she begins. I ask her to play the left hand without looking at the score, but when a number of mistakes result, I say, ‘When you can play each from memory, that’s when you’ll be truly comfortable (Kelly nods). That’s the sort of detailed practice that you need to do with hands separately before hands together will further improve’. We return to the left hand, and I ask Kelly to play the shape between quavers 1 and 2, and then the shape between quavers 2 and 3 and then the combined shape of quavers 1, 2 and 3 – ‘Good!’ I say that that kind of practice will help her learn the shape of each left hand ellipse – ‘is it a big one, or a small one?’ I return to the pairs of notes, asking Kelly to identify each interval, and then saying, ‘I’ve got to go from a fifth (quavers 1 and 2) to a seventh (quavers 2 and 3), so how fast has the movement got to be when each interval is compared?’ Kelly correctly identifies that the movement to cover the fifth will be a bit slower than the movement to cover the seventh, which I ask her to do. As I gesture, conduct and sing, I ask her to take a breath with her arm and body, play with ‘no bones, all sort of elastic’ and roll upwards. I suggest that we analyse the interval between C# and F double sharp (quavers 3 to 4). We arrive at the augmented fourth, but Kelly hasn’t covered that in her theory yet. I demonstrate, asking Kelly to chain all gestural fragments into one larger gesture. I ask Kelly to speed up slightly between quavers 2 and 3 and get quite excited when she is able to cover the distance legato. I say, ‘that’s the gesture for that half bar, there we go … so you analyse each interval … what speed of gesture do I need for each interval, because it’s going to be different for each one’. While gesturing, I say that each interval needs to be analysed and ‘covered’ but then each of these is subsumed into the greater gestural whole. I suggest that is what
Kelly could practise here on page two, and perhaps even on page one too. I ask Kelly if she would like me to give a ‘progress report’ (yes) and I show her using the piano keyboard as a sliding scale – about ¼ of the way there and I praise her for her efforts so far. Jean says that Kelly really loves the piece and I say that I do too. I say that while that was an intense hour, Kelly was ready for this new phase and I congratulate her for her diligence and preparation. Kelly plays the Debussy, but it seems to be untidy when compared with the previous lesson. It could be that Kelly is very tired. I say that Kelly is good with the pedal which is ‘sort of good, but sort of not good’ (?) I suggest that some things have ‘gone forward while others have come back’. I do acknowledge that it’s probably due to being a bit tired. For the crossing hands part on page two, I write in the pedalling and then ask Kelly how she is going with it generally. I ask her if she’s ready for the ‘Commonwealth Games’ (maybe not yet), but I say that she has a good handle on it already. In retrospect, it probably would have been better to end the lesson there. While I click, I ask Kelly not to slow down. I suggest that she take those few bars and increase the tempo so that it matches the rest of the piece. I ask Kelly to play the beginning of the piece, but she plays the same part, which would suggest she is very tired. I do ask again and she plays the beginning and then we compare it to the crossing hands part. I ask Kelly how she will increase the speed, then sit and demonstrate add-a-group at a faster tempo. Kelly sits and does it too. I say, (jokingly) if she is sure she doesn’t want to go back to Grade 5 (?) I ask Kelly if she’s ambitious and if she wants to be good at it (yes) and I say me too. I say that even though it’s fast, it’s still important to listen for perfection of rhythm and clarity too. I ask her to play and listen ‘for it’. She partial practises each beat and then chains them together very well. I say that while it’s better, she will need to ‘force’ it to get faster now. I caution her to leave the pedal out sometimes and listen for total clarity. I move to the crossing hands part on page one, saying that when descending, the exactness of the rhythm is missing. I demonstrate and then ask Kelly to revise this area, which she sits and plays, and I comment that it isn’t quite even there. I guide Kelly through rhythm drills: LSLS, SLSL, SSLL, LSSL, LLSS. She has to think hard here but does get them all, though SSLL and LSSL are challenging. I remind her to not only use her fingers, but also the larger overarching gesture too. I then ask her to play the ascending gesture and then the descending gesture, which she does very well (‘you’re a good girl!’). When she puts the pedal back in, the hands lose control, so I suggest leave out the pedal. I move to the beginning, and say that her rotary
movement to the left is too fast and she is ‘landing’ on the thumb instead of ‘scooping it up as you go’. I exit to go to the bathroom, as Kelly practises the elliptical movements using add-a-beat technique. She practises each several times as I asked her in a previous lesson. I am gone for quite a while, yet Kelly continues. I ask Kelly to chain them together, and I say, ‘That’s it … so you land on the thumb a bit slower and move to the right a bit quicker’. I say that I can ‘hear it in there’ (the optimal result), but when I ask Kelly if she can hear it she says no. Jean says that she can hear it a few times. I suggest that she not ‘stop’ on the thumb, but to play the thumb whilst moving to the right. I write on the score, demonstrate and suggest, ‘The circles are bigger to the right and smaller to the left’. Kelly tries chaining the gestural fragments together and has success. I ask her to add the other hand in. I identify which group gives her the most trouble, and ask her why. Kelly identifies that the intervallic distance is wider, and therefore the gestural movement needs to be faster. I suggest that she throw her hand from the top note, to the bottom note and back again. She does well and I suggest that her progress her isn’t as good as the previous time I heard the piece – ‘which is normal with a piece like this’. I summarise by saying that as the intervals between notes vary, so will the speed of gestural movement vary in order for the rhythmic precision to be upheld. Kelly nods. I give her a summary of work to do. Jean says that it seems that this piece is one that needs to be reviewed again and again and I agree. I remind Kelly to try and enjoy herself along the way, aiming for a sparkle behind the notes. I sit down and pretend that I’m riding a horse, doing a critical comparison, encouraging Kelly to involve her whole self in the playing. I say that in one way, it is an analytical process, but merging herself with the music is the ultimate goal. I suggest that Kelly ‘own each note’ and merge the brain and the body. I say that, ‘brain, body, heart and soul all go together … it’s good to go in and do detail, but you can’t forget the big picture’.

Lesson 26: 3 August 2014

Reviewed 15 September 2016

- The lesson starts with Jean telling me that she can hear that Kelly’s playing is ‘sometimes not right’. I ask her what she means and she says that it can sound ‘a bit lumpy’ and I laugh. Jean says that sometimes Kelly likes to go faster and faster. Kelly smiles and I mention that Adrian has the same problem. I mention that the B-flat key is a bit broken. Jean says that Sam is parking the car. Jean suggests that Kelly takes
off her jumper. I see that Kelly has tagged her music folder and ask her what *fuga* means (German for fugue). I say, ‘Let’s have a listen’ and then we change chairs. I explain that the one that tilts forward slightly is probably best in order to enhance the ‘pelvic tilt’. We do some sit and stand exercise – ‘Playing the piano is like standing up except you’re slightly sitting’. I do a demonstration where I play while sitting and standing. My pen accidentally falls inside and I open the key lid to retrieve it. Kelly looks very surprised and I ask her if she would like to like inside, which she does. She seems genuinely interested, and I explain that each key is actually three times longer than what you see. I say, ‘the further in you go, the more energy you need. If you’re going to move in, you need more energy. These are basically levers, and the closer you are to the lever, the more energy it takes … Can you feel that? Much easier back here. Amazing isn’t it … so touch sensitive’. Kelly nods with interest. Jean asks me if I know how to tune the piano (no). Jean asks me if I know a tuner that I can recommend (yes). Jean said that Yamaha tuner was quite expensive ($180). I say that $150–$160 is to be expected. I say, ‘all right, let’s have a listen’ and as I put the lid back on, Kelly looks at Jean several times. Kelly plays the Mozart *Rondo in D*. The first section is going well, but she slows considerably towards the key change, and there are frequent mistakes. As she comes to the right-hand broken chords, I chuckle and say, ‘It’s hard this bit isn’t it?’ I correct the notes of her ascending scales as I sit at the second piano. I say, ‘Good girl, you’ve got two pages now’. I ask Kelly to write in D Major scale where she was having difficulty. I suggest we review some sections, and we work on the left hand phrasing for the bars where the right hand has Alberti chords. We review the fingering for the left hand here. I scaffold the left hand with right-hand block chords and then begin adding the right hand as written. We continue to review the fingering, gestural choreography and tonal shape of the phrase. I remind her not to switch her upper arm muscles on and off for ascending right-hand scales, as there is a bump on the thumb. She is able to correct the problem (‘good!’) but has difficulty with the notational accuracy while doing so. I manipulate her arm so as to encourage her to switch on the upper arm while remaining loose from the elbow down. She plays the right-hand scales again, but is still having slight difficulty merging accuracy of notes with purity of sound (upper arm and thumb combination), though it is improving. I remind her to pronate further inwards when turning after the fourth finger (as opposed to the third finger). I ask Kelly why the movement between 3-1 is different to 4-1. She answers, ‘they’re further apart’ and I agree. I demonstrate
and ask Kelly to watch how my elbow comes a little higher for the 4-1 combination, as opposed to the 3–1 combination. Kelly nods and I continue to demonstrate, saying, ‘when you play it fast, you can’t really see it, true? But it’s there … little movements’. I say that Kelly has done a good job overall there. We move back to the beginning and I demonstrate the phrasing of the opening, and Kelly plays. I’m not very clear about what I’m after, but Kelly copies quite well. Though I don’t say it explicitly (and maybe should), I can see that Kelly is pulling down on the thumb and over-extended the other fingers, so for greater ease of execution, I encourage her to ‘throw the arm’ when playing the thumb during the cadential motif to high D. I do encourage her to throw her elbow up on the B and say, ‘Yeah, let go of any tension there’. I say, ‘that’s it’ and mention that there is only one A there. Kelly nods. I say, ‘between the A and the B, you’re sort of gripping a bit’. Kelly tries and I point out that the notes ‘aren’t working properly there’ – Kelly nods. I suggest that it’s due to some tightness in the wrist, but I see now that it’s due to over-extension of fingers 3, 4 and 5 which causes the tightness in the hand and wrist. She does much better this time. I say, ‘If there’s any notes missing … where they don’t sound (I demonstrate) … it means something is sort of switched on and that’s holding you back’. Kelly nods. I move on quickly to the scale that connects the opening statements of the theme, asking Kelly not to slow down so much here. I use conducting, body movement, my voice and gesture to demonstrate a slight ease into the new phrase. Kelly plays this scale, and I say, ‘That generally has improved though … good girl’. As we work together and practise various fragments, I see that Kelly’s main challenge is finger over-extension. She has some difficulty remember the notes for the final couple of gestural fragments, so I demonstrate various practice techniques to help improve her knowledge of notation and fingering here: pairs of notes, shifting rhythms (LSLS, SLSL, SSLL). I ask Kelly how harp is going and what she is working on. Kelly looks to Jean and then tells me. She tells me Schubert’s *Moment Musical in F minor*, which is a piano piece. I demonstrate briefly (too big for Kelly due to octaves). Kelly plays the passage again, and I ask her not to ‘rock forward so quickly, otherwise you get a bump’. I say, ‘That’s lovely’. We continue, and I say, ‘feel the bottom of the keys for me’ and I caution her not to drop the wrist, but I still see the main problem being finger over-extension. Nonetheless, I say that it’s improved and I cue her to start from the beginning with hands together. I coach her with the articulation and tonal shape of phrases (A louder than D/G louder than C#) and left hand softer. I suggest that even
within the left hand, she could make it louder and softer. I say, ‘That’s it’, but the message as to why doesn’t seem particularly clear. Am I really giving her the skills to listen and hear for herself and then be guided by that? I seem excited, but I’m not sure Kelly understands why. I ask her to continue, but she falters at the semiquaver interchange that we worked so hard on before. I think she needs more time, so I suggest we continue on. Nonetheless, she repeats the scale a number of times, usually with some hesitation. I ask her, ‘Why is sometimes really clear and sometimes it’s not?’ Kelly doesn’t seem to know, so I suggest that it’s because she’s lost contact with the bottom of the keys due to general tightness ‘somewhere’. I demonstrate again, asking her to keep the upper arm switch on and ‘lay your hands over the keys’. I ask her not to ‘jerk’ her hand backwards when executing the thumb. Whilst I come over and loosen up her arm, it really is the finger over-extension that needs attention, and I see that now. I ask her to keep her wrist loose as she makes the transition from descending to ascending and then make a comment regarding the length of her fingernails. We laugh. She continues to try to improve the scales and I continue to help her feel the upper arm change direction which then activates the elbow to employ an elliptical interchange. We move on to the cadential point, suggest that, ‘we need to make the left hand more colourful there’. I ask her to feel a quick down movement, and then a slow up movement for the phrasing, and I demonstrate using expressive gesture and my voice. I ask her to ‘slide’ more slowly on the upper note, so as to generate a decrescendo. She has success and I give her a pat on the back – ‘good girl’. I ask her to write it in, asking her ‘How would we write that?’ Kelly explains, but starts talking about the fingering. I ask her how we would write the up and down movements and how fast each is. I mention that I could just write decrescendo, but that is already marked in the score. I ask Kelly, ‘What movement makes you get softer?’ and she answers ‘up’. I agree and then write the gestural choreography into the score, offering a demonstration soon after. Kelly copies and seems to have enhanced understanding now. I do a critical comparison to emphasise this point before adding the hands together. I move to the choreography of the right hand, deconstructing it into gestural fragments which Kelly copies before adding all fragments together into one phrase. I mention that it will be challenging to put the hands together, showing Kelly in slow motion the choreography as well as narrating in real time. I ask Kelly to practise that part with hands separately, and I place a pink sticker on the score to remind her. I say that of all the bars so far, that is the one that
‘needs the most work’. Kelly nods. I say, ‘It’s actually quite good already’ and then ask her to keep going. Kelly plays (quite well) and I ask her if it’s her idea to go … (I play with a slight stretch at the cadence). I can’t see her face on camera but she tilts her head. I say that it’s a good idea and ‘can I steal it?’ I ask her (and demonstrate) the leaning notes are to be played on the beat. Kelly copies and I demonstrate more slowly. Kelly copies and thereafter, we do some drills to synchronise the hands (stopping and repeated the synchronised notes multiple times). I ask her to get those a bit more exact and then we move on – ‘don’t make the B too loud … lovely’. Kelly puts the hands together again, following my lead. I ask her to join the left-hand legato whilst phrasing the right hand. ‘Good girl … you’re a good kid’. I move to the next page where a similar passage can be found. I ask Kelly to start her turns on the upper note, and I point out the footnotes, which she says she hadn’t hear of that term before. I explain briefly that there can be an upper or a lower turn, and do a quick demonstration. I ask Kelly if she knows why ornaments are included in this music – she says no. I explain that it’s for decoration, like putting make-up on. I also suggest flowers in the house as an alternative analogy. I cue Kelly and she puts the hands together for this section where the turns are. I say, ‘Good Kelly’ before asking her to be more exact with the phrasing, where all little slurs are observed. She plays hands together, but really needs to be doing hands separately here. Nonetheless, I say, ‘good girl’, and she pushes on, despite wrong notes and hesitations. I explain that section is quite detailed, but such detail will enable more sophistication, as I play the hands together in critical comparison. I suggest that like looking at a diamond under a microscope – ‘it’s very detailed’. I go on to suggest that List A and List B are often the most difficult choices due to this level of detail. I say, ‘you’re keeping up with me really well … big smile?’ I ask her if she will learn another page and Kelly nods. I suggest that it has improved since last lesson and that she is heading in the right direction. I ask her if she has practised Debussy since Thursday (yes) and I ask, ‘Yeah, any good, or?’ (Yes). I ask her to show me the beginning. She starts before stopping to adjust herself as I ask her where her belly button is in relation to the keyboard. She starts again, and then again, but it’s quite untidy. I suggest that we practise the hands crossing, and give her a quick practice suggestion here. I use expressive gesture and say, ‘Now take notice of what it feels like when you do it well. As you shift into that position, can you recreate that feeling?’ As I sit at the second piano, I do a five-note gestural fragment and Kelly copies. We do it many times. We
then start adding notes around that fragment, before and after. We return to the nine-note gestural fragment interchange, and I say that it’s very even there, but when adding the other notes, it doesn’t work as well, so there is perhaps a need to review the way that the hand executes those other notes when the left hand crosses over the right hand. I sit at the second piano and suggest that there needs to be more vertical space between the hands, lest the right hand gets squished, causing faulty rhythm here. She plays again, and does slightly better. As I watch, I can see that Kelly is sitting too upright and probably needs to tilt forwards from the hips in order to achieve such space. Nonetheless, she does seem to get there eventually. I do a critical comparison, demonstrating how space between the hands enhances the rhythmic reliability. We move on to the F minor shape, but I see the same challenge here too. I ask her to experiment with the gestural fragment that connects ascending and descending, before asking her to think of where her right elbow is in relation to the notes. In retrospect, I think that her elbow isn’t leading the hand here. Nonetheless, I point out to Kelly that when she plays the interchange fragment, the arms are ‘nice and free’, but when adding all other notes, the right hand becomes ‘stuck’ (perhaps due to an inactive elbow?) I say, ‘If you partial practise something, try to be aware of what shape it’s in, otherwise if you change the shape, it won’t come out the same’. I dramatise what that might look like as I tell myself, ‘so I’ve got my elbow here a bit …’ Kelly nods and I ask her if she’s getting tired and she seems a bit embarrassed. We then move on to the sustain pedal, and I explain a little regarding half-pedalling, and then full pedalling at the cadential points. I suggest that Kelly concentrate more on the hands at this stage. We move on to the middle section where the hands cross, before I suggest that she may not have had time to practise it since last lesson. She looks a little guilty. I reiterate the idea that if something works well partially, but not within the whole, it’s probably because the movement has changed during that transition, rather than it being a case of being ‘unlucky’. Using expressive gesture I remind Kelly that piano playing is very ‘spatial’ due to its size, and slight deviations of the arms can interrupt coordination. ‘Aim to be aware of where your body is in relation to the notes and what your arms are doing’. I share a story with Kelly regarding the Debussy piece Gardens in the Rain, and how I ‘just practised’ rather than analysed how I was moving through the notes and how that might affect my ability to play the piece. I demonstrate different ways of playing the piece, depending on my level of body awareness. I suggest that Kelly could take an imaginary movie of
herself, or perhaps practise with a mirror in order to gain greater understanding of how her moving body shapes the sound and secures the rhythm. As I sit at the second piano, I ‘practise’, conveying my intention towards greater body awareness while doing so. I explain to Kelly that with the more advanced repertoire, ‘it’s all to do with choreography, shapes and positions’. I review how each of Kelly’s pieces have different challenges, and meeting those challenges will enhance the stylistic authentic of each piece. Kelly nods. I suggest that pieces often overlap, e.g. broken chords. I demonstrate a little of her pieces, suggesting that some kids pick up such choreography very quickly, and for others it can take a little more time. I suggest that while she is a hard worker, she could become more aware of how her body moves in space. I say, ‘That’s where you get your energy from … moving’. I do a critical comparison of a little of Mozart’s Rondo in D to show how a slight pelvic tilt can enhance the quality of the touch. I continue, ‘Use gesture and movement from the trunk as well’. I demonstrate again, and then ask Kelly to try. She plays, but then I ask her to mimic my body movement alone, before adding notes back into such movement. She does so and the tonal colour is certainly different. I then ask her to apply that concept to the Debussy, reminding her to give the hands some room so the fingers can articulate clearly. Kelly keeps trying and I encourage her to adjust her right hand and elbow for enhanced finger clarity. She does well, though it takes a number of times to get there. As I stand beside her, I reiterate how important it is to not sit still, but to become more aware of ‘where is my body in space?’ Kelly nods. Using expressive gesture, I continue, ‘It’s like a dance … your whole body and being’s got to be involved, not just your fingers’. Kelly nods. I explain that in the lower grades, the pieces are more stationary (in one spot). I use the analogy of hopscotch for the lower grades and long jump for the upper grades – a different technique is required. I dramatise long jump, with its big run up, reiterating greater awareness of the body in the higher grades. Jean says, ‘Thank you so much’. I say, ‘Everything’s moving in the right direction … it’s slow though, as it is for everyone. If you work on it long enough, you’ll get there’.

Lesson 27: 10 August 2014

Reviewed 4 October 2016

- Jean says that she is a bit sick and everyone is a bit tired. Apparently Kelly went to the Optometrist and her eyes have become ‘worse’ in the last eight months. Jean and
Sam says that they need to review how much music Kelly is doing and they have
decided to stick with one lesson a week. They suggest that holiday time might be a
good time for extra lessons and they would like her in bed by 8pm, in order to wake
up a bit earlier. Kelly seems happy and is busy adjusting the chair. They say that two
lessons a week is really efficient, but are worried it’s too much. I suggest that we
listen to Mozart and ask Kelly if she needs to wear glasses. Jean says that she already
has glasses, but they will go on Monday to get the prescription increased. She also
talks about special hard lenses to stop her eyesight from getting worse. Kelly tells me
that these lenses are to wear at night when sleeping. Jean seems worried about the cost
and the fact that they are very fragile. I ask them if they will continue with theory
lessons (yes, but not from next term). It seems that they are thinking to scale back
Kelly’s commitments, though they really like Yvonne. Jean says that Kelly
understands her really well. Jean says that she is worried having 1 lesson a week will
slow Kelly down. I agree that it probably will, but that’s OK. Kelly plays the Mozart
Rondo, but it doesn’t seem to have improved a great deal, though she has gone further
with learning the notes. It’s hands together except for the end of exposition where she
reads the right hand alone. I say that Mozart needs as much colour and detail in the
articulation as possible. I ask Kelly if she has a cold too, and I say that I’ve been
unwell this week too. Jean says that the shop is really busy and she has to work
Monday to Friday, and then look after Kelly on Saturday and Sunday so she gets very
tired. I empathise with Jean and say that I understand. She says again that she has
been worried about dropping to 1 piano lesson a week, but she also doesn’t want
Kelly to drop any of her instruments. Referring to final phrases at the end of the
exposition, I ask Kelly to ‘show the audience that’s the top note’. Kelly plays a little
slower and makes a good sound. I point out the fingering, asking her why it might be
that way. She starts to answer, but I cut her off saying, ‘So that you don’t bump’. I
suggest that she can ‘pick up the two as you roll’. I continue to help Kelly to develop
variation in the way that she plays staccato. I say, ‘Nothing’s every static … it’s
always moving to or from somewhere … music’s got to go somewhere’. I do a critical
comparison, demonstrating the way that staccato can have colour and tonal shape, just
as much as legato can. Kelly nods. I ask her to start again, a little louder then softer
the second time the theme is heard. I ask Kelly not to slow down during her scale
transition and thereafter when the melody is heard in the bass. I play along with her
occasionally and use gesture to coach tonal shape and phrasing. I ask her to speed up
the section thereafter. I say that the piece sounds too soft, and a bit tired, so I ask her to exaggerate even more, particularly at the beginning. She starts again, and I say, ‘that’s it! A bit more energy, that’s what I’m looking for … especially in the left hand’. She continues to play as I coach her with uniformity of pulse and shaping of phrases using body movement, expressive gesture and singing/vocal cues. I ask Kelly to feel strong in the tops of the arms and play right to the bottom of the keys. I help her with the fingerings of the chromatic scale transition, asking Kelly to write ‘chromatic scale fingering’. I say, ‘that sounds heaps better … it sounded a bit sickly before, like it was lacking iron’. I say, ‘That’s good, it came alive just then’. I ask Kelly to show me a sparkle in her eyes, before asking her to ‘play the left hand like that’. The vision is off screen, but I say, ‘not like this … OK?’ Kelly smiles and nods. I move to the right-hand Alberti chords and I encourage Kelly to play louder and deeper with the left hand by dropping into the keys faster – ‘That’s awesome, very good’. I say that we will move on, saying that that has improved, as the first time was too soft. Kelly nods and I give her the general knowledge notes, talking briefly (exposition, rondo, appoggiaturas, sighing notes, rondo sonata form) and teaching Kelly the pronunciation of Wolfgang. I ask Kelly to study this and she nods. I ask Kelly if she has heard of exposition (the piece is displayed) and then talk about development and recapitulation. I ask Kelly if we can hear her Bach now. I ask Kelly how far she has gone with Mozart and she shows me. I ask her if she has any questions (yes fingering) and I encourage her to have a note pad and pen beside the piano that she can jot down any questions during her practice. We move to the section where the right hand has perpetual semiquavers, and I sit beside her and experiment with the fingering. I ask Kelly to write in the fingering as I play beside her. I say that the fingering is based on what I have just tried and felt to most comfortable, including ‘the gestures of the piece’. I ask Kelly if there are any other questions (no). I give Kelly the analysis for her Bach, talking a little bit more about the fantasia/toccata aspects of the Prelude. I also give her the analysis for Debussy, asking her to read the information when she has time. I talk a little bit about Children’s Corner, and the relevance of the title Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum and the impression of a child practising but becoming distracted. I give her the analysis for Nocturne, and I ask her if she enjoys reading about the pieces. She looks at Jean as says ‘maybe’ and Jean says that she enjoys research. Kelly asks me if she should play the Prelude or the Fugue, and I suggest the Prelude. She asks me if she should play hands separately or
hands together and I suggest hands together. She says she’s not very good at it, but I say, ‘maybe just show me’. It starts off well, but she is really reading notes thereafter. I say that she is doing fine, as I was expecting it to be much more stretchy. I suggest that she concentrate on the Prelude due to limited time with one lesson a week. Kelly seems disappointed, but I pat her on the back and I ask her to encourage herself a bit. I ask Kelly what she might be working towards for the end-of-year recital, and I suggest maybe two or three pieces rather than five. Kelly is unsure, so I suggest perhaps Bach Prelude and Mozart mainly, and perhaps Debussy and Chopin if she has time. I ask Kelly if she is able to put page two of the Prelude hands together (yes Mark), but I think it’s a bit unrealistic in retrospect. I sit and demonstrate add-a-beat technique with hands together, asking Kelly to aim for that this week. When she ‘misses’ the coordination, I ask her to tell me which bar it was (bar 3). I sit at the second piano and we do add-a-note together, throwing the arms in the direction of travel. I sense that there is some stretching in the right hand, so I ask Kelly to move her elbow so as to encourage the arm and hand to roll through the notes – the difference is quite stark. We cycle through this process again, and I point out that the right hand travels faster than the left hand here. Kelly does well. I say, ‘whenever there is a coordination problem, do gestural drills and throw in the direction of travel. Sometimes the right hand moves faster than the left hand, and when you try to play the hands at the same speed, that’s when you’ll have a coordination problem’. Kelly nods. I suggest that we hear some of the Chopin now, saying that she is half way through most of the pieces, hoping to give her some confidence. I say, ‘you’ll get there Kelly … you’re a good player … skilful’. She plays the introduction to the Nocturne, and I pull her up with her timing. Thereafter, I ask Kelly if she can be more extroverted with her gestures so as to make the piece come alive. She tries again, and she shows improvement here. I suggest that we go on, which she does though the recording ends prematurely.

Lesson 28: 17 August 2014

Reviewed 4 October 2016

- We talk about the Chan boys being quieter than usual. I say that I think that their Mum threatened to end their lessons if they weren’t going to take it seriously. Jean says that she sometimes does that to Kelly. We laugh and Jean says that Kelly immediately changes her attitude. I ask Kelly if she is well (yes) and I suggest we
start with the Mozart *Rondo*. Kelly starts to adjust the chair, but I swap it for another, as there are 4 chairs in the room. I talk about the chairs being from the old conservatorium. I ask Kelly to start with a big breath in. She plays quite well, but I put the chair height up and she starts again. It doesn’t seem to have improved, especially in terms of stability of tempo. May be I should be directing her to use the metronome instead of assuming ‘things will happen’ because I perceive her to be ‘very musical’. I suggest that she change the octaves in the left hand to single (bottom) notes. I mark the score and show Kelly where it has improved (she agrees) and also where it still sounds ‘sluggish … a bit tired’. I ask Kelly to play the appoggiaturas with more sparkle, sitting to demonstrate. Kelly tries the right hand and I say, ‘Yeah, that’s it, use more energy when you play’. I ask her to start again with hands together, which she does, but the tempo changes. I put the metronome on and she starts the cello section at a good tempo but I stop her saying that her left hand sounds ‘very soggy’. I demonstrate and use expressive gesture, asking her to ‘put a bit more energy into it’. She tries again and I say, ‘that’s better … what’s different about the way you play it there? It’s almost like you’re getting too relaxed with your playing and there’s no sparkle anymore’. I turn the metronome off, and I ask her to go from the cadence before the cellos enter, but she tends to speed up here. Kelly plays again, and I say that her left hand doesn’t sound like it’s really ‘joining in’. Using expressive gesture and dramatisation, I ask her to play the left hand softly but still with energy and shape. I say that perhaps because I asked her not to play so loudly with the concerto, she has gone too far the other way. Jean says that it might be hard to adjust – too soft or too loud. I ask her to flap her arms from the elbows like a chicken. She does and I ask her to be a bit more energetic. Jean asks her if she wants to take off her jumper, which she does. I ask Kelly to run down to the library and back again – ‘Hurry!’ I ask her to feel like that and put lots of energy into the playing. Kelly plays the B minor part and I say, ‘now I’m feeling it’. I say that while she is only a kid and it’s a bit confusing, do I play soft, do I play loud, but remind her that the most important thing is to always be energetic when playing. Kelly nods. I say, ‘you know how I’m standing here, being energetic?’ I sit down in the chair and pretend to be sleepy, giving her direction to be energetic, but in a non-energetic way. I return to normal, saying, ‘OK, so the reason I get up out of the chair is because I’m trying to inspire you (to be energetic) … so I want that back from you, OK?’ Kelly nods. I say that what she is doing is fine, but it doesn’t feel like there’s anything there. I say, ‘I’m sorry … I don’t mean to mean’.
Kelly smiles, and chuckles, as does Jean. I energetically ask Kelly to play from the beginning again. She starts and I ask her to throw her arms faster, but she makes mistakes and it seems as though my coaching is distracting her. Nonetheless, she is smiling and continues. As Kelly plays I say, ‘nice and bright … juicy left hand … show me muscles … same tempo’ and I sing the Alberti bass while moving and gesticulating. Kelly comes to a stop and I say, ‘Good … now that’s how much energy you need to put into your own playing’. Jean says, ‘It seems slightly faster … keep up this speed?’ and I agree. I ask Kelly to keep going, while I coach her. I demonstrate and ask her to shape the left-hand chords, asking her to make them come alive, suggesting soft-loud-soft. She tries, but I say that her softs are ‘sort of dead’, and I dramatise. She tries again whilst I use gesture and body movement and it’s better (‘good, and again’). I hand Kelly the pencil and ask her if she would like to write it in the score. I encourage her and she asks me how to write it. I suggest $pf$ and then she adds the hands together. I say, ‘good’, and ask her to close the book and listen to how it sounds. She does well, so using my voice and expressive gesture I suggest that she make the second phrase louder. Kelly plays, but then I notice that the score says soft, so she plays it that way. I demonstrate the left hand, saying that even though it’s ‘only’ a broken chord, it needs shape, otherwise the piece won’t move forward. As Kelly plays the ascending chromatic scale, I ask her to ‘milk it’, before demonstrating, saying, ‘Make sure we’re arriving somewhere’. Kelly tries and does very well and continues on. I say that I’m impressed with her right-hand Alberti chords and her coordination is spot on. I mention again that even soft playing has to have direction and energy. I ask Kelly to play from the diminished seventh bars with the right hand. I review the fingering, writing it in the score while Kelly plays. I suggest staccato here, before demonstrating with the pedal, saying that’s what people usually do. I ask her to keep going with it, and I ask her if we can hear something else. Kelly suggests Bach Prelude and I say, ‘OK, let’s have a listen’. She plays it hands together, and it really is very stretchy and quite hesitant. After a couple of lines I ask, ‘OK, how you going there?’ She says that she’s been practising as I had asked, and I say, ‘Yeah? Still not working?’ Kelly says she can’t chain it altogether yet. I say that maybe it’s still too early as she has only had a week. I ask her to play the add-a-beat ‘version’ which she does. She doesn’t get far before I ask her if the hands are (perfectly) together there. I ask her what other exercises she could use to get the hands synchronised. I get my score and say, ‘they’re big pieces are they?’ Kelly nods. I say, ‘Are you good at being
your own teacher?’ Kelly says that she’s not sure and I say that she might have to be. I ask her again what I might suggest. She seems unsure so I say that if she is having trouble getting them together, she will need to force them together. I sit at the second piano and we ‘nail it in there’. We do staccato, two-note slurs, add-a-note, repeated notes, and add-a-group gestures before moving to the next bar. Mixing it up in this way does challenge her, and I ask her if she can feel the hands touch the bottom of the key at the same time. It’s slow going, but the results are there and we keep moving on. I ask Kelly, ‘are they actually together though?’ and then try two-note slurs with staccato on the second note. We continue on and use add-a-note with repeated staccato as well as add-a-group. I ask Kelly to notice how when she tries to do more than a half bar the hands seem to come apart, perhaps because she ‘stops moving’ and needs more energy. We continue on, and I ask Kelly to use an energetic preparatory movement before dropping and rolling through the keys. I say to Kelly that if she wants to play the big pieces, she has to play like the big kids, rather than being too conservative with her approach to using energy in the playing. I say that I can tell that she’s practising, but her mindset doesn’t fit the bigger pieces yet – ‘You’ve got to get bigger than the piece or it will swallow you up’. When I ask her if she understands, Kelly nods. I say that if she wants a challenge, she needs to physically ‘lift’ herself up. I ask her to run down the corridor and back like she did earlier, saying quickly, ‘hurry!’ Before she goes, Kelly asks me cautiously, ‘where do I go?’ and ‘same place?’ Jean and I laugh. Jean says, ‘I don’t know, she was very energetic before the class, but then when she comes she is very calm. I think it’s the same as the school … very quiet one’. As she comes in, I say, ‘you’re a very quiet girl but you can’t play these pieces quietly … they’ll be too big for you otherwise. I know you’re only a shy girl, but you’ve got to act a bit more like Winne (they laugh) … she’s big and boisterous’. I also refer to Adrian and Neil and their ‘big’ personalities. I remind Kelly that’s why I get up off the chair, saying that I see others sit quietly while teaching. I say, ‘If you want to teach these sort of pieces, it’s sort of the same as if you were playing them’. We move to the next line and continue with the coordination drills – add-a-note in the direction of travel though accenting the last note of the gestural fragment. I say, ‘Watch me’ and I encourage Kelly to use a preparatory up movement before flowing through each gestural fragment. I ask Kelly to practise like this during the week, saying, ‘You’ve got to get the right attitude or it will swallow you up’. Jean and Kelly laugh nervously. ‘You’ll never really get on top of the piece,
you’ve got to get on top of it’. Using an energetic gesture with my arms I ask Kelly to show me the beginning, ‘Go!’ She plays and I ask her to move her fingers fast as well as using gestures with arms. After she finishes the first few bars, I say that I can definitely hear a difference and ask that she ‘refresh’ each new bar. Kelly plays well, and then I ask her to play staccato. I encourage her to make a bigger more boisterous sound by intermittently free falling into the keys with a tonal splat. I notice that the left hand is a bit wonky in bar 3 so we work there briefly, using staccato and legato combinations, ‘Good, good girl!’ I say that Adrian is very good at this kind of detail and that Kelly could learn from that, albeit without the obsessive streak. I suggest that Kelly could be more brash like Neil, and both boys could be more sensitive and take on a more hard working, serious attitude like Kelly – ‘We can all learn from each other’. I say, ‘Now play it as if your life depended on it!’ She plays, but seems to second-guess herself. I say that I can definitely see the end result in the distance, ‘it’s there’. We return to staccato and then legato, asking Kelly for more finger articulation. I say that it is a really difficult piece. Jean says that it seems that the piece needs a lot of power. I agree and say that you generate that power through movement, as well as fingers. I say again that while it is a tricky piece, I believe that Kelly can do it, as ‘it takes a certain kind of person, one that will see it through right until the end’. Jean asks how many lines Kelly needs to practise and I suggest a smaller amount and in the manner that we have done in the lesson. I ask Kelly if she has been through most of the first page (yes). I ask Kelly if she has enough time to practise it in the amount of detail required (20 minutes to do 4 bars). Jean says that she practises about 1.5 hours a day, but is always short of time. I agree, and suggest that a smaller amount is better. I commend her for practising that amount, though it ‘just takes time’. I count the bars and then suggest that if she wants to see results quicker, aim to practise half of the piece. I say that it’s ok to ‘play through’, but to see improvement, ‘a smaller amount more intensively’ will be the way forward. Jean asks 10–15 minutes checking notes, but I cut her off, saying that I think that Kelly will need more focused, partial practice. I say that it’s good to be ambitious, but a strategy is also necessary. Jean says that Kelly is still enjoying all four pieces and I say that that’s good. Jean asks if Kelly will play something else and I suggest Chopin. Kelly plays hands together. The introduction is good though too fast, and the notes become more hesitant towards the bottom of page one. I stop her and ask how she’s going and she says she needs a bit more practice. I say, ‘These two lines are really good’ and I ask her to start again. I
coach her to ‘lift and drop’ as she plays the introduction and the melody thereafter. I take the book away, saying, ‘Try not to look at the notes, you’ve got to memorise the shapes so that you can move over them quickly, otherwise you’ll have those tonal holes where the sound doesn’t happen’. She starts again and I ask her to tilt forwards from the hips, involving her upper body. I ask her to play the left hand faster – ‘It’s a slow piece, but your movements are too slow’. I say that there isn’t enough momentum with the left hand at that pace. I ask her to try again, and she starts from the beginning. I stop her just after the introduction, demonstrating how she can start with some ‘thrust’ from the upper body while using free fall of the arms. She has real difficulty with the notes here, but rather than focusing on that I say, ‘Now that’s where you would slow down … yeah’, referring to the left hand between right-hand phrases. I sit at the second piano and demonstrate. I ask her to speed it up and start memorising, asking if she knows how to do that (yes). I say, ‘You can already play the piece, so the next thing to do is to start to memorise it so that you’re not having to find the notes, because in the effort to find the notes (pretends to find notes), there’s no momentum to carry you through’. Kelly nods. I say, ‘I think that you need to move out of the note-learning stage in order to see further progress. Sorry I wasn’t a bit more complimentary like usual’. Jean laughs and Kelly smiles weirdly. I say to Kelly that her pieces are in that stage where they need a lot of practice, but there is a need to ‘get up over the notes’ rather than sitting and ‘playing’ them now. I say that I still think that she can do it, and Jean agrees, saying, ‘She still didn’t get the feeling yet’. The atmosphere seems a bit awkward.

Lesson 29: 24 August 2014

Reviewed 15 September 2016

- As the recording starts I open a bottle of soft drink and ask Kelly how she is. She smiles broadly and says good and I say, ‘You look cheerful … that’s good’. I ask her how harp is going (good). I comment how cold and rainy it’s been. I mention how cold it’s been lately, and the dog made the bed a little warmer, though it was still cold. Jean and Kelly laugh. I ask how she is going with it all this week, and Kelly seems positive and nods yes when I ask if she has had good progress. Jean says that she has been ‘going up and down a lot and finally a bit better’. I agree and say that learning the piano is like that in the higher grades, as progress can plateau before increasing again, as it’s never in a straight line. I encourage Kelly to keep trying her best, as it
sometimes can take longer to see progress in the higher grades when compared with the earlier grades. Kelly smiles and starts playing Mozart’s *Rondo in D Major* – it has certainly improved. She seems to look at the music a lot. I turn the page and she stops playing. I say, ‘that is much better … good girl. It actually sounds like Mozart now. It sounds really alive … that’s good, well done … yeah. What are you doing differently?’ Kelly seems unsure. I continue, ‘It sounds like that soft drink, Sprite. It sounds like it’s got a lot of sugar in it now’. Kelly smiles and nods. Using expressive gesture and my voice to demonstrate the phrasing, I point out where the left hand has the melody and ask her to keep practising, trying to maintain tempo without getting slower. I comment on the part where the right hand has Alberti chords, saying that it is really very good, as it’s the hardest part. I say that is the part where most people have difficulty and Kelly says that most of the time, she can’t get that part right. I say again that she is really good at it, but she doesn’t seem too sure. I ask Kelly to start again and she does so. After the semiquaver interchange, she stops. I say, ‘very good … now give us a bit more sound on top’, as I demonstrate the cadential ornaments. Kelly copies me and I say, ‘very good’. From there I demonstrate and vocalise ‘here’s the question, now here’s the answer’, and point out the right-hand phrases are different in terms of rising and falling semitones, so the sound should reflect that. I suggest ‘getting softer, getting louder’ and Kelly copies. I do a critical comparison with my voice, and ask her to show us the difference between the two phrases. She nods yes. I ask her to start from the beginning and she does so. I remind her to give more sound as she approaches the top D’s, referring to ‘sunshine’. I am quite energetic and vocal here, and Kelly smiles as she continues to play. As she plays, I use expressive gesture and conducting to coach her, saying, ‘don’t slow down’ and ‘roll forwards’, and sometimes sing the phrase line. I say to Kelly that her playing has really improved and she smiles – ‘Well Done, that is awesome playing’. Kelly looks pleased. I ask her again what she has done differently, as the playing seems more energetic. I ask her if she feels more confident, and she tentatively says yes as she smiles. I suggest that she ‘get the Sprite’ and her and Jean laugh. I say, ‘It’s got to be really bubbly, and fresh, and sweet, and energetic … like you’ve just had a Sprite’. Kelly is smiling as she nods. I dramatise the analogy of ‘looking for something to do’ rather than ‘Sunday night before school and everyone’s really tired and ready for bed’. Jean and Kelly chuckle and I say, ‘it’s sort of a Monday morning song, off we go!’ Kelly resumes from the diminished seventh section with the right hand. With her
trills, I suggest a bit more finger. I hold her hand still, not something I would normally do (so she can’t rotate as much). She smiles and I say, ‘Add the rotation with the finger (action)’. Kelly plays and then I ask her to play a C Major pentascale. From there I do a Piscchina style exercise to active individual fingers 2 and 3, then return to the trill in the Mozart. I laugh and mention that she is putting her fourth finger on top of the third finger. From there we do staccato, add-a-note drills and I adjust her elbow higher. I reiterate that her trill is still good, though it could be enhanced with greater finger action. We keep going to the end of the section with the right hand to the end of the exposition. I mention that we come to the development section. I check the right-hand notes and then as she plays the ascending and descending three-note fragments, I encourage gestural movement by moving her forearm and elbow as she plays. In effect, the ascending slurs are gestural under-shapes and the descending slurs are gestural over-shapes; she does well. Kelly continues and I encourage her to drop freely into the top notes by doing a tonal splat. As she continues, I take a drink of soft drink. I correct a few notes (E and F#) and she continues. I mention to Kelly that she is ‘really picking up the whole down up thing since last year’. Kelly smiles and nods yes. I suggest that it is becoming more automatic and ‘part of the way you play’. I encourage her to keep going with the piece, as it’s really improving now, and I show her a sliding scale of her progress. I say, ‘Whatever you’ve been doing, keep it up’. Kelly nods. I say, ‘It’s not a serious piece … it’s a party piece’. Kelly nods again. I mention that in due course, we can look at the dynamics and I narrate them. I ask her to play the semiquaver passagework, which goes well. She plays the ascending and descending three-note gestural fragments covered earlier. I demonstrate and suggest playing them like, ‘Happy Birthday!’ Thereafter I use expressive gesture and vocalise the shape of the phrases. Kelly tries and I encourage her to ‘come on, build it up … happy birthday!’ The apex falls a little flat, so I do a critical comparison using dramatisations of how one would wish someone a happy birthday with energetic sincerity, as opposed to not. Kelly laughs and then tries again. It is a little better as I use expressive gesture and my voice to coach her. I demonstrate again, using my voice to emphasise the shape and energy of the gestures. Kelly tries again and her playing shows enhanced energy now. As she continues, she is able to colour the sound with expressive gesture, despite the material still being quite new. I demonstrate, saying to Kelly that her left hand is more melodious this week too. As we peruse the remaining pages, I say that I think she will be good at the piece, as I am starting to
hear the style emerging. I say, ‘Not an easy piece, but once you get the idea, you go with it’. Kelly smiles and nods. Regarding the tricky semiquaver passagework, I say that I can see how much effort she has put in already, though the fingers are still slightly uneven. I ask her to play those bars. I sit beside her, and begin to demonstrate the gestural choreography, beginning with the pronation of the forearm as the thumb passes under the hand. From there, Kelly copies me as I deconstruct the passage into five-note gestural fragments, before chaining them together. We continue, as I ask her to ‘start rolling’ as she is playing the preceding notes before the thumb pronates. There follows experimentation to find the spatial trajectory that links the notes. I say, ‘Very good, see the little circle there?’ and Kelly smiles, nodding. I continue, ‘Do you see it? Get to know the spatial pattern and lay the notes across that’. As she plays I trace the passage in the air before writing in a gestural cue in the score. I suggest that it can be hard to find, and we continue recycling the exercises that seem to train the hand to change direction. As Kelly plays the nine-note gestural fragment, she shows good improvement and I encourage her, ‘Yeah, it’s in there … I can hear it’. I remind her not to get stuck between fingers 3 and 4. I say that there is a little hiccup somewhere (where is it?) but it sounds very good in retrospect. I suggest that it is sometimes uneven between 2 and 1 where the hand changes direction from descending to ascending. She corrects and I say, ‘Oh very good’. I suggest that realising the spatial pattern does take experimentation. I mention that overall, Kelly’s thumb has improved as she is not reaching down in order to execute it, rather ‘just popping it in along the way. There’s no time to go up and down … you just go across’. I say this as I am gesturing elliptical movements with my right hand. I say, ‘If that was my piece, I would do the same’ and continue to demonstrate the next two beats of the passage in small fragments with corresponding gestural direction. I say that these next two beats are harder than the previous two beats because it uses fingers mainly 2, 3 and 4. I sit beside Kelly and we ‘workshop’ these two beats in small fragments in an effort to increase finger dexterity and gestural direction. Techniques used include ‘add-a-note’, ‘pairing’ and ‘shifting accents’, all within a framework of loosening the wrist and elbow, which I ‘shake out’. Kelly smiles. She does manage to increase her ability to execute the notes quickly and evenly, and I pat her on the back and say, ‘Good girl’. I say, ‘Playing fast finger work, you have to have a really fast mind. That’s how you get it fast … get every little bit of it fast’. I say that it’s almost like you set fire to the passage as I dramatise. Kelly nods. I say, ‘that’s awesome …
great … really happy with that. What else? Kelly suggests Prelude and Fugue in C Minor Book 1, and I say let’s hear that. Kelly plays the Prelude and I make corrections, though they are few. However, hesitations are many. When she finishes, I ask her how her hands feel, as she says, ‘sometimes relaxed, but sometimes tense’. I ask her where her hands start to ‘freeze up’ (near the bottom of page 1). I say that that would make sense, as the bars that are the best are the ones that are nice and free. I remind Kelly that last week I asked her to cover less material, but in more detail. Kelly says that she has practised mainly the first two lines, and I say that it sounds like it, as they are good. Kelly nods and I give her an indication of her progress. I ask her to continue in the same way, aiming to ‘get more of it to feel comfortable. The more you have to stop and stretch, the more it will start to seize up, and the more it seizes up, the more you’ll need to stop and stretch … so they go together’. I ask her if she feels any tension during the first two lines. Jean says that she has only practised the first two lines and I reiterate that she has done well. I suggest that during this week, she start to practise the next two lines a little more. I say that there is no hurry to do the Grade 7 exam, so take it slowly. Kelly smiles and looks at Jean. I ask her to play the beginning again, which she does, though she appears to ‘stop and start’. I ask her how she might be able to get from one bar to the next without needing to stop. Kelly answers that she would go from the last note/s of one bar and chain it with the beginning of the next. I agree and ask her if she has done that yet. She says no, so I suggest that that is probably the next step. I detail the process as ‘steps 3 and 4 for lines 1 and 2, steps 1 and 2 for lines 3 and 4 and play through the rest to learn notes’. I liken the process of going through a conveyor belt, where different sections of the piece are at different stages of learning. Using the analogy of ‘a sausage machine’, I suggest that she just do one thing at a time, and avoid trying to do everything at once. Using gesture and storytelling, I dramatise the process of a production line. I mention that with advanced repertoire, it can be easy to become overwhelmed. I mention that Grade 7 is probably the hardest exam, where the repertoire becomes more of a ‘professional’ standard. I mention that pieces like Le Cou Cou or Für Elise, are more like encore pieces rather than core repertoire pieces. I say that up to Grade 6 are the fundamental grades and Grades 7 and 8 are much bigger, particularly Grade 7. I mention that Wendy is having some difficulty with Grade 8, though it was time for her to move up. I also mention Adrian and Neil. I say that Kelly has worked hard the last year, so she has a good foundation. I say that a lot of the practice drills that are
needed the advanced levels are similar if not the same to the earlier grades. I sit down and demonstrate how she might take the latter half of one bar and chain it to the first half of the following bar, which Kelly sits down and does. I ask her to move her left hand faster, before asking her to copy me in a FGCA flat drill (the four notes that link the two bars) while throwing the hand in the direction of travel. I say that if there is any hesitation during these four notes, ‘you will get stuck’. Then I show Kelly how to link the two bars with hands together. In effect, the two hands are thrown towards each other. As I sit down at the second piano, I lead her back to three notes (outward gesture) and then again to four notes (inward gesture). I demonstrate the full last beat of bar 1 and link it to the full first beat of bar 2, which Kelly copies. It’s at this point that I realise that the fingering that she was doing for the drills is different to that used within the piece. I say, ‘When you do the drills, you’ll have to make sure you’re practising the same fingering, otherwise you’re practising a completely different spatial pattern’. I ask Kelly which fingering she intends to use longer term, and then ask her to partial practise what was just covered, but using that fingering. We sit at our pianos and that start the drills again, this time adding more of the second bar to the first bar. We do some synchronisation drills into during the first beat of bar 2 before linking the two bars together again. I reiterate that she would continue in this way for lines 1 and 2, whilst doing ‘steps 1 and 2’ for lines 3 and 4. I suggest that it will probably take about 8 weeks. I ask to hear her Chopin Nocturne. I ask her how she is going with ‘memorising’, saying that if she needs to stop to ‘find’ the notes, it will disturb the fluidity of the gestural movement. Using expressive gesture to illustrate my point, I say that she really needs that in a piece like this, ‘you’ve got to nail the left hand, you don’t want to be thinking about notes’. Adrian comes to drop off keys and Kelly plays hands together. While the overall touch is good, the delivery is quite untidy and fragmented in terms of fluency. I stop her at the end of the first page, saying that it has improved. Thereafter mention that she is doing ‘the Russian split’ and I go on to explain. I ask her if she has been listening to any particular recording (no) and then I sit down and demonstrate. I say that it was very popular in the early 20th century, but perhaps reserve it for the Neapolitan sixth bar, rather than quite so often. I sit at the second piano, suggesting that the opening note could be louder. From there, I demonstrate the phrasing while singing the melodic line. I say that there are two short phrases followed by a longer one. I suggest that Kelly ‘show’ this to those listening and demonstrate a decrescendo at the end of phrase 1 so that it
is clear there are two phrases and not one – ‘Use dynamics to show the listener that that is the end of the first little bit’. Kelly plays and I say, ‘that’s nice’. I suggest she do the Russian split for the first note, but together thereafter, which she does. I then coach her with a more deliberate gestural attack on the first note of phrase 2, playing and singing, ‘No, there’s one more bit here’. Kelly tries and I say, ‘good’. I suggest that she now add more volume to the left hand in phrase 2. As she plays I coach her using expressive gesture and body movement, though I’m sitting. I ask her not to slow down when playing the trill, though perhaps a slight easing before the final note of the phrase (good). Using enhanced dynamics and expressive gesture I coach Kelly with greater phrase definition in the second half of page one too. She goes on, but accidentally plays the first half of page one again. I go on to demonstrate how she could play the Neapolitan sixth bar (and thereafter) ‘differently’. I play Kelly the underlying harmonic structure using block chords, before saying, ‘Show the listener the harmonies’. Using critical comparison, I go on to demonstrate how one might illustrate the harmonic ‘difference’ between phrases 1 and 2 at the top of page one. I say that Kelly has done well during the week, and I ask to hear the top of page two. I suggest that, ‘it’s quite nice, but just a bit loud’. I ask Kelly to play *pp* and ‘a bit more loving’. She puts the hands back together before I ask her to play the quavers with greater forward flow, in order for the music to sound improvisatory. I ask Kelly to use the soft pedal here. Kelly plays and then I ask to sit down, demonstrating the top of page two. Kelly sits down and plays herself. ‘I say good’, but ask her to feel for a more definitive sense of breath between phrases 1 and 2 at the top of the page (good). I ask Kelly if she plays scales and arpeggios every day (yes) and then I ask to hear a little bit of Debussy. She doesn’t get far into the second page before I interrupt and say, ‘That’s heaps better’, before going on to demonstrate a more active left-hand staccato on the top of page two. Kelly plays well, though I ask her for more sound in the left hand generally. I suggest that we move to some voicing on page two, before quickly moving to point out the unevenness of that same part. I then say, ‘The beginning is excellent … you’re really churning the mill there’, and articulate what I’m saying with gestures of the arms. I ask her to maintain greater finger clarity in the bars where the left hand crosses over the right hand – ‘it gets a bit sleepy there’. I ask her to play it without the pedal, which she does, and then I ask her to play the passage staccato. She copies me, and we sectionalise it before moving back to legato. She continues to do her best, but the hands are generally rather uneven. I ask her to feel
like she is moving her right elbow to each side. She continues to experiment as I encourage her. I say, ‘It’s really coming along but you’ve got to put a bit more energy into your playing’, as then the pieces won’t be too big for her. Jean says that she has adjusted her attitude a bit when she is practising. I say that if she is practising well, it will be quite mentally exhausting. Kelly says that she has been colouring the test tube practice sheet, and she asks for another one. I ask Kelly if she would like a trophy (maybe) and Jean says that Kelly loves trophies. They say goodbye and Wendy comes in with coffee.

Lesson 30: 31 August 2014

Reviewed 5 October 2016

- The lesson starts with a question about fingering in the Bach Fugue and I say that we will work it out. Kelly adjusts the chair and I experiment. Sam says that Jean couldn’t come today because she is sick with a headache. Kelly plays the opening subject with her left hand and then shifts the chair back. I ask her how her progress with the hands together is going generally, and she tells me that she is good at for the first half page and is working on the second half of the first page. I ask her to play the first page so I can hear what she’s been doing. She has the hands together and the voicing is certainly improving, but it seems the tempo is too quick for her to play accurately and fluently. After the first half page, I ask her to show me the left hand. Thereafter, I coach her with maintaining legato and voicing. I ask Kelly why she is playing the D in the left hand – ‘do you remember?’ She tells me and then I remind her about the B natural. We return to the fingering in the left hand so as to maintain legato (454). I say that there are often some unusual fingerings in Bach fugues, but the important thing is not to twist or get tight. I ask Kelly to move in gradually here while bending the fifth finger to the side. She gets it eventually and I shout, ‘well done!’ Kelly smiles. When she chains it together, it’s tricky for her, though she does get there. I ask her to return to the start, with a more robust touch. I say that it’s quite good so far, though the countersubject isn’t articulated as it was in the previous lesson, which I ignore. Kelly coughs. I sit down and demonstrate greater definition of voicing when the answer enters, though it’s not clear what I’m asking her to do. Nonetheless, she does much better. I ask, ‘is there any reason that you are breaking the legato between C and F# (in the countersubject)?’ It’s clear that I have forgotten what was covered in the previous lesson! I ask her to check the fingering there to
ensure a smooth legato (?) Kelly plays hands together again but gets faster and faster each time, then I see that it’s not possible due to the repeated note in both hands. I ask Kelly to start again and I record her using the iPad. I ask her if she was trying harder that time as the voicing seemed better. She doesn’t answer, so I show her the recording, saying that the green answer was much louder than the pink codetta. I ask her again if she did that deliberately (no). I explain that that was the purpose of the recording, though it’s now much better and I we watch it again. I explain that she is being more active in one hand than the other, like in the Mozart (‘that’s good’). Kelly smiles. I ask her to start again, but she stumbles. She starts again and I ask her not to rush. Thereafter, we move to refine the shape of the subject in terms of the last 3 quavers. I continue to ask for this and that, but it’s all rather confusing, in terms of what needs to loud and what needs to be soft. It probably would have been good to record it on audacity and then ‘watch’ the shapes so that my thinking/requests were clear. Nonetheless, I say that it sounds brighter to my ear and I ask Kelly what she is thinking. She doesn’t seem to know, so I say, ‘It sounds like you are listening and trying to make judgements for yourself. You’re getting better at listening and questioning if the playing sounds like it has a shape to it, or does it have jagged edges’. I sing the subject, deliberately making some notes too soft. I say that the subject has to be loud, but still have tonal variation. I ask Kelly to start again and she does well, except for one top note in the answer that was too soft, which I point out. She doesn’t seem to know what I mean, but plays the answer, trying to vary the touch, and I say, ‘Good Kelly … you’re a clever kid aren’t you?’ I ask her to start again, but I’m not sure why. It seems obvious in retrospect that she’s not sure either, though I do say that I can tell she’s listening and it’s about 95% excellent. I say that it’s almost like a professional recording (?) and I sing the subject, saying that there is a subtle shape to it. I say, ‘I can tell you’re listening’, which is perhaps the goal; I’m not sure. I move to the left hand thereafter, demonstrating and asking Kelly if she can crescendo as the notes ascend, but also increase the overall volume with each ascending sequence. When she finishes too soft, I say, ‘don’t be too Chopiny with it’, meaning don’t be too soft (?) I use expressive gesture and my voice to coach the shape here, leading into the fingering that was worked through earlier in the lesson. I pat her on the back and say, ‘Well Done’. We move to the right hand thereafter (where the subject returns in the bass). I sit beside Kelly and review some fingering with her, writing it in the score. With regard to the thirds, I ask her to maintain legato
on top. I help Kelly with the shape and angle of her hand, but the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand are very unstable, and it seems that this piece may not have been a good choice, though I don’t say anything. She holds her left hand under the right hand in order to support the palm and continues to keep trying. I say that she is a good kid and I ask her to add the other notes to complete the pair of thirds here. I say, ‘excellent’, but she is really struggling here. I say to Sam, ‘She’s tenacious isn’t she? Keep trying … good girl’. I stop her and tell her that I can see that it’s getting better, suggesting that we move on. I say that every little bit that we do is a little bit further and Kelly nods. I ask Kelly how she went with the Prelude. I get a drink while Kelly starts. She continues to stumble at the bar interchange when the intervals are wide. She continues most of the way to the bottom of the page. I say that it’s definitely improved, but when I ask her how her hands feel, she tells me they are a bit tired – ‘It’s a bit hard’. I ask her if she feels like she is getting stiff in the wrists (last two lines). I ask her to start again, but it seems worse this time. I ask her if she knows it from memory, and I ask her to ‘swirl’ around the notes more; ‘start the process of shifting (to the new bar) on the previous notes’. She plays the left hand and while she can do small amounts well, I can’t help but think that the piece is too difficult for her at this time. For example when she plays the left hand alone, I coach her to use gesture to cover the notes and she does well, but can’t seem to reproduce the gesture reliably, especially when she can’t ‘let go’ of the notation. I say to Kelly, ‘Now, you’ve got to ask yourself, if I can do it now, what am I not doing when I have the hands together’. Kelly says something about thinking, and I say, ‘I don’t think you’re thinking about it early enough … it’s almost too late. That’s why I asked you if you can do it from memory, so that you’re thinking about it a little bit earlier’. When I ask her if she understands, Kelly nods. I ask Kelly to try the hands together again, but using the last four notes of each bar as a preparation for the next bar (I use gesture and body movement to demonstrate). Kelly starts again, and as I play I literally ‘push’ myself through the last four notes of the bar and into the next – it does seem to help, but when I stop, so too does her ability to play accurately. I do say, ‘That’s a tricky one’ and I ask Kelly how she can apply what were just doing in the left hand a few minutes ago to this part. She says something but it’s unclear. I ask her to play the last two left-hand notes of the bar with the first two of the next (FG – B flat B flat). I ask her to apply the opposite motion, i.e. anticipating the direction of travel, a note before necessary – ‘So you’re sort of, over the top of the notes before you need them’. It
does seem to help, and I ask her to add a note before and after to this gestural fragment. After she has the left hand, I ask for hands together. She tries several times before I ask her to play the last two with the first two as before, but with hands together. I point out the individual intervals between each pair of notes here, and they do seem quite wide with both hands here. Kelly still seems cheerful and tries again. I sit down and demonstrate a large pronation and wide elbow to cover the sixth in the right hand. I ask Kelly not to stretch, but to roll across and through the intervals. I explain to Kelly that we are partial practising the joins between each bar, but also getting to know the intervals that exist therein, and experimenting with how to best accommodate those intervals. I say, ‘that’s the sort of practice that I want you to do now … so go deeper into the links … as you go deeper into those links between the bars, try to anticipate the notes a note before they come. The whole idea of doing this sort of practice is so that you’re absolutely sure of what’s going to come, and then you can prepare for it slightly in advance so that your hands jump over the notes, rather than stretching to the notes … by then it will be too late, as you’ll lose momentum and that’s when stretching will start. Once you start stretching, that’s when it will become uncomfortable. But I do think that it’s a difficult job, and you have improved … well done’. I say that it’s slow going, but there is progress. I say, ‘you’re doing a good job … honestly. It’s not that your hands too small, it’s that you’ve got to get to know the notes so well that it all just comes tumbling out. You’re just ahead of where you are, but if you’re still looking for notes … My advice to you is, try to know the links so well that you can think of them before you need them’. Kelly nods. I say that concert pianists play these pieces all over the world. I say, ‘These are not easy to play, you’re into the big kids’ stuff now’. I say that this is adult repertoire and I check if she has anything else that she would like to check. I say that fugues ‘take ages’, and they drain the lesson time a lot because of their detailed-oriented nature. I say, ‘If you can learn a prelude and fugue well, you’ll be a better player for it. It teaches you to listen, compare and analyse’. I say each style is different though they have commonalities, and I use the left hand of the Chopin as well as the left hand for the Bach.

Lesson 31: 7 September 2014

Reviewed 6 October 2016

- Sam asks me about changing the lesson on 21 September due to Kelly’s birthday, and I suggest during the holidays. I say that my birthday is tomorrow. Kelly is
working hard adjusting the chair. I talk to Sam and Kelly about the City Hall concert. Kelly says that the Alberti right hand in the Mozart has ‘gone backwards’. I say that that can happen, though when she plays it, I say that it’s much faster than I had previously heard; Kelly is surprised. I work with Kelly, encouraging her to not build any stiffness in the wrist or thumb joint (staccato, two-note slurs, add-a-group). I can see from the video though that her elbow needs to be higher to allow freer rotary movement of the forearm. With the E7 groups, I encourage her to shape her hand more diagonally to the centre so that the thumb ‘hangs’ under the hand and off the keys. I say, ‘You’re moving your arm a lot, but not much of your fingers’, which she seems to refine. I ask Kelly to widen her elbow and play on the corner of the thumb while ‘angling’ to the corner of the room. I ask her to hold down all fingers and then play the fifth finger alone. This seems to help to activate the finger a little more. We return to add-a-note, add-a-group and then add-a-bar, and it does show improvement, though I say that the E7 starts to become a little tight again. We cycle through these exercises again, in order to encourage Kelly to loosen her thumb, activate the fifth finger and angle the hand inwards. Within two attempts, Kelly seems to be loose, but then tight again which I point out and encouraging her to cycle back through the drills. I say, ‘You’ll get there, Kelly’. I ask Kelly if she’ll be 10 (yes). I say that I’ll be 41 and I ask Kelly how old her mum is (Sam says 1975). It is interesting how I am using an outstretched arm when Kelly is using a bend at the elbow. Could it be better to use a combination of these when refining rotary movement? Nonetheless, when she has very good success, I slap my thigh and smile. Kelly smiles too. I say that cycling back and forth through this process will really work (‘you can see it’s better’), but say that sometimes our minds step in and try to control, which can induce stiffness. I demonstrate and point out that my entire arm is ‘wobbling’ when the fingers sound even in rhythm, and then the opposite. I go on to demonstrate how you need rotation and fingers working together, not one without the other. I remind Kelly (and demonstrate) to keep her thumb muscle loose. I explain to Kelly that the reason the passage is becoming harder is due to the increased speed. I say to Kelly that she should aim for a wobble in the arm and combine that with the fingers. I show Kelly that the same kind of technical concept also applies to trills. She smiles and nods. I ask Kelly how we should use the time (different piece or keep going). Kelly continues with the Mozart Rondo until the end of the exposition. I sit down and play, pointing out the need for a uniform tempo through here. I play the ascending right-hand scale
and the Alberti left-hand chord, asking Kelly to ‘match’ them. Kelly does well and I click in time. I sit at the first piano and we partial practise the ascending scale, after which I pretend to be the metronome by playing E7 chord every crotchet beat. We have some fun reversing the parts and Kelly smiles. We repeat that again and then I ask Kelly to play the two parts simultaneously, pointing out that they are perfectly matched in tempo now. After that we add the two bars together as written and I help Kelly to coordinate the beginning of the trill. She is still having trouble with accuracy of the scale, so we do some grouping practice ascending and descending (group of 3, group of 3, group of 4, group of 5). Thereafter, we break the scale in half before adding all notes back together. I say, ‘It helped didn’t it?’ and Kelly smiles. We return to adding the two bars together by taking the last note of one and joining it to the beginning of the next. We then do a team play where I play the first bar and Kelly plays the second, and then she joins them together. I ask her to expand on that idea at home. We then work on the trill, and I encourage Kelly to widen her elbow, presumably to encourage rotation of the forearm. I work with Kelly to refine her finger alertness. When she adds the hands back together, I clap and say, ‘that was awesome! So brilliant! That’s the best I’ve ever heard’. I say that a trill uses a combination of forearm rotation and finger dexterity, and that Kelly often has too much rotation and not enough finger action. I say that most kids are the opposite. I say that different students have different areas of strength and I point out Kelly’s and how she could learn from others too. I talk about the skills and concepts that she is learning will stand her in good stead in the future. I say that some of these include, freedom of the arms, rotary movement and finger technique, how to practise effectively, good pedalling, and enthusiasm (‘if you’re not enthusiastic, you’re playing won’t sound good’). I do a couple of critical comparisons to illustrate this concept of enthusiasm (Debussy and Mozart). I ask Kelly to scoop up the energy through the middle of her body. I join in too and encourage Kelly to apply this energy to her playing of the Mozart scale, which she does well. I say to Sam, ‘She’s come on a lot’. Sam says that it’s good because she needs to be encouraged to play with that kind of energy. I say that a few weeks ago, Kelly seemed a bit tired, and Sam said that she found it hard to keep practising these more difficult pieces, because when she gets to a point where she feels she cannot overcome the challenge, she gets a bit ‘down’, despite practising diligently. I agree that it’s hard, but I ask Kelly to try to remain positive. I say, ‘As soon as you do that, it sucks all of the energy out of the playing (Kelly nods) … so
even if it’s not working, try to remain upbeat’. Kelly says, ‘Yes Mark’. I remind her of the week that she came in and the playing sounded very different, and it was because her Mum said to practise with lots of energy. I ask her to imagine if I didn’t come in with a positive attitude, and how that would rub off on the students. I say, ‘So if you practise like that, that’s how you’ll end up sounding’. I continue, ‘If I teach like that, that’s how my students will sound. If I teach like this (energetic gesture), that’s hopefully how the students will sound (Kelly nods). So … even if you’re feeling a bit down, just try to be cheerful. Generally, every time I hear you you’ve progressed, except for a few weeks ago, when I could tell that your head (mindset) wasn’t right (Kelly smiles and nods). Often (progress) has nothing to do with your fingers and arms, it’s about what your mindset is. If you feel like, I just can’t … this is so big … that’s how you’ll play and it will be too big for you. In order to overcome the big pieces, you have to have a big attitude’. Kelly smiles and we do the ‘upward swoosh’ exercises again. I say to Sam, ‘She’s quite a quiet person, and so am I, but it takes a lot of energy to teach well, and it takes a lot of energy to play well. That’s why I spend a lot of energy in the teaching, because I know that that’s what it takes to play well and hopefully you can “catch” some of that (Kelly nods). I’m not doing this for my own health. I do it to try and inspire you, so that you can take that energy (and use it in your playing)’. I say that sometimes when students come in feeling down or having done no practice, I feel that lack of positivity, and it affects my mood. I say, ‘If you give me your energy, I’ll give it to you, and we’ll bounce off each other. That’s the best teaching relationship … when I open the door and think, oh, thank god it’s Kelly! Likewise, when the door opens and you go, oh, thank god it’s piano! Rather than (said in a negative manner) … oh how are you? Fine. How’s your week? Oh, good. How did you practice go? Not great, but you know, I’m sort of depressed about it all. It’s very draining. So try and be upbeat. I’m not saying this because (this is you), I’m just giving you a general talk, because it’s very easy to be overcome with these big challenges. Just put one foot in front of the other (dramatises while ‘smiling’). Just keep going, you won’t be there for a while yet, probably in January the pieces will start to come good, but you’re on the way Kelly … good girl’. I ask her if she would like me to hear a bit more. She starts the development and I sit and demonstrate the stark dynamic contrast, saying, ‘Be like an orchestra’. Kelly smiles and plays, and I encourage her to play the soft phrase, ‘like you’re plucking the harp string’. I ask her to pedal the loud minims (full 2 beats). In a couple of different spots,
we talk briefly about which note of the octave to omit (bottom or top). I ask Kelly to widen the contrast between loud and soft, and we review the precision of the phrasing. I encourage her to ‘show’ me how much she cares about the notes. We move on to the ascending semiquaver/quaver motifs and Kelly asks, ‘Is it that fast?’ I say yes, using conducting and vocalisation to match the tempi, including the return of theme. I suggest that I do the previous semiquaver/quaver motifs ‘in the background’ so that Kelly can hear the comparison of tempi, ‘so that they match’. Kelly smiles. I refer to a previous part of the lesson where we did the same sort of thing. I suggest that Kelly combine the broken chords of the new section with the right-hand motifs of the previous bars, as an exercise to compare and match the tempi. I suggest that she join the two sections together now. The tempo is uniform and we keep playing together. She does well (‘good girl’). Though she plays the semiquaver passagework of the next section slower, it is hands together, fluent and accurate. Kelly smiles proudly when I say, ‘Oh, you’re such a good kid. That’s really hard to do, well done … that’s awesome’. I explain that we need to get the sections to match in tempo now. I play the main theme ‘in the background’ while Kelly plays the semiquaver passagework. Kelly does well. She smiles and seems to really enjoy this methodology. I reiterate the need for a uniform tempo. I ask Kelly to play slowly while I turn the metronome on to ‘work out where we are’. I say that that is 85 and I ask her to play 86, and remind her of the left hand crotchets. I suggest 87 and we play in ensemble together. I ask Kelly how her perfect pitch is going. I play a few notes C# A F C G and she does so well. I suggest we could start doing chords. I say that she could aim for 120, perhaps over two weeks. I say that she will probably run into a few problems with fluency as it starts to get faster, but start to build the tempo up, rather than ‘just playing it fast’. I compare the process to stretching muscles, a little at a time. I put the metronome on again and we play together. I correct Kelly’s rhythm (crotchet on second beat of the bar). We go again, MM = 89 this time and I coach her with the decrescendo before the return of the theme. I ask Kelly to use the tools I have explored together to improve the piece even more and ask, ‘What else are we going to do?’ She suggests Nocturne and we talk about the missing key on my piano. Kelly plays the first page rather well. I ask her to play again (it’s awesome), asking her to keep rolling through those notes that are missing (inaudible). Kelly plays and I ask her to ‘keep it moving’. It truly is better this time! I say, ‘that’s awesome … that’s lovely … that’s at performance level. You could get up and play that first page at a concert. It’s really good, very good …
awesome!’ I ask her to play page one again, and I point out a wrong note in the left hand (otherwise no harmonic suspension). I ask Kelly to mark the score, saying that the chord is G#sus4 to a G# chord, following a return to the tonic C#. I sit and narrate the chords while playing the harmonic outline. I remind Kelly to ‘keep rolling’ through the left hand and I roll my hand over the keys. I say, ‘As soon as you stop, that’s when you won’t have any sound’. I ask her what we need to have to keep rolling? (movement). Where does the movement come from? (arm). Where does the movement from the arm come from? (confidence). I say, ‘Don’t worry if you play a wrong note or it comes out with a bang, as you can always refine that, but you can’t make an inaudible note louder except with confidence’. I say, ‘It’s awesome Kelly … well done’. Kelly tells me about how her progress is going for page two, and I say that she is moving forward and that’s a really positive sign. She shows me the top of page two with hands together. I ask Kelly if she has listening to a recording lately (no) and I say that I will send her one if she makes the effort to listen to it (yes). I say that the tone sounds too determined here, and needs more dreaminess. We work on Kelly’s touch here (no sharp corners). I say, ‘Good girl, that’s a really positive lesson, I hope you’ve got something out of it, because I certainly have’. I ask Kelly a little about her Fugue and then mention that we have a performance coming up in week 5 of next term (end-of-year concert). I sit down and say to Kelly not to be worried (she looks worried), and suggest that she aim to have two of her pieces to a good standard by then. I suggest we think which two might be manageable by then (maybe only 1). I ask her which piece she feels most confident with so far and she says Doctor Gradus. I say that as we have eight weeks to go, Prelude and Fugue is probably not likely to be ready. I say that we could aim for Doctor Gradus and Chopin for the concert and the other two (Mozart and Bach) … ‘keep chipping away at’. I say that Debussy and Chopin don’t have to be perfect, but I would like Kelly to accelerate a little more with these two in particular. I say that Andrew says, ‘Yes Mark, woof’ and Kelly could say, ‘Yes Mark, meow’.

**Lesson 32: 14 September 2014**

Reviewed 6 October 2016

- We talk about going to piano concerts, and I suggest that she could go to some; perhaps the Medici concerts. I ask Kelly how she is, and comment that she looks happy. I suggest that we hear Debussy first. I ask Sam how Jean is (good) and he tells
me that because she’s been working a lot, he’s been coming with Kelly for piano. Apparently Jean watches the lesson videos to help with her practice. I ask Kelly to play so I can listen to how it’s going. It starts well, but is very messy when the theme returns on page two. Sam asks Kelly if she needs her glasses and I say that we need to get the middle ‘dreamy’ section more accurate with rhythm and tempo. While I find my music, I ask Kelly how harp is going (good). She says that she likes piano best. I click the tempo and ask Kelly to play the middle section more stable, which she does. I give her feedback on the rhythm here. I ask Kelly is she knows what the piece is ‘about’. She says, ‘fingering and technique’. I recount the story of the child doing their practice, which I have told her before, but she doesn’t seem to remember. I sit at the second piano and play the middle section for Kelly in order to illustrate the ‘story’ about the little girl. I say that the middle section needs to sound dreamy, but not completely out of time. Kelly plays the first line of the middle section and I ask her not to move her right hand out of position, which I demonstrate at the second piano. I coach her with the pedalling thereafter. I point out the tempo indications in the score to Kelly, cautioning her against pulling the tempo around ‘like Chopin’ (nowhere does it say accelerate). I demonstrate again and Kelly tries. As she plays I coach her, suggesting that she make the third A flat in the bass loudest of all in order to build the musical tension. I make some corrections to the notes and then we go again. I ask her, ‘What would it sound like if you left the pedal on?’ so as not to lose the bass sonority. I suggest (and demonstrate) that she use volume rather than speed to create intensity for the third and final phrase here. Kelly plays and does well here – ‘good girl … nice job’. I demonstrate a more definitive decrescendo for the last two bass notes, coaching with the pedal too and clapping the beats. Kelly starts to ask me about the pedal and I say, ‘I’m glad you asked me’, writing it in the score while talking. I sit back down and experiment again, asking Kelly what she thinks. I give her option 1, option 2, option 3 and she says that she’s not very sure. I suggest option 1, even just a half pedal. She implements the suggested pedal, but ‘not lift your foot all the way up’. I give her the thumbs up, and then sit and demonstrate. I suggest we go from the beginning of the daydream section. Kelly plays the first phrase and I ask her to change the fingering to 135 so as to avoid twisting the hand for a better ‘roll’. I say, ‘Lovely’ and she continues. I say, ‘that’s really good. I’m happy with that. Sometimes I don’t really know what to do until we try it lots of different ways, and that’s what you should do when you’re a musician … try it different ways’. Kelly nods. ‘Does that work? What
combination suits the piece?’ I point out that there are no pedal markings written on
the score. I ask Kelly if she can be more boisterous during the first sectional
interchange, especially with the left hand. I say that I usually say to drop into the
staccato (Kelly nods), but here I think the opposite is best. I demonstrate the staccato,
saying, ‘I’m landing on the note and then flicking’. I do a critical comparison, asking
Kelly if she sees the difference (yes). I do the comparison again, this time using a
pencil to highlight the different velocity of the hand movement. I ask Kelly if she
would like to try (yes). Kelly does well, so I ask her to apply the concept to all left-
hand staccato in that bar, which she does, though I say that it’s still a little bit delicate.
She tries again, better this time, and I ask her to bring her hand back quickly. She does
well so I ask her to put the other hand back in. It takes many attempts, so we reduce to
one beat at a time. I help Kelly to identify the right-hand chords and then play them.
After that, we do left-hand staccato and right-hand chords. It makes a big difference
when the notes are played as written, but soon after she returns to the previous left-
hand staccato. I remind her of the ‘direct’ staccato – ‘feel the key and then push
(upwards)’. Kelly tries again and has a good result. We return to left-hand staccato
with chords, add-2-beats, and then as written. I say, ‘Good, it’s better (Kelly nods).
You can tell can’t you (Kelly nods again)’. I ask Kelly to apply the same technique
for the following part. I demonstrate and point out how the articulation would indicate
a quick staccato followed by a longer note (accompanied by a forward tilt of the upper
body). I dramatise using expressive gesture and my voice to show Kelly the shape and
character. She does very well, but is having trouble with clarity thereafter, due to left-
hand staccato that is not short enough. She tries a few times and I say, ‘Opposite of
what we usually do … spring off the key’. She keeps trying, but the sound is not clear
in the right hand now. I ask her to remove the left-hand note and replace it with a
gesture with the whole hand. Then I ask her to add the right-hand broken chords back
in with the left-hand gesture, but I see now that it’s the right hand that needs attention
here. Nonetheless, she keeps trying and it actually sounds very clear in the end; I clap
my hands. Kelly seems happy. I ask her if she is having a nice time (yes), and if she
enjoys coming to piano lessons (yes). I say that I like it too and that it’s fun – ‘I enjoy
my job, it’s fun’. I ask her to practise that section, and then we come to the return of
the main theme where the left hand crosses over the right hand. I ask Kelly to be more
athletic here, but she increases the overall tempo instead. I say that I want her to cross
faster rather than play faster. I coach her with the left hand gestural shape and
associated tonal shape, but really the right hand needs much more evenness. The tape seems to stop and then restarts. The recording resumes with Kelly playing the right hand, and I talk about using energy and momentum to play the notes – ‘you use the energy that you’ve created’. I say, ‘you’re doing a good job there, it is a very tricky piece, and you’ve definitely improved. There are a lot of challenges ahead, so keep practising … certainly don’t (only) play it over and over. Go back and watch the recording and expand on that’. I ask Kelly to choose one or two things to ‘fix’ each practice session. I summarise that we worked from the middle section backwards today. The last thing is that I want Kelly to take the pedal off the crossing hands bars in section 1, as the finger work is not yet even. We practise gestures to each ‘corner’ of the room and then begin adding notes in the right hand before adding more notes in the left-hand bass. We work our way back up to the full 16 semiquavers of the bar, and I say, ‘That’s it … practise it like that and that will really help’. I say that there are 5 minutes left, so I suggest that we here the augmented chord lead up to the final section. Kelly asks if she should add pedal there and I agree. She plays all the way to the end. I say, ‘Oh wow, that’s really improved … congratulations’. She asks me about adding the pedal in the crossing hands part just covered previously, but I say not to until the fingers are perfectly even. I say that the unevenness of fingers is a symptom of not being sure of the overarching gesture. I say, ‘Get rid of the notes, explore the overall gesture, and then start putting the notes back in one at a time (which is what you did) … pedal comes last.’ With the last section, I ask Kelly to project more brilliance in the sound of the left-hand melodic line. I play the phrase and ask Kelly what the main note is (F), and then I get her to ‘splat’ on that note with the whole hand before adding the single note back in. I point out that it’s the opposite articulation we used earlier for staccato. I demonstrate, asking Kelly to play the left-hand notes while adding in some right-hand chord notes, but then return to just the left hand. In order to create a crescendo, I ask Kelly to ‘splat’ 4 times, each with slightly less downward velocity. She then puts the actual notes into this gestural movement, and then I ask her to add all the other notes last. She does really well – ‘Wow’. I go back for another round, and I ask Kelly to play the left hand with the required free fall followed by an upward slur for the second note of the left hand. I ask Kelly what fingering she is doing, Kelly shows me. I suggest 21 31 21 31, trying it out, but then I say that her idea is good. I ask her to show me her idea again (21 31 31 41) and say that I like it because it may affect a decrescendo more easily, but that’s not the way I
would do it. I ask Kelly to stick with what she is doing. I say the challenge with any passage like this is getting the hands to coordinate precisely. I suggest that she employ add-a-beat technique here. I say, ‘yes Mark, meow’, and Kelly copies me. I give her a hug and so that she doesn’t have to say it as I’m only being silly. Sam and Kelly say thank you. I say that Kelly is on the right track with the Debussy, giving her a progress report since last time. ‘It’s a long road and you seem to be putting on foot in front of the other. It sounds like you’re improving slowly but surely’.

Lesson 33: 1 October 2014

Reviewed 7 October 2016

- Again, I’m talking about other students when I really shouldn’t! I talk about siblings with differing abilities, a student with ‘terrible’ rhythm, and others who can’t multi-task. I say, ‘after about 5 years, he’ll come good … I’ve just got to keep him learning that long’. I ask Kelly how she’s been going. She says that she has practised hands separately for the Chopin, but can’t get hands together (page two). I ask her how page three is going. She says, ‘I’ve briefly done it, but I haven’t gone through it precisely’. I ask Kelly if she would like to start from page three today (yes). She asks right hand and I agree; Kelly plays right hand. I coach her with notes, ornaments, fingering and basic phrasing. With the trills, I say that it’s good that she is nice and loose in terms of forearm rotation, though more finger action will be good. I ask her to be sure that she is not gripping any other fingers while trilling. I ask Kelly to write in some fingering as I play the notes, and then Kelly tries. I ask her to unlock her wrist, firm up her joints, and adjust the wrist laterally. I say that fingertips unlock the power and tone, and I ask her to scratch her nose with her fingertips and then transfer this subtlety to the piano. I ask Kelly if she thinks that is a good idea (yes). I explain that I learnt that from another piano teacher. Kelly’s fingers do seem to improve and I ask her to write in the fingering for the next fioritura. She plays and writes herself this time. I ask Kelly to write, ‘scratch nose fingers’ and say, ‘if you flatten out your fingers, you lose leverage to create sound’. I ask Kelly to practise the right hand – ‘the notes are there, but you need more work there (yes Mark)’. I review the fingering for the jumping octaves and Kelly writes it in as I demonstrate. She plays the trill again, and I ask her to use more finger and not so much rotary movement. I ask Kelly to use gesture to come out of the trill. She does this and then I ask her to fix the rhythm in the descending scale. She has trouble, so I help her to understand the rhythmic
subdivisions. I show her the new arrow stickers, saying that Jean will be ‘so jealous’. I ask Kelly to write ‘rhythm’ on the arrow sticker. She has trouble with the spelling so I help her. We talk about the new Garden City where I bought the stickers from Big W. I suggest five notes for the trill, and ask Kelly to notice what she is doing with her arm but imagining she is ‘standing above’ watching down. I ask Kelly to use the rotary movement, but reduce it by half while adding more finger action to ‘make it sound like a melody’. We use add-a-note technique to let go of tension and to ensure finger clarity. I say, ‘Be expressive, but don’t overlap the fingers in an effort to be expressive’. I demonstrate and ask Kelly to try. I then point out that ‘there is too much air’, asking Kelly is she knows what I mean. She answers too loose and I say that the legato connection isn’t precise (the reverse of overlapping). Kelly fixes up the problem. I say that a nocturne is a good piece to study tone, and when practising I suggest that she make sure that the tone is very ‘exact’. Kelly nods. I do a critical comparison where my voice sounds airy and then smudged (as opposed to neither). I say that every note leads to the next one, so there is ‘line’. I write in the score and then demonstrate. I say, ‘Oh, that’s beautiful … very good’. We carry on and I demonstrate the ff octave jumps. I ask Kelly what ff means, and she answers very loud but in a soft voice. I play with her a few times until she ends up shouting ‘very loud!’ Kelly and I laugh, and I say that she can sound quite angry or upset there. I ask Kelly if her Mum has been shouting, and she says, ‘sometimes’. I laugh and say, ‘Do the practice Kelly!’ I ask her to do more practice and let her know that while I’m encouraging her, I really expect that she ‘pick up the pace’. I say, ‘As you learn the notes, get straight into the sound’. Kelly trills and I ask her to write, ‘no flapping … not too much rotary movement’ in the score. I ask her not to ‘introduce any air into the notes’. I ask her how many notes for the trill, and Kelly says she’s not sure. I suggest 5 and 9, writing it into the score. I remind Kelly to play with rounded fingertips. I ask her what exercise she could employ her. I ask her to take a small amount and force it to improve quickly, perhaps starting with two notes and then expanding to the whole phrase from there. I say, ‘do what you find hard, and then expand outwards’. We take turns with a three-note gestural fragment, then adding another note. I ask Kelly to scratch her nose and then we add another note, increasing the volume through double rotation. I ask Kelly to ‘be a bit more bangy’. She does better and I ask her if she is scared of the notes (upward chromatic scale part). Kelly says yes and I say, ‘Yeah, I can tell. That’s why you’ve got no power. So in order for
it to sound expressive, what do you need to get confident with? (Kelly – the notes) …
the notes and the fingering … how do you do that? (Practise it?) … yeah, but how to
you practise it? (Umm)’ I start to demonstrate add-a-note and ask Kelly what that
technique is called (add-a-note). I agree and ask Kelly to do that. She does while I get
a drink. I remind Kelly to play with loose arms and firm fingers. For some reason, my
third and fourth fingers twinge, and I say that if she ever has pain, it’s a sign that
something isn’t right. She says no when I ask her if she knew that. She asks me why. I
say that it’s because you’re using the muscles in the wrong way. I caution Kelly not to
stretch or twist. I say, ‘that’s why we use add-a-note technique, because you’re
finding the natural shape of the gesture’. Kelly continues to add 1 note at a time while
throwing her arm in the direction of travel. I join in at the higher register. I ask Kelly
to move on to the next phrase. Using expressive gesture, I ask Kelly to ‘swing into the
notes, like a monkey’. I dramatise using gesture and body movement the way a
monkey might move, and how he might not move. I mention to Kelly that one of the
reasons why we use gesture in piano playing is to keep our muscles from becoming
stiff. I leave the room to cough, and Kelly starts practising again, adding more notes
to the three-note gestural fragment that I started. I come back in and play the five-note
gestural fragment, which Kelly copies. I say, ‘that’s it … like a monkey’ and I ask
Kelly to write that in the score (like a monkey). Sam asks me if I’m fine (yes). I ask
Kelly if she is playing Chopin in the concert (maybe), but I insist, saying that she said
she would do it (?) I ask Kelly to push herself – ‘you’ve got four weeks’. I say that I
will help her, but she has to work hard too. I ask her to scratch her nose with her fifth
finger before returning to play (hey, that’s good). I say, ‘like a monkey swinging and
scratching the nose … that’s how you play it’. We continue to add notes, and I ask
Kelly to start with a preparatory movement. I ask Kelly is we should join the F# to the
E legato and she says no. I ask to sit down and I try it a few times, before saying, ‘No,
let’s stick with the plan’. I say that as the last note is louder, she will need a lot of
(vertical) leverage, and I ask her to copy my tonal ‘splat’ before adding the note back
in (good girl). I summarise that during the lesson so far we have practiced each phrase
with add-a-note technique, and I ask her what next? She says, ‘join them together’,
and I say, ‘possibly’, but then she says, ‘add the last note of one with the beginning of
the next’. I agree and say that these drills will help her to learn the notes quickly in
order to meet the performance goal. I add, ‘You’re also developing the sound at the
same time, OK?’ Kelly says OK. I say that I could continue with her, but I want to
move on. Kelly says she understands what to do. We move on to the beginning of the Nocturne and Kelly plays. I interrupt and say perhaps we should use the soft pedal on the repeat. I write in ‘una corda’, explaining the term to Kelly, referring to the mechanism of both the grand piano and the upright piano. Kelly plays, adding the soft pedal, but thereafter it is very untidy when compared with the previous lesson. After she finishes the first page, I say, ‘Look that’s got a lot of potential … do you usually make that many mistakes?’ I explain that sometimes I can put people off their playing, and relay the story of my student Hannah. I ask Kelly if that ever happens to her (sometimes). I say, ‘you’ve really got the right idea … you have. Can you do it more accurately?’ Kelly smiles, nods and begins again. It’s really good this time and I say, ‘That’s heaps better, don’t play it with mistakes … why not … why don’t we want mistakes?’ Kelly says ‘umm’, and I say (jokingly), ‘Because people will get really angry’. She starts saying something and I say, ‘No, because it takes away all the expressive power of the piece’. Kelly nods. I continue to say that she is doing so well with the expression, but no one will hear that if you are making mistakes, as that’s all they will hear – mistakes. I say, ‘Mistakes aren’t terrible, it’s just that if you play a lot of them, they take away from all the really good things that you do’. Kelly nods and seems to understand. I say, ‘That’s why we don’t make mistakes, not because we want to be perfect, but because the listener can’t relax and listen’. I laugh and ask Kelly if she ever thought of it that way before and she says ‘no’. I refer to the trills again, asking her to play with more finger action here. I say that part of the problem is that she doesn’t know how many notes to play. I suggest we work it out together (it seems to be 11 notes altogether). I laugh because I can’t count. We arrive at 11 and I ask her to use her fingertips for maximum expressive power. I ask Kelly if she likes the Simpsons (yes a long time ago), and I give her a mini-figure. I ask her to use the scissors to open – ‘half the fun is seeing what you got’. Kelly laughs as she realises she got Mr Burns. I laugh and say that Kelly can put him on her piano and he will remind her not to make mistakes. Kelly thanks me and then adds the hands together. With the trill on line 3, I suggest that she visualise the crescendo as a flower opening (gradually): ‘Make every note belong to the next’. Kelly tries right hand again (that’s better) and then she adds hands together. I say, ‘That’s good, I liked the trill much better, but the scale sounds a bit mechanical’. I do a vocal critical comparison here and ask Kelly to practise more here. I ask Kelly to stand and I demonstrate the opening triplet a little faster. She sits and plays (good) to the end of page one. I say
that that’s performance standard. I remind her that she has a tonne of work to do elsewhere. I ask Kelly to write, ‘flower opening’ and to speed up the trill, suggesting some different fingering (1/3, 3/2). I tell Kelly that she has a tendency to stick her thumb out when using 3 and 2, which causes stiffness and a slowing of the trill. I demonstrate, Kelly tries and it does show improvement. I ask her to put it back into the piece, but soon after I ask her which hand needs more practice (left hand). I say, ‘If you don’t nail the left hand, your right hand will get distracted’. Kelly plays the left hand and I highlight an incorrect note. I ask her to play the left hand while playing D# and C# on the beat. I review the gestural choreography of the left hand with Kelly, encouraging her to keep moving. I suggest that the fingering isn’t the best, so we change it to 5215 instead of 5213. I say, ‘Whoever did that fingering needs to be fired’. We laugh and Kelly writes the new fingering into the score. I say that the old fingering is causing her to ‘do more practice’ when it’s probably not necessary. She adds the hands together, and I ask her if it feels better (yes). I explain why it’s not a problem (last quaver with touching fifth finger). I sit and demonstrate the two options, reminding Kelly not to bang the fourth quaver, no matter what the fingering. Regarding the trill, I say that if it was my piece, I would use 13, but Kelly likes 32. I say to write it in as an option to explore further. I mention that Neil got a HC in the QPC, great news for him. Kelly plays the B section and I say, ‘That’s sort of right’, sitting down to demonstrate, asking for more space between phrases. I say that she needs to make it sound improvisatory and spacious. Kelly tries again, but stops just before the cross rhythms saying that she can’t do it. I say that she has been saying that for weeks and just needs to be brave and do it now. She does hands together, and I remind her that she achieved so well with cross rhythms in the Mozart Concerto. I say, ‘you can do it … you’ve just got to push yourself a bit. If you keep saying you can’t do it, you never will … just do something’. Kelly nods and continues. I help her ‘organise’ the right hand with pairs of left-hand notes. It’s challenging, but she keeps trying – ‘Don’t go on yet, just stay with that’. Eventually I ask her to separate the notes and she does great. I clap and say, ‘Yes! Done’. I say that with these big pieces, you just have to start with something, even if it’s just a chord with the right hand (like we did), otherwise you will never get there. I ask her to move on to the next two bars using the same method. She starts with pairs of left-hand notes, then adding in the right hand, and then hands together. I say, ‘That’s what I mean, start with something, and go closer to what you want, one step at a time … Work at it, until it shifts (to
being correct). We move on and I start Kelly off on the next bar, left hand, right hand, together with left-hand chords, and then as written (good). I say that I’ve helped you do half of these, the other three are for you now (yes Mark). I say that page one is good, page two can be good fairly quickly, and page three needs about 6 hours practice. Kelly nods and I ask her if she can do that between now and Sunday (maybe). I sit and demonstrate Section B with my alertness in the dotted rhythms, then the opposite. As I play, I narrate, ‘dreamy, in time’ – bring out the contrast. I remind Kelly to project the tonal shape, but not too much or too ‘notey’. Thereafter I coach Kelly with the rubato using gesture, body movement and singing. She plays again and I coach her to breathe between phrases. I suggest that A Major is bright, and I ask her what colour and we both agree on yellow! I say to Kelly, ‘You can get this one ready in four weeks, it’s more than possible’. Kelly nods and I remind her to come on Sunday.

Lesson 34: 5 October 2014

Reviewed 7 October 2016

- Kelly is thirsty and has a drink. I think they were a bit late. Kelly winds the chair up to the required height. I ask Kelly how she went with the third page of Nocturne (good). I give Kelly a compliment regarding her ability to stretch the time in her own way. Kelly is still adjusting the chair while I look through my music, going to the preface. I talk to Kelly about the two different versions. Kelly starts from the beginning, but the introduction is too fast. I help her find the speed for the melodic line and then we go back and apply that to the introduction. I ask Kelly to think of the speed of the melody before starting the introduction. We repeat this process; Kelly plays with many errors and inaudible notes. Nonetheless, she continues to the B section. There are many errors here, but she has improved overall with the cross rhythms. The triplets are too slow, so I sit at the second piano and play with her. When she finishes Section B, I say, ‘Oh that’s beautiful, that’s the best part of the piece so far, and good girl, you’ve put the hands together’. I go on to say that she is missing many of the notes, and remind her to play with a stronger action when using the grand piano: ‘you’ve got to land on the notes a bit faster’. I say to Kelly, ‘You probably don’t miss all those notes at home’ and she agrees. I ask Sam when the grand piano is coming and we laugh. I swap the chair for something higher, so that she has more leverage to fall into the notes. I ask Kelly if she can connect to the piece
a bit more: ‘use your upper body to show me what’s happening’. I demonstrate and Kelly tries. She does well and I remind her not to play too fast. Kelly plays again as I conduct with expressive gesture. I stop her when she misses a left hand C#. I say, ‘You need a preparatory up movement so you’ve got enough downward thrust’. I ask Kelly to stretch out the modulation to F# minor by demonstrating, and she tries again. I play the melody along with her. I mention my student Isabella who would always be a bit too soft with the bass notes. I ask her to try again and I stand to coach her. She carries on to the B section this time. I use gesture and drama to coach the key changes. Thereafter she loses momentum and confidence, but I say that it has really improved, despite being a bit soft in the left hand. She resumes from the end of the B section, just before the triplets begin. I coach her with the rhythm, first from the score and then from the second piano. I compliment Kelly on her gorgeous sound at the end of the adagio. I ask Kelly if she can ‘coach’ herself without me this time, saying, ‘it’s a bit nice’. I demonstrate a little and then ask Kelly to resume playing from just before the triplet section, but suggest that the left hand sounds a bit unsure and she needs more left hand practice here (I put a sticky note there). I put the metronome on and we practise the left hand gestures together. I ask her to keep everything moving (don’t stop anywhere during the gesture). I reiterate that the piece has definitely improved. Kelly starts the third section – the sound is good overall, though the fluency is not. I help her with some of the notation, reviewing fingering, and the avoidance of ‘flicking’ the second quaver of each half bar. I say that it sounds better and ask her to keep going the best that she can. As she plays the final fioritura, I smile at Sam. Kelly finishes and I give her a clap saying that she is a ‘good kid’. I remind her that she still has a long way to go, though she has certainly improved. I give her an indication of where she is, how far she’s got to go, and how far she has come in the last three days. I remind her again not to play too softly and to throw her arms into the piano. I suggest and help Kelly to implement some fingering for the final bars of the right hand, and then the left hand. I suggest that she avoid changing the pedal on the final note, giving her a critical comparison and talk briefly about overtones. Kelly was unaware of this concept. I say that Kelly’s fioritura are working quite well on the whole. I ask her if she has any questions regarding the coordination between the hands (no). I ask her to do more practice on the right hand in the fioritura before we do more work on how the hands work together. I ask Kelly to start the third page, asking her to play the written ornament as written, showing her how and on which
notes the hands synchronise. As there are eight notes for the trill, we build it up one note at a time before adding it into the full melodic line. I demonstrate which notes synchronise here, asking Kelly to show me with her body the shape of the phrase. Thereafter I coach her with the shape of the phase by encouraging her to roll on the notes, pronating and supinating on the keyboard surface. We refine the choreographic shape of these five notes E F# G# A G#. Kelly continues on with the hands together. I say, ‘That was great … very good girl’. I ask her to increase the volume of the right-hand melodic line by employing double rotation in order to create momentum here, and Kelly is quick to copy. I ask Kelly if she knows what I mean, and she nods yes. I demonstrate the concept of double rotation with the next few bars too, using the analogy of throwing a ball. I use a rubber to critically compare, saying, ‘If you want to throw it a long way or make it louder you’re going to have to employ double rotation to the back in order to create momentum’. I explain that that is what a double rotary movement is for, as I play again, explaining how ‘throw the ball’. I go looking for my rubber and we laugh. Kelly tries again, but starts to falter after a few bars and I say, ‘OK, you can see that it’s hard to do when you’re not sure of the notes’. I ask Kelly what she will need to do and she agrees to practise in order to become more comfortable with the spatial choreography. I reiterate that she is on the right track, but has more work to do. I suggest that she practise hands separately through here, but I also remind her of how far she’s come. I suggest that it is a sad piece, and then ask Kelly if she knows anger and guilt (hermit crabs dying), and then narrate that ‘loss’ as I play the introduction. I say, ‘It’s sad, but it’s more than sad’. I ask Kelly if she knows what gloomy is (yes). I add, ‘Maybe if I’m sad forever, my (dead) pet will forgive me’. I play a little where I narrate the technical components (but nothing else), suggesting it doesn’t sound as ‘deep’. I play again, saying, ‘the better I know the notes, the more I can express myself. I don’t know about you, but I’ve always found that’. Kelly nods. I go on to say that that’s why she is having movement and expression in the B section (the notes are not yet familiar). I suggest that we hear how Doctor Gradus is going, saying that this piece is quite different. I dramatise what might be happening and what I might be feeling in the two contrasting pieces. Kelly plays, but it is just too fast; it sounds frantic and untidy. When Kelly comes to the middle section, I stop her and say that the tempo is far too quick and I can’t hear any other notes. I suggest that I record it ‘so that she hear it’. Kelly plays again as I record. I ask Kelly to watch the recording, saying, ‘If you were teaching someone and they
played like this, what would you say?’ As it finishes, I ask Kelly to think of two good things you could say, but Kelly doesn’t know. I say that she has correct notes but the rhythm is inaccurate. I suggest that the tempo is good, but the finger action is unclear, perhaps due to some stiffness. I take Kelly through the five-note gestural fragments that link each beat. I say that Kelly needs to move her arm more, lest the fingers won’t have the momentum to speak, as ‘you’re not over the top of them and able to execute them … you’re not rolling towards them because it’s too stiff’. I take Kelly through the five-note gestural fragments, 10-note gestural fragments and then whole bar gestural fragments. I ask Kelly what the interval between low G and E is (sixth), F and D (sixth) – ‘it’s the same distance, but the fingers used are different (4-1 as opposed to 3-1), therefore the speed that you need to throw your hand across will be different’. I suggest that Kelly review some of these basic movements in order to cover the distance required in the time allowed. I ask Kelly to try again and we work together. It is better, but I insist that she is still ‘not getting down to the F fast enough’. I say that if she doesn’t do this, the note either won’t sound, or it will be too loud, and I do a comparison while Kelly watches. I say, ‘If it’s too fast, you’ll get a bump … if it’s too slow, you won’t hear it … so you have to get the right speed to get the right sound’. Kelly tries again, though it’s challenging for her. I ask her to play the top note a little louder it will give her the required momentum, and I clap when she does. I say, ‘that’s what’s missing in your playing … you’ve forgotten all (?) the movement’. She nods when I say, ‘Never mind, it happens to everyone’. I continue, ‘you have to learn the movements again and then lay the notes across the movements. Without the movements, your notes won’t sound properly … that’s what’s happened’. I ask Kelly to play again, and this time I record her on the iPad. She plays, though it is very uneven. I suggest we have a look at the recording. I suggest that Kelly may not be ‘connecting to the top of her arm’. When she does so, the result is quite stark. I ask her if it felt better (yes). At Kelly suggestion, I ask her to come back to some basics in the following bar too. I point out where she has improved, though I say that if I don’t intervene, she would be ‘in danger’ of not finishing the piece, as it would be become too difficult. I say, ‘If you can get better at the technique, you’ll have more options to be expressive, but if you haven’t got the right movements or the right technique, you’ll never play the piece very expressively or very well’.
Lesson 35: 12 October 2014

Reviewed 10 October 2016

- Jean is with Kelly today and I ask her if she has been well (yes). Kelly says that she has a question regarding the Alberti chords right hand in the Mozart Rondo. I ask Jean how life is (busy) and that she heard I was really sick and Kelly was worried about me. I say that I have a headache because Neil was driving me crazy on Friday due to not knowing his arpeggios for his exam in two weeks. Jean says that the boys play very well. Jean says that sometimes you have to be very strong with the kids. She says that Kelly practises, but sometimes doesn’t concentrate. Jean says that I must be able to notice that she is ‘up and down’ even though she is practising and Kelly looks really annoyed at Jean. I recount the lesson about 4 weeks ago and then compare it with the following lesson where Kelly brought me a drink to the lesson. I say that I could tell that she had tried harder and that was putting more energy into the playing; Jean agrees. I say that piano playing takes a lot of energy and is not like sitting quietly doing homework. Jean says that it’s not like handwriting. I say that that is why Adrian plays well, because he is energetic. I pretend to be energetic and say that even still, everyone has ‘ups and downs’. I suggest to Kelly, ‘Keep moving forward … keep enjoying yourself’. Jean says that after that lesson we were just discussing, she put in a lot more effort. I say that I could tell, as there was a huge difference. Jean seems to give me permission to be stern with Kelly, saying, ‘So sometimes you can be cruel on her’. I say that that week I probably was quite upfront about the way she was playing, as I was last week. I ask Kelly how her Debussy was going, recounting that as I was watching previous lessons, the first part of the Debussy was very good when compared to the remainder, but now it seems to have reversed. I explain to Kelly that with these trickier pieces, review must always be part of the process when practising, rather than simply ‘playing’. I sit and ‘review’ the loose action of the hand, wrist and forearm. I ask Kelly to play the Mozart and thereafter I make the analogy of playing the cello, where the finger and bow must synchronise. I say that the Mozart, her finger and arm movement and not aligned. We go ‘back to basics’ and review the notes slowly. I say, ‘I have no idea what I’m doing, but I’m just going through my memory bank’, meaning that I’m partial practising using strategies that have worked in the past – ‘What could I do to help this passage improve?’ I suggest pairs in the direction of travel, scratch my face to activate the fingertips, five-note gestural fragments, 10-note
gestural fragments, whole bar fragment, big rotary movement for the fifth and smaller rotation for the third, accent on the third finger (third finger isn’t activating well). Kelly tries again and I note that there is some tightness in the fifth finger, so we work through some add-a-note gestural exercises to encourage her to open her right elbow wider so as to align more effectively with the fifth finger. I ask her to play staccato, then wiggle her fingers in the air as fast as possible before playing again. I say to Kelly to she is able to do two groups very well, but thereafter, the forearm seems to start to tighten, perhaps due to a tight thumb muscle (I think). Kelly plays again and I say that she is ‘holding her thumb like that’. I demonstrate and say that when the thumb is unduly bent it seem to induce tightness. I ask Kelly to experiment, but then start to question whether that is the muscle that is responsible. Nonetheless, I ask Kelly to keep her thumb loose and avoid bending the first distal joint of the thumb. I ask her if she has to bend the thumb for cello, and Kelly says yes due to the bow hold required. I recount the story of my student Anya and her stiff left hand. I suggest that Kelly adjust her technique when playing the piano after coming from cello or harp. Kelly continues to experiment and I ask her if two groups are easy for her (yes). I sit and the second piano and continue to coach Kelly to align her elbow with the hand. We experiment with several positions of the elbow so as to induce rotary freedom of the whole forearm, and this does seem to help. I caution her not to ‘sag’ the elbow or over-extend the right-hand third finger during the second group. We also try making a downward sloping fist, avoiding a claw hand and tightness in the thumb, and soon after she is able to play a whole bar without too much effort. I suggest that when something’s not right, it will because of tightness, or a mismatch between movement and fingers (I remind Kelly of cello again). I ask Kelly how we address that – back to basics, and how each note relates to the next. I ask Kelly to use her upper arm as a pendulum, demonstrating as she copies. I suggest that it is similar to the Debussy in the previous lesson where the upper arm wasn’t involved. I say, ‘your fingers don’t stop here (above the wrist) … your arm stops here’ and I locate a point where my neck joins the rest of the spine. I encourage Kelly to feel the same spot on her body, but she says she can’t feel the muscle working as she moves her arm up and down. However, when I do the same thing and ask her to feel the spot on my body, she seems to understand. I say, ‘So the muscles from your arm are actually (in part) in your back’. Kelly nods. I ask Kelly to not think from the top of the neck down, rather than just above the wrists down. I say that everything starts from your back, and I sit
down and we go again. I suggest that when playing easier repertoire, such concepts may not be quite so important or obvious, but once you approach the upper levels, you need to think from your back, as well as the upper arms, forearms, wrists and fingers. I ask Kelly if she can play 1 group without any tightness, which she does. From there we start to add another group to the feeling of looseness, and I reiterate the importance of ‘adding’ to that feeling rather than practising without a strategy in mind. We repeat this process, and I encourage Kelly to ‘angle her hand up’, meaning to pronate the forearm by raising the elbow height. We go back to single notes in this position, but I encourage Kelly not to over-activate her fingers in the process. I say, ‘When you play your thumb, don’t lift your third finger up’. I show Kelly what I mean and what I would like from her next. We return to changing 1, 2, 3 and four-note gestural fragments, though she finds it difficult not to lift the fingers unnecessarily. We keep trying, but I can see that the height of Kelly’s elbow isn’t good and she continues to over-extend her third finger. I continue to encourage her to move her elbow up and down energetically, though she doesn’t seem to notice when she is barely moving it at all. Nonetheless, we keep trying and I encourage her to group each beat as a gestural fragment that is initiated by the elbow and upper arm. I suggest that she ‘acknowledge’ its difficulty and aim for a 10-group gestural fragment first of all. I ask her to keep her elbow high and avoid over-extension of the third finger. We then launch into LSSSL drills before returning to the 10-note gestural fragment. I recount from my student days when I found Alberti bass quite tricky, but the skill does come eventually. I caution Kelly not to lift her fingers up when not in use. I say, ‘Please keep your arms high, you’re not in the little kids’ music anymore’. I ask her to exaggerate the energy a bit more, as it can always be scaled be. I suggest that we move on to Debussy, and I ask Kelly how harp is going (OK). Kelly looks at Jean and she tells me that Kelly has pieces she is working on in preparation for next January’s harp camp. Kelly says that harp camp is fun. Jean tells me that Kelly is partnering with another student, Leon, for a duet. She tells me that Leon learns harp, piano and clarinet. Kelly plays the Debussy, it has improved in terms of fluency and clarity, but it is just too fast. Nonetheless, she plays the entire piece from beginning to end without skipping a beat, apart from the final bars. I say, ‘Yeah, that’s good … good girl’. I ask Kelly if it feels a bit easier for her now (yes). I say that it has definitely improved, and the middle section is beautiful. I also complement her on a melodious left hand, though the right hand isn’t completely even most of the time,
despite having improved since last lesson. I say that the piece is very fast and ask Kelly if she can play it slower. I ask her to ‘go towards’ to E, F, G and A but she doesn’t seem to be able to control her fingers at the slower tempo. I work with Kelly to find the directional movement at the fast tempo, but suggest that she needs to be ‘ahead’ of where she is. I suggest that the movement is good, but the fingers are moving too fast within that framework. Kelly tries again and I say that’s better. I demonstrate various methods, pairs of notes and directional practice with add-a-note, but she seems to ‘change the movement’ as she adds more notes. We continue to swap turns, experimenting with the correct velocity until the fingers and movement coordinate. I say, ‘There we go, it’s right’. Kelly nods. I ask her to start again, but she goes too quickly – I say, ‘No’. Kelly laughs and I say that I can’t hear all of the notes. I demonstrate saying that the circles are of differing speeds due to their varying size. I’m not so sure that is the problem though. Nonetheless, I demonstrate ellipses of the same size, and then ellipses of differing sizes, narrating as I go. I ask Kelly if she can do something similar, moving her arm while singing. Kelly tries, but the notes seem to be rather lumpy again. I ask her to revert back to 10-note gestural fragments, saying, ‘Can you see inside your head the circle/s and how big it is?’ Perhaps telling of the not too distant future, I say to Kelly, ‘If we attached some electrodes to your elbow and fed it through a computer, what shape would the circles be, and how fast would they be?’ Kelly nods. I ask Kelly if she can make the E F G and A louder, so ‘there’s a darker part of the circle’. This seems to help, and I ask Kelly what two functions the ‘throwing action’ serves (she says movement to go to the next note and to make the top note louder). I point out ‘the little voice’ and Kelly seems to understand. I ask her if she can imitate, and I get very excited when she is able to. Kelly looks really pleased with herself. Jean says, ‘It’s different, very different’. I say that it did take us quite a long time, but we got there. I suggest that the idea of ‘seeing’ the circles on the computer did seem to help, reminding her that not all the circles are the same shape, or the same speed. I make the analogy of walking, sometimes big steps, sometimes not so big steps. I do say however that it’s good that she is using circular movement rather than relying on fingers alone. I demonstrate again, narrating each ‘circle’ this time, saying, ‘The bigger you go (the wider the interval) the bigger the circle is’. I also trace the size of each elliptical movement in the air with my finger, and then remind Kelly of the voicing, which also functions to induce momentum in order to ‘trace’ the bigger circles. I say, ‘You work out what the
movement is, and then you practise it into the piece’ and Kelly nods. I complement her on the sound of the crossing hands bars, but it doesn’t go so well when she tries this time. I ask Kelly how big the movements are likely to be, and how fast the hands will need to travel so that the fingers don’t run away. She seems to have difficulty descending, but is able to do it in isolation. I ask her to ‘memorise’ the movement trajectory – ‘memorise what it feels like’, before we start adding neighbouring notes back in. I ask Kelly if she is ‘getting tight’ anywhere, reminding her that stiffness will cause the speed ‘to change’. I demonstrate again, and Kelly plays. I ask her to play the nine-note gestural fragment ascending and the nine-note gestural fragment descending, both of which are well controlled. I point out that like in the Mozart, ‘something is grabbing’ when both fragments are chained together. I demonstrate a couple of likely scenarios. Kelly plays again and I say, ‘That was better, except the left hand was too fast on the way down’. I say, ‘When you play these bigger pieces, they aren’t actually notes … they’re gestures and shapes, and you’ve actually got to memorise the gestures and the shapes and the speed of the shapes. That’s how you’ll get an even sound. If it’s not rhythmical, it’s not because you’ve got bad rhythm’. I ask, ‘so what’s the problem? That your rhythm’s bad?’ Kelly says no. I suggest that learning how to reproduce the size of the gestures is what practice is for. I say, ‘That’s why add-a-note technique is so good, because it allows you to memorise the speed of each individual part of the bigger gesture’. Kelly nods. I remind Kelly how earlier we were doing the beginning of the Debussy, and we added a certain amount of notes before the rhythm ‘went wonky’, because the gesture wasn’t being produced accurately. I demonstrate in the air how adding an extra note is just adding a bit more to the gestural shape without changing it in the process. We continue with this idea, and I say, ‘don’t change it … just add a bit more’. I guide Kelly through the crossing hands bars, and she really does seem to ascend very well, but descending is still proving problematic. I say, ‘If you get there too early, you’ll get a bump, and if you get there too early, you’ll get a wrong rhythm’. Kelly continues to experiment, and when she does get it, I say, ‘Great, now can you reproduce it? Can you see it on the computer screen?’ What follows is Kelly playing ascending really well, and descending really well, so I ask her to chain the two gestures together to make one larger gesture. Kelly does much better, though I suggest (using gesture), ‘there is a little jagged edge’ in the first few notes of the descending gesture. Kelly tries again, and it’s really very good now. When she tries again though, it steps backwards. She
continues to try and has more success this time. I say that it will sound right if the
gesture is reproduced accurately. I say, ‘The purpose of practice is to sit and
experiment until you can reproduce the movements that suit the piece’. Kelly nods. I
say that through the process of practising, everything becomes ‘automatic’. I say that
Kelly has improved, but to further improve, she will need to go deeper and study the
size of the elliptical movements. I ask Kelly, ‘how do we find it out?’ and then say,
‘through add-a-note and trying to visualise the shapes’. I say to Kelly that while she
can play the piece, and it has improved, there is more work to be done. Jean says that
she thinks the action of the grand piano is different to the upright piano (I agree), and
she asks if they can come to the Conservatorium to practise before the concert. Jean
says that they can’t afford a grand piano yet, though maybe next year. I ask Jean if
Kelly plays well at home. She says mostly well, a little lumpy, bit after 1.5 hours it is
much better. I say that Kelly’s sensory motor system probably takes a while to ‘warm
up’ and I encourage Kelly to imagine the movements that connect each note while
she is practising, as this may increase her ability to ‘start cold’. I say, ‘That’s what I do,
and that has really helped me with piano playing’. I go on to say that rather than it
being a case of I hope it goes well, you are better able to predict what will emerge
from your hands and body, making the whole process a lot more reliable. I continue,
‘Therefore, even when you’re nervous and not warmed up, you can switch it on’. Jean
says, ‘Yeah, I think Kelly doing the basic practice like what you teach for 10 minutes,
and then after that she does really well, but when she’s doing the whole piece for the
first time, it’s up and down’. I agree. I suggest that because I’ve been playing the
piano for a long time, when I sit down it sort of feels like, ‘Oh, I’ve done this before’.
It feels very comfortable for me. Even though I don’t practise, I can still play because
I’ve memorised what does it feel like to play well … if I want this sound, what have I
got to do, what movements do I do? I’m very familiar with what it feels like’. I
suggest to Kelly that that is why I’m able to teach her about this, as it didn’t come
easily to me, and I had to work out a way to make it more reliable. I sit down and play
the section that links the two thematic entries together, saying to Kelly that she is
playing too fast. As I sit at the second piano, I ask her to bounce both hands on the
keys before adding notes back in, saying, ‘Think of the overall movement’. I check
for tightness of the right hand and then suggest she practise while asking, ‘How do I
get from one group to the next without freezing’. I ask her to practise the add-a-group
technique before chaining them together, ‘without changing anything … just do what
you did, but add each one (together)’. Kelly plays very well this time. ‘You don’t do each one and then suddenly change it … you’ve got to keep it the same, but join them (each gestural fragment) together. That’s sort of why sometimes you play it really well, and sometimes you don’t, because the movements are not right’. Kelly nods. Jean says, ‘I think she still can’t remember what she does … sometimes really good, and sometimes pretty bad’. Jean laughs. I say, ‘That’s OK, my job is to try and get you to remember, so that’s why rather than just saying you’re not practising enough. It’s not always about practice … it’s about what are you doing and what are you thinking while you’re practising … so now you’ve got the energy, try and see the pictures (movements) in your head’. Jean asks me again about practising on the grand piano and what time closing time is.

Lesson 36: 18 October 2014

Reviewed 20 September 2016

- I say, ‘OK, here we are again’. Kelly smiles and tells me that she had a cello (orchestra) competition at Iona College. I say that I used to love playing in orchestra and Kelly agrees. Jean says that Kelly loves the sound of the cello rather than the violin. Jean talks and laughs about her friend’s daughter who is learning the violin (out of tune). Kelly adjusts the height of the chair. I ask Kelly how she is going with the Chopin. Jean laughs and says that she is still struggling. I say, ‘Do you reckon you’ll make it for the concert?’ Kelly nods and Jean says, ‘she will’. Kelly plays the hands together of the Chopin Nocturne in C# Minor. It is quite musical overall, but there are many unclear passages (especially the left hand) and incorrect notes. When she finishes I say, ‘OK good. That’s the first time I’ve heard it all the way through with hands together … well done’. I smile and give her the thumbs up. Kelly nods. I say that as it’s a nocturne, we need to be moving in the direction of a slow and peaceful piece and while it’s not there yet, it’s coming along. Jean is recording. I reiterate that I’ve never heard it ‘that good before’. I sit down and say, ‘The main thing would be to find a way to land on the left-hand notes without stretching’. I do a quick critical comparison and point out that Kelly is playing the left hand with finger over-extension, rather than ‘with shape to the finger’. As Kelly is playing the opening left hand with fingering 5312, I ask her to show me that combination and then 5212. I ask Kelly which combination is easier. She thinks and then says they are about the same. I ask, ‘Which one gives you the best shape of the hand so that you can control
the sound?’ When she replies the latter, I agree. I remind her that we started to review some of the fingering last week and that most people would use 5–3, but it might be best for her to go with 5–2. I suggest that having to stretch and over-extend the hand is one of the main reasons that she ‘misses’ the notes (the notes become inaudible). While demonstrating, I ask Kelly if she can roll from notes 2 to 3 of the half bar. She does this and then we continue, but she is having difficulty getting the bottom notes clear. I point and say, ‘That’s what I’m talking about’. I ask Kelly to ‘stay in the air’ before dropping into the note. She is doing much better so I point out what happens to quavers 7 and 8 if the fingers are too flat (over-extended). I explain the there is no lever to activate the note – ‘You need a bend there so that there’s a lever’ and I show my bent knee. I straighten my leg and explain that without that, it takes a lot more effort to make the sound. I say that I think her fingers a quite flat throughout and there needs to be more dropping into the notes. Kelly nods. I then remind her that she has learnt the whole piece, so she is moving forward, but the next things will be to look at how she is playing the notes. I encourage her to think about how she is going to play each note before she plays it, especially in terms of finger shape and how she will ‘drop’ into it. She does much better this time, though the fifth finger is still flat. I stop her, say ‘pretty good’ and then ask her to scratch her nose with her left hand fifth finger. I ask Kelly if we have done this exercise before (yes) and then I show her how I would like her to play the fifth finger. She does better again and I say, ‘much better’ before asking her if she has memorised the piece (sort of). I say, ‘If you memorise it, you’ll be able to look at your fingers and you’ll be free of the notes, so you can think about the relationship between the notes and how you’re playing them’. I demonstrate, saying that when looking at the page, it’s more difficult to keep an eye on the shape of the fingers. I ask her to close the book up and have a go at the left hand from memory. Kelly tells me that she can only play memorised with hands together. I smile and say, ‘Come on, have a go’ and she does. As she plays the left hand, I say, ‘don’t stop … never stop’. Kelly continues to the end of the first section. When we get to the A F# C# F# fragment, I ask her not to stretch but rather ‘go towards the notes … play slower, move faster’. She gains greater clarity and forward flow this way. I ask Kelly not to move quite so quickly on the fourth note of each half-bar gesture – ‘After you’ve played the note, then keep moving quickly (towards the bottom note)’. I say, ‘No, don’t do this Kelly’ and I show her how moving quickly off the note causes a tonal bump. She tries again and improves, though I remind her to
round out the fingers to a greater extent. As she plays, I stand and say, ‘Keep moving’ as I sway and sing. As she approaches the end of page one, I ask her to project ‘more bass’, pointing out the rising semitones. I asking her not to play the bottom note and then stretch, but rather play the bottom note on the way to the second note (good). She continues to experiment. I ask her to play very loud on the returning C# bass. I ask Kelly to free fall into the keys with a tonal splat, which she does, and then I ask her to ‘put that much energy into the bottom note’. I then ask her to move off the bottom note into the next one. She continues to experiment, but is having trouble with the notes, so I ask her to open up the score to have a look, playing and identifying the harmonic structure. She has another go, and I remind her to drop into the bottom notes with firm fingertips. I then add two and more notes to the half-bar gesture that Kelly copies. We continue, before I stop and suggest that overall, her left hand needs more practice (more familiarity). I say, ‘You sort of know the notes, but not well enough to fall into them with confidence, and that’s why you’re missing many of them’. Kelly nods. I ask Kelly if she practises the left hand separately (sometimes), and ask her to do so. I say that her left hand needs more work, as she is stretching and trying to ‘cover’ the notes, which makes the tone not very confident. On the second piano, I then demonstrate what a confident left hand might sound like. Kelly nods. I remind her not to ‘cover’ the intervals as this results in a lack of power. I ask Kelly to start from the beginning again. She plays the first 8 bars very well this time. I ask her what the chords are ‘so far’, and then suggest that even though she can play the left hand separately, she could sing the right hand, which I do. I suggest that Kelly practise the left hand as though she is ‘playing the piece’. Kelly nods and I say, ‘Don’t just play notes, find the shapes as well’. We start again, with Kelly playing the left hand while I play the right hand. When she doesn’t breathe between phrases, I review the concept with her. She does well, but I stop her again after the end of the next phrase saying, ‘Hang on … I need a breath. You didn’t let me have a breath there’. Kelly smiles and we team play again. When she misses the bottom note again, I ask her if it was just bad luck, or a technical fault, like in tennis – an unforced error. When I ask Kelly if she plays tennis she says no, so instead, I demonstrate and ask, ‘What happened?’ I start to suggest it might be a combination of not enough leverage, but Kelly says that she slipped off the note. I ask why – ‘were you looking at your keys?’ (maybe) I suggest that she looks at her key so that she lands right in the middle of it. I liken it to gymnasts on the balance beam, where they know their routine so well that they don’t
slip. I say, ‘You’ve got to know your piece so well so that you don’t slip’. Kelly nods and I ask her to close the book and start memorising. We begin team playing again, with me coaching her on breathing between phrases. As we finish the first page, I say, ‘Good girl, well done. That’s much better’. I demonstrate the last phrase, then use expressive gesture and my voice to convey that after stretching, the next little bit pushes ahead slightly. I ask Kelly if she knows what rubato is (sort of). I say that we did a lot of it in Snowflakes and start to play while demonstrating with my body and voice. I say that that will be the next phase for Nocturne, but the left hand needs to improve, reminding her to ‘land right in the middle of the note with enough leverage and finger curl, so that we have a fuller sound’. I say that the right hand is important, but the left hand forms the foundation of the piece and you need to ‘knock it on the head … nail it, though not literally’, and I start to play each note of the left hand very heavy, but then clarify, saying that it probably wouldn’t do her any harm. I ask Kelly if there are any spots on page one that are particularly tricky. She pauses to think, and I suggest the second-last bar perhaps. I ask her to so after my demonstration with single notes. I then demonstrate pairs of notes using SL combination, which she copies. She then copies me as I play as written, and then again as I lift abnormally high between each half-bar gesture. I say, ‘Before you drop into it, think of the whole four-note gesture’ and she does so. I then demonstrate and ask her not to twist or stretch between the first to the second quaver of the bar. She tries, but I repeat the direction, showing her what not to do before saying, ‘just play that note and move … good’. I say that that kind of open stretching (over-extension) is no good for your hand generally, and no good for the piece. I demonstrate again, and Kelly nods. After she plays this bar, I suggest we apply that idea to the beginning. I demonstrate each four-note gesture and as I hold my hand in the air, I say, ‘what’s my four notes, what’s my four notes’. After I suggest that Kelly try I say (using expressive gesture), ‘You’ve got to have them all in your mind, and then you roll through them’. Kelly smiles and then tries, but I stop her when she ‘stops’ just before key impact. I ask her to ‘Go! Confident!’ before each gesture, and it seems to help her ‘collect’ each four-note combination with one scooping gesture. I say, ‘OK, good’ and then convey to Kelly using expressive gesture, that I can ‘feel the confidence dripping out of those two bars’, referring to the last two before the second section of page one. I direct Kelly to drop in and play each note three times, without stretching, and instead ‘moving’ between the intervallic distances. We then move to another variation, where
the note is played, and then repeated again before quickly moving to the following note. We then move to LSLL, which I liken (and play) to the Habanera from ‘Carmen’. After this, she plays as written. I remind her of the revised fingering and sing the right hand beside her, using expressive gesture. Just before the Neapolitan sixth, I ask her to roll onto the notes rather push. She does so and I say that it’s better, before suggesting that we practise the shifts involved here (pairs of notes). I circle in pink pen each overlapping pair of notes. I then show Kelly how she can use double rotary movement to enhance the volume, cautioning her to ‘jump’ through the notes rather than stretching. I say again, ‘don’t stop … you’ve moving, swimming … don’t just stop swimming, because you’ll sink’. I use gesture, body movement and dramatise here. Kelly plays and I ‘swim’ with her. As she stops I ask her (and dramatise), ‘Ok that’s good, now swim, but slow down swim, but keep swimming’. I sit down and demonstrate and then Kelly plays again as I coach her ‘swimming’. I write on the score and point out the key change to A Major, and ask Kelly to slow down to illustrate it. I stop her and say, ‘Good. That’s beautiful, you’re really swimming now, but can you swim artistically?’ and I suggest that she ‘stay in the air longer’. As Kelly plays, I sit and add the right hand at the second piano. As we come to the triplet bars, I ask her to play them faster. I play along with her and it works very well in helping her ‘catch’ the rhythmic stretch. I ask her to pretend that that’s the end of the piece, and ‘just take your time’. I say that I do think that overall, the piece is a little too fast, though I’m worried that if I ask her to slow down, she will slow down the left hand and lose the necessary gestural momentum in the process – ‘You’ve got to move quickly, but within a slower tempo’. I say, ‘It’s very hard to explain, but having said that, I’ve just realised how far you’ve come in one year’. I remind Kelly that this time last year (2013) she was playing Snowflakes, having skipped about 5 grades in a year. Kelly agrees with me when I say that it’s pretty impressive. I start to play the triplet section, and ask Kelly to play a bit more exaggerated there. Kelly plays well, but I stop her and ask her to imitate me in the way that my hips move forward with the swell of the music. She tries a little, but I say that I can’t see it happening, so I ask her to copy my exaggerated movement, without playing. She copies me well, so I demonstrate and ask her to put the notes back into the movement. She does so and I move in sympathy. I say that earlier, her playing was too flat here, but ‘no it has colour’. I ask, ‘use your arms and your body to shape’. I come over to move her from the hips but she is very ticklish. I say that it should sound quite playful
here, compared to earlier in the piece. I demonstrate and then as she plays, I coach her using body movement and expressive gesture. I suggest and demonstrate that she play louder as the triplet figure ascends higher. Kelly imitates the idea, and I use expressive gesture, body movement and my voice to encourage this process. As the music fades away, I say, ‘Pretend there’s a little kid going off into the distance’. I ask her to freeze her arms on the long note that finishes the section, before moving on. It’s interesting how she is able to copy the way I gesticulate beside her. I encourage her to ‘keep going’ through into the next section. I stop her and say that would have been better had the crescendo in the right hand been supported by a stronger, more confident left hand. I ask Kelly not to use 5-3 in the left hand, and use 5-2 instead as before. I ask Kelly if she can really ‘nail it there’. I demonstrate the right hand and then hands together with plenty of passion and volume. Kelly tries quite well, and I direct her to partial practice the hands together into the F# minor bar and I suggest that she stretch the time there, demonstrating using my voice and expressive gesture. Kelly repeats and then continues as I coach her – ‘more sound in the right hand, come one!’ I walk over and use expressive behaviour and a ‘whoosh’ to encourage her. I suggest that during the final bars, she ‘wander around’. I play the final bars in harmony with her and she copies my arm movements. After we finish, I say, ‘OK, I can see the finish line. It’s just starting to nudge its way in’. Kelly nods. I say that it’s starting to turn into ‘music’. I ask Kelly to try to get more confident with the left hand now. I ask her to start again, as we play together. I stop her soon after the first couple of chords, saying that she needs to use bigger movements for a ‘big’ piece. I demonstrate the first two bars, saying that she needs a big girl attitude to play a piece like this: ‘little girl body, big girl attitude’. Kelly plays again, and I roll her shoulders, saying, ‘She me with your body what’s happening in the music’. She tries again, and her sound has more depth, but I pull her up regarding the pedalling. She starts again, and I sit and play at the second piano, coaching her with the rubato. As the bar with the Neapolitan sixth approaches, I stand and coach her with expressive gesture, vocalisation and body movement. During the A Major section, I coach her in a similar way, saying, ‘moving forward … pulling back’. It’s going well but towards the triplet interchange, we pause and I take the opportunity to say, ‘OK, your notes are getting in the way of the piece there. You need to practise a bit more there’. I say, ‘That it’s all right, the piece is starting to come on now. Do you feel it?’ Kelly nods yes enthusiastically and I smile excitedly. I say, ‘I feel like I can get up and coach you
know, rather than sitting and checking for wrong notes. So you want to get the piece to that point’. Kelly nods again. I sit and play the end of page one right hand before moving on to say that Kelly’s key change was ‘really lovely’. I play the right hand/left hand as I sing along, narrating the keys and ‘it’s not so bad after all’ to one of the phrases. I play all the way to the end of the B section. Before moving on to play the return of the A section, I use my face to ‘set’ the mood. I play a little of the return before turning to Kelly saying that these pieces are actually meant for ‘older’ students who are ‘emotional’ and ‘mature’. I tell Kelly that I’m sure she has as much emotional depth as someone older and ask her if she feels sad sometimes (yes). I add happy (yes), sometimes shy (yes) and I ask her not to play the piece ‘shyly’. I tell Kelly that I’m not usually ‘like this’, meaning quite extroverted when teaching. Jean laughs when I say that I don’t go out in the street and (sings), but I explain that I do it to try and encourage Kelly to be more like that when playing. I start playing and say to Kelly, ‘You have to sort of connect yourself to what’s happening, and the easiest way to do that is by using your body’. Kelly nods as I ask her to copy me moving forwards from the hips. She copies me as I stand, play the first chord and stand, and the second and third chords and stand. Then I ask Kelly if she can stay seated, but pretend she is ‘standing’ for each chord. She does very well, but Jean and Kelly laugh as she smudges the pedal on the last chord of the introduction. I say, ‘Good girl, already it sounds more like the music’s telling a story. That’s what’s missing in that piece … there’s not a lot of story there yet (Kelly nods). It’s mainly because you’re a little bit afraid of the notes. Would you agree or? (Kelly nods) … Maybe?’ I ask Kelly to practise the left hand especially during the change to F# minor. I clarify, saying that she has done very well to get all the notes under her fingers, though I’m just trying to push her along a bit as she’s running out of time. Kelly nods and I say, ‘I don’t want you to freak out, I want you to work hard’, and she nods again. Jean asks if memorising is better. I say, ‘Memorising will help you let go of the notes Kelly’. She nods. Jean says that she has memorised most of it. I ask Kelly what the newest part is, and say that that is the ‘sketchiest’ part. I reiterate the importance of not stretching between notes and how memorising the notation pattern will help her group the notes together, physically and expressively. I dramatise what it might be like in someone’s mind who knows only individual notes, rather than groups of notes. ‘That’s when you’ll stop, because you’ll stop to check. Once you stop to check, the blood drains out of the piece. So in order for it to sound full and real (I’m using gesture while talking
here), and forward flowing, you need to know where you’re going before you even go there, and the only way to do that is by memorising’. Kelly nods. I clarify that she is doing well overall, and show her where her progress is on a sliding scale, including how far she came during the lesson itself. I suggest that she go home and practise what was covered really thoroughly, and use ‘those 4 bars’ as an example, showing her how I might practise. I explain to Kelly that if I were playing this piece, I would have to follow the same process. I say that while I can ‘read’ the notes (which I do) there is ‘nothing there’. I ask Kelly if she understands what I mean, and she seems to. I say that while I can ‘play’ it, I don’t well enough to … (I demonstrate the first phrase from memory with greater self-expression and embodied involvement). ‘Once you can let go and see the piece as something that’s a part of you and you’re dancing through the notes it will come alive’. Kelly nods. ‘That’s why I don’t play along with you, because I don’t want to mess it up. I can’t teach you expression unless I know the piece well, that’s why I often only play one hand. What I want you to do is try to know all the notes and then adapt into a more expressive outcome. You don’t want to just sit there and play all the right notes. It’s too big of a piece for that’. Kelly nods and I tell her, ‘You’ve come a long way’. I ask her to show me ‘big girl playing’, as I start the introduction. Kelly plays and I ask her as she is playing, ‘what’s going to happen? Tell me a story’. I close the book and stop coaching and moving as she continues to play. I stop her after the first section and say, ‘that’s sort of getting there. You had me, but then …’ I start singing the phrases with greater space while I ‘act’ the phrases with my face and hand, and ask Kelly to ‘give me greater space to hear what you are saying’. Kelly nods and I ask her to try again. She does a little better, though we both laugh when she misses the notes. I ask her to remember to drop into the first note of each phrase and ‘let it ring’. As she plays the phrases, I encourage her sense of storytelling by saying, ‘What happened next Kelly?’ I compliment her by saying that it’s starting to sound more like ‘a piece’ now.

Lesson 37: 19 October 2014

Reviewed 20 September 2016

- The lesson begins with Kelly playing the Chopin Nocturne in C# Minor. She plays the introduction before I interrupt and ask her to slow down the tempo; we play together. I don’t say anything and don’t always play either. There are a lot of mistakes, but I’m not sure whom it is making them though! Kelly continues to play
from the return of the A section as I sit and listen. To be honest, there isn’t a great deal of improvement since the previous day, to be expected really. I smile at Kelly as she finishes. However, I say to Kelly that I think it sounds better when compared to yesterday, particularly the left hand, which is more confident and clear. I move to the triplet section, asking Kelly to be stronger through there and she plays. I say, ‘OK, good much better’. I remind her to lift the shorter notes rather than holding them through the pedal changes; she fixes it. I ask her what morendo means – I say, ‘dying away’, and ask her to play a little slower there. I say that I noted how she cleared the pedal before moving on to the return of the A section and ask her if that was deliberate (yes) – very nice idea, very nice idea. I say that the triplet section sounded ‘a bit notey’ and ‘wasn’t very inspiring’, whereas most of the playing is ‘quite beautiful’. I ask Kelly to be more playful there, more charming. What follows is a facial dramatisation of the different moods of each key change through until the return of the main theme. I ask Kelly to count a full bar before she starts the piece, and I demonstrate. I mention that it sounds a little rushed, though the second time I asked her to do it slower was better. I sit and sing the main melody while ‘conducting’ to give her an idea of the starting tempo before actually playing the first part of section A. I continue to play the left hand while clicking the beat and then start playing the introduction, asking Kelly to beware the two sections match in terms of tempo. I say that the introduction shouldn’t be faster, lest it won’t sound like a part of the piece; Kelly nods. I say, ‘Let’s have another go. Think of the main theme and get your tempo from there’ and Kelly plays. The tempi still don’t really match, though I say, ‘The tempo is much better now and I love your Russian split’. By way of demonstration, I ask her to soften the last note of phrase 1. I ask her to try again. This time I interrupt and say that the cadence into F# minor at the end of phrase 2 is too fast. I indicate by using a ‘stretching’ gesture and demonstration. Kelly imitates well and then continues as I coach her with ‘breathe, pause’ and verbalising quaver rallentando. I also conduct her, use body movement, ‘big sound’ for the Neapolitan sixth and ‘relax, relax, relax’ as she approaches the A Major modulation into the B section. I stop her and tell her that it sounds really good and is of ‘performance standard’. Kelly nods. I play and review the decrescendo at the end of phrase 1, and then stretching of the last two quavers heading into phrase 2, saying, ‘that’s what a singer would do’. Kelly plays while I coach her using body movement, gesture and my voice. I also say, ‘dig in’ to emphasise the descending fioritura and ‘show us’ for
the Neapolitan sixth. While taking my pencil case out of my bag, I continue to use my voice and then dance to convey the rubato and character of the phrases. Soon after Kelly has trouble with the notes (just before the triplet figures, which she plays too slowly). I sit down again and she stops at the end of the B section. I say, ‘You’re really starting to impress me now, this is good’. I follow by saying that I don’t like the left hand coming into the triplet figures – ‘it’s not that you’ve got wrong notes, it’s just that the intensity of the piece drops out’. Kelly nods and I demonstrate, saying, ‘It should be quite strong there’. I say that I don’t like it so much, but I really like the A Major interchange, playing a little of the right hand – ‘it’s got a really nice contrast of mood and you’re moving it on, really good idea’. I say that Kelly’s left hand is really very good, and I ask her if she is getting a better feel for the grand piano (no, not really). I say that it sounds like she is thinking of the notes before playing them, and then falling into them rather than checking first. I use a pencil to analogise between thinking and then dropping into the note as opposed to stopping just before the moment of impact. I tell Kelly that she is doing much better with that concept now, and she nods yes when I ask her if she is aware of that. I suggest that we move on to page three now. After she plays I ask her not to change the pedal after the trill, which she does (yeah that’s better). I say, ‘excellent’, and then demonstrate even more time stretching heading into phrase 2, counting the beats and playing. I mark the score and then Kelly plays again. I coach her using body movement, expressive gesture and my voice as she approaches the descending fioritura. I stop her saying that it’s too soft, suggesting double rotation to increase the volume. I say, ‘by the way the rallentando was good’. I go back to the melodic line and demonstrate double rotary movement using random note splats to convey the concept; Kelly nods. I demonstrate a greater dropping action for the left hand. I suggest we go from the top of page three again. Kelly plays well and I say to Sam, ‘that’s heaps better … she’s doing well. It sounds very intense … you’d hardly believe it was a 10-year old girl playing … sounds very good’. I demonstrate, asking Kelly to pull back even more before the final cadence preceding the fioritura. Kelly plays and then I ask her to play the left hand alone, two bars before. I play the right hand. It works very well in teaching Kelly to ‘wait’ for the melodic line. I say that I probably overdid it a little, but emphasise that there really is no rush and refer to ‘a big rubber band’. I refer to bar 50, playing a little, saying that ‘it sounds a bit dead there’ and ask Kelly to ‘show us the change of harmony’ by using rubato. Kelly tries and I say that it was too much, though that’s the main idea.
Thereafter, I use body movement and expressive gesture to coach the dynamics and rubato. It’s beautiful to watch. She plays the fioritura quite well, though a little unclear. As she finishes the piece, I help her to lift her arms and give her ‘thumbs up’, saying, ‘OK, credit where credit’s due … that sounds good’. Kelly looks at Sam and smiles. Sam says that Kelly sounds even better here than at home. I say that I really mean it and I would tell her otherwise. I say to Kelly that the challenge will be feeling the ‘little adjustments’ on her own. She nods when I ask her if she can do it herself. I say that I’m not normally like this (walking around the city being very expressively extroverted), but I do it to try and ‘wind you up’. I say that I don’t usually sit in my home and saying (very expressively), ‘Oh I think I’ll have roast beef dinner!’ I say that to play music well, it’s like being an actor. I say that I’m not faking it, as I’m really feeling it, but I ‘turn it up a bit’ when playing a piece like this. I say that it’s not like playing the Clown, Sarabande or Gold Rush (I play short excerpts), saying, ‘Look how far you’ve come’. I show Kelly an indication of her progress since yesterday (much better) and ask her to clean up the left hand of bar 29 onwards. I start playing some drills for the left hand, saying that it sounds like a bit more of what we covered yesterday could be applied there; Kelly nods. I say, ‘The notes are getting in the way of the music there’. I say that I don’t blame Kelly, as it’s quite difficult. I convey to her that if it were my piece, I would be doing the same thing too. I do a practice simulation as Kelly watches. I then show her how I would memorise the chords it before closing the book and playing it. I say, ‘Rather than trying to learn it all and then get it all perfect and then be expressive, put confidence into every note along the way’. I continue to show Kelly how I memorise the left hand by analysing each intervallic pair, ‘so I can see it in my head. I visualise the keyboard and fall into the notes without thinking. I think of the shape and the intervals, not each note’. I explain that thinking in single notes will inhibit a full tone, due to overcautiousness. I analogue using a tiptoeing action with my feet. I say, ‘You’ve got to learn those notes so that you’re not all careful with it’. We smile at each other. We move to the fioritura, and I ask her if she will do some drills there, demonstrating ‘pairing’ the notes. Kelly nods yes and I suggest we do some together now. Together at our pianos, we do groups of six, chaining each pair of notes together, ascending and then descending. I then suggest and demonstrate groups of three consecutive notes this time, displacing one note forward each time. Kelly catches on very quickly, though the turn from ascending to descending is a little trickier, though she adapts quickly.
She is able to maintain the fingering very well overall. I say, ‘There’s two drills that you could do there (I play the fioritura scale) … it will improve your knowledge of the notes, and when you have good knowledge of the notes, what will improve?’ She takes a while but seems to agree when I suggest ‘confidence’. I then say, ‘And when your confidence improves, what will improve?’ She has a think and I say that it rhymes with compression. Kelly says expression and I ask her if she ‘gets it’. She agrees. I say, ‘Improve the confidence of your notes and that will improve your overall expression’. Kelly nods. I say that her playing of the piece is really good and that it’s about 8.5/10 now. I say that the piece has gone from about 6.5/10 to 8.5/10 in two weeks – ‘very good girl’. I ask to hear her Debussy. I say to Sam that her can report back to Jean that she has done very well since yesterday. Sam laughs and Kelly smiles. Kelly smiles and says ‘yes’ when I ask her if Jean made her practise in the time since the lesson yesterday (oh good). I say, ‘You like it though?’ Kelly nods and I say, ‘I can tell. You don’t seem sort of miserable. You’re not miserable are you?’ Kelly smiles and says no. Kelly plays the Debussy very fast, though it’s not always well controlled and she stops just after the return of the main theme. I stand and watch. After she finishes I say, ‘It’s heaps better … good’. I sit down at the second piano and play the final bars while counting the beats (don’t slow down there). I tell Kelly that it’s super-fast and play a little myself. Kelly begins again and then stops just where the hands cross each other. I ask her that it does sound a lot better and I ask her how she has got it to this stage. She answers, ‘the basic skills more’ and I ask her to keep it up. I ask her to show me the right hand, saying that the gestural fragment on the fourth beat of bar one ‘doesn’t sound quite right’. I play, prompting her to pair the notes, saying that it sounds like she is either getting tight in the wrist, or the fingers are a little floppy, or a combination, or the movement isn’t right. She tries again, and it’s a case of ‘sometimes good, sometimes not’, so I suggest ways to practise. I analyse the intervals with Kelly – D and C/A and B. In a somewhat unusual way, I ask her to copy a rhythmic pattern using these notes, which Kelly does faithfully. I then ask her to copy DC – G – AB – G, then splitting the Major seconds slightly, then playing as written – I chuckle and say, ‘good girl’. We then repeat what was covered, and then four-, five- and six-note fragments, then the whole of the first bar. I then ask her to go back to the intervallic practice for the next bar BC – G, then BC – FG, then EG – BC – FG – AC. I then ask her to repeat this drill, noting the fingering. I then ask her to do each interval once, in quick succession. Then I ask her to split the intervals
quickly, throwing the hand in the direction of travel. We then go back to these notes, but play them as written in the score. I ask Kelly is she can ‘do some that there’ and she agrees. I say that I hadn’t done that drill with anyone else before, but it seems to ‘help you find the notes quicker’. I add, ‘When the rhythm goes off, it’s usually because your mind is not thinking of the notes before you get there, so drills like that can help you discover the small intervallic relationships between the notes’. I say that those drills can help speed the brain up. ‘When the brain is sped up, the fingers will speed up’. Kelly nods. I say that it really hasn’t got a lot to do with not having fast fingers as your fingers are already fast enough, it’s more that the brain needs to think a bit faster here. I say that the piece is ‘heaps better though’. I say that the crossing hands part is very good, as is the second page. I say that we need to stop, but I say that she will need to fall into the melodic notes in the final section faster. Kelly plays – it’s quite lumpy, but I say that it’s quite good overall. I suggest that Kelly practises the change between the hands, taking two semiquavers in the left hand and chaining to 1 note in the right hand. She has trouble, and I suggest that she might need to refer to her music. I ask her to practise in this way, as the join between the hands isn’t right. I say that it’s not terrible, but it’s a bit bumpy and would be the next thing to do. I summarise the score in terms of what is working well and what is in need of review. I ask to hear from the beginning of the reprise of the theme isn’t coordinated with the left hand. I say that it sounds like she needs to do more practice with the right hand in a similar way as was covered with the first section earlier. Kelly agrees. I say that will keep her going for the next few days, though I will try to find another time for her later in the week. I say, ‘I think you’re well on the way, and the pieces will be ready. The pieces are significantly better’.

Lesson 38: 26 October 2014

Reviewed 22 September 2016

- I ask Kelly how she is going, and she is very smiley and confident. I ask her which piece she is going to play first next Sunday at the Intermediate Concert. She shrugs her shoulders and looks at Jean. I suggest Nocturne and she nods. I ask if she has any questions and ‘how the grand piano fund is going?’ Kelly is looking at Jean a lot. I ask Kelly if she is ‘ready’ for her performance and she takes a bow. She starts to play but I interrupt to adjust the chair, saying, ‘With these bigger pieces, you need a lot of leverage in the arms’. Kelly begins to play, but the introduction is too fast. Her
phrasing is very beautiful. I sit and mark the score with a pencil. When she finishes, Kelly bows and I say, ‘Well done Kelly … it’s clearly ready for performance. You made it … what?’ Kelly nods, but looks disappointed. Jean laughs and says that she’s not happy with it. I say that it’s ready to give it a go and that’s she’s still very young and that perhaps by the fifth performance of the same piece … I say that she’ll always be learning it. I suggest that once she’s learnt a few more nocturnes, she will understand this one even better. I say, ‘It doesn’t mean that you leave it at that. What weren’t you happy with?’ I sit at the second piano and Kelly says that she’s not used to the grand piano. I suggest that Kelly could stay after her lesson and practise on one of the grand pianos – Jean asks if it’s ok (‘we’d love to’). I suggest down past the café to room 2.15. I start playing the introduction and say that the first couple of bars still don’t sound like they’re ‘setting the scene’ (‘they sound a bit notey’) and I conduct the tempo. We play together and I coach Kelly with the length of the notes (full beat). I say, ‘It’s lovely, keep going’. I say that she needs to bring out the bass a bit more after phrases 1 and 2. I point out that there is a C# pedal point for quite a number of bars so the change is a point of interest. I say that her bass got softer rather than louder and ‘in fact a couple of them didn’t sound’. I ask Kelly to play the left hand here (good). I correctly label it as a Neapolitan sixth (should be Italian, German or French). I ask Kelly to refine the balance between bass and broken chords, and also the feel of harmonic resolution. I ask her not to slow down the depth of the touch as she slows the tempo. I ask her to add the right hand, doing a quick demonstration. Kelly plays hands together and I sing the bass part with her. I ask her not to back away from the rising semitones in the bass, instead making them heavier. Kelly plays but is having a bit of trouble with the notes now. I suggest that the main problem with the page one is that the bass drops in and out, rather than being ‘shown’. I point out the dynamics in the score while playing the ascending bass line towards the end of the A section. Kelly does better, so I ask her to add the right hand without being distracted by it. ‘Good very nice’. I ask her to do some partial practice of the left hand in the change to F# minor, as it’s too soft to support the right hand here. I continue to coach her with the volume levels, saying, ‘Show us with your upper body your intention’. Kelly does well (‘good girl’). I say, ‘That’s so colourful … you know like oil paintings … they’re really thick (Kelly nods)’. I compare it to a watercolour, which is wishy-washy (Kelly nods). I caution Kelly against a wishy-washy left hand. I say, ‘Lots of paint, really dark … lather it on’. I say these while using expressive
gesture to dramatise the brush strokes. Kelly smiles and nods. I summarise – ‘highlight the harmonic line of the bass’. We start again and I coach Kelly with voicing of the opening chords. She does better. I do a tonal splat, asking her to come down faster on the fifth finger. She continues to experiment and does get there. She does very well thereafter and continues into the A section. While she plays I identify the chord changes while coaching her with the rubato, and resolution of harmonic tension. She continues into the B section but it isn’t as good as Section A in terms of accuracy and confidence. She gets to the end of the B section and I say, ‘OK, that’s good’. I ask Kelly if she heard me pull back. I sit and demonstrate the inherent rubato of the first part of the B section where it modulates from A to F# minor. I say, ‘Show us those harmonic shifts by easing the last two quavers’, and I mark the score in multiple spots. I ask her to start the B section, saying, ‘Concentrate … no wrong notes’. As she plays, I use body movement, gesture and my voice to coach her with tempo, rubato and colour. She continues into the return of the A section, and I coach her with the pedal which was quite dry here earlier. Kelly continues as I coach her, but sometimes it appears to distract her as wrong notes appear. I point out the climax of the piece where ‘the whole piece is going to’ and say that they aren’t loud enough or fast enough. I ask Kelly to take her time to articulate the bass notes loudly by dropping firmly. She continues into the fioritura and I coach her with ‘not stopping’ in order for the left hand to be totally clear. As she plays the final bars I say, ‘Finally … sunshine’. I sit down and demonstrate, suggest the final note be louder. I suggest that it sounds more ‘sunny’ when staccato is used, though it does say 4 beats in the score. I say that she could just hold the pedal down instead, but it’s only a small thing. I say that bars 54, 55 and 56 have to be the strongest and most exciting of the whole piece – ‘a really dense, thick sound rather than water-coloury’. I ask Kelly to say ‘the bass’ with increasing volume, which is quite funny. I say that it’s only taken half an hour to go through the whole piece, which indicates the piece is really going well now. I say that progress is scaffolded, with each week showing improvement. I reiterate that we need to hear the harmonic changes, which are through the … BASS! It’s a funny moment where I ask Kelly to shout. She smiles a lot and Jean chuckles. I ask her to do a bit more practice of the right hand leading into the climax. I mention the monkey on the page, which I question Kelly about (swinging on the keys). I suggest that it still sounds not quite confident yet, so I sit down and we do some ‘confidence’ drills, basically add-a-note technique. As the passage increases in notes, Kelly has to refer to
the music to remember. We continue on, this time with two-note slurs for each pair of adjacent notes. I say, ‘you really want to nail this part. It sounds like it’s a bit prone to break down, depending on how you feel on the day, and you don’t want the whole piece to come towards something only for it to fall apart. (Kelly nods) It’s not very satisfying for the listener or for you’. We resume the two-note pair drills, and I suggest that Kelly spend a good 10 minutes doing this. We move into LSLS and SLSL, then back to pairs of notes, then into rhythmic alteration, then staccato triplets, then staccato pairs, then as written, then ascending and descending while adding notes either side, then as written. We then start from ‘the next note back’. What follows, is pairs, staccato pairs, as written, LSLS, SSLL, ascending and descending, ascending and descending but adding another note/s to the top. We then start from the next note back again. Kelly copies me as we do pairs, as written, LSLS, SLSL, as written, ascending and descending, ascending and descending but adding another note(s) to the top, as written. We then add ‘the next note back’… We stop and I ask Kelly if she gets the idea; she agrees. I say, ‘If you do that you will triple your confidence’. I ask her to start from the beginning of the ascending chromatic run. She does very well in terms of accuracy and fluency. I ask, ‘Feel easier?’ and Kelly agrees. I say, ‘It works. If you spend the time doing it … most kids won’t do it’. I whisper, ‘lazy’ but then suggest ‘maybe they just forget what to do … and they’re lazy’. I say, ‘you’re good at that piece … you’re ready to get up and have a go now’. Kelly nods and smiles and looks at Jean. I suggest that maybe Kelly could play again towards the end of the year at the AMEB chamber concert. Jean says she will check the date. I suggest that it might be inspiring for some of the other students to hear her play. I suggest that we move on to the Debussy now. I leave the room briefly and Kelly does some warm up drills. She starts playing, but it really is too fast and starts to lose control. For some reason the video must have stopped, as it resumes at the end of the piece. I ask Kelly to play the right-hand broken chord, using gesture in the direction of travel. We then add bits of the left hand back in to this, but she has trouble adding more and more material. We practise in groups, which are then chained together. I ask her ‘touch’ the left hand C before rolling towards A within a single gesture – she has more success this way. I say that the pedal will ‘hold’ down the C for her and no one will even notice, but it will be audible if the finger work is lumpy. She adds the pedal and it does seem much better. We move on to the next bit, checking the fingering and chaining the left hand, then adding left-hand fifths with right-hand block thirds. This
is tricky, but Kelly does it eventually. I suggest that if she was to ‘get good at that it would help enormously’. I then ask Kelly to repeat the process but with right-hand octaves, but she can’t stretch, so I suggest broken thirds, and then with all notes, working backwards from the top notes. I ask Kelly not to come so far out with the left hand. We start the chaining process again, and I point out that as the left hand plays, the right hand starts to prepare to move up. I ask Kelly to note how tight the sound is otherwise. I ask Kelly to start from the previous chord now. When she misses the bottom note of the right hand, I say that it’s very easy if there is momentum behind the note. We then take out the left hand and I encourage Kelly not to twist. That really seems to help her with the right hand is added back in. I say, ‘See when there’s no twisting, it’s so much easier’. I ask Kelly to start with the bottom group now. We work on chaining the bottom two groups together, then groups 2 and 3, then groups 3 and 4. When she tightens up and misses the notes, I ask her to do more preparatory movement in the right hand. I ask her to chain groups 1, 2 and 3 together, then 3 and 4, and then finally 1, 2, 3 and 4. I say, ‘Woo!’ and clap. We then move to the left hand, and I ask Kelly to play the open fifths split in order to firm up the sound. She starts to twist, so I help her review the position of the fifth finger when compared with the thumb on the key surface (in for 5, edge for thumb). I ask her to face the diagonal right corner and play with closed fist before adding notes back in. She plays as written, and it is better, though still a little unreliable. I ask Kelly to practise the left hand, aiming for authority and firmness. I come over and adjust her hand diagonally and suggest that moving between the left-hand notes is ‘like one of those gymnasts on the balance beam’. I point out the other area that I would like Kelly to work on – the crossing-hand part in the middle section. I ask her not to ‘stop’ the right hand moving, referring to the ball analogy. I demonstrate how the right hand uses a ‘see-saw’ action rather than stopping between ascending and descending. Kelly has trouble with the notes, so turns to the score. I caution Kelly against locking up in the arms in this section, which causes a lack of clarity in the fingers. I play a little of the middle section, suggesting that Kelly play a bit slower and not be in such a rush. I say that that is where ‘the little girl stops practising and starts making up her own music’, before Mum comes in! I point out the descending interchange is too fast, as there is a ritardando in the score. As I play the interchange from the middle section back into the return, I dramatise what Mum might say/yell. We all laugh.
Lesson 39: 29 October 2014

Recording not available.

Lesson 40: 1 November 2014

Reviewed 10 October 2016

- I ask Kelly if she’s ‘ready’. Kelly says ‘maybe’. Jean says, ‘Don’t forget’. I ask what she means and Jean says, ‘I keep saying … Kelly you need to have energy like Wendy’. I agree that Wendy could have a bit more of Kelly’s work ethic, but Kelly could have a bit more of Wendy’s sparkle. We talk about how amazing her progress has been. Kelly adjusts the chair and I ask if she still enjoys playing piano (yes). I ask Kelly if she likes playing these pieces (yes). Jean says that she loves Nocturne. I ask Kelly if she will play from memory, and Jean says that she will. I remind Kelly that playing pieces, particularly at this level is ‘storytelling through the notes’. I say that at the end of the day, conveying the story of the piece to the audience is what matters, not how perfect everything is. I turn off the light and ask Kelly if she can convey ‘the story of the night’ whilst playing in the dark. Kelly plays quite accurately though it’s better when I use my mobile phone as a torch. I turn the lights back on as she approaches the middle of the B section. When she finishes I say, ‘it’s very polished … good girl’. I asked her if she has ever played with the lights off (no). I suggest that it might be fun to try that at home, just like Chopin may have played by candlelight in the olden days. I ask Kelly to imagine what it might have been like to be Chopin playing in the 1840s. I tell Kelly how he died from a bad cough in 1849. I talk about the music is quite sad and might be good to play at Chopin’s funeral. I tell Kelly that he wasn’t a concert pianist, unlike Franz Liszt who invented the piano recital. I say that he was also born in 1810. I tell Kelly about Chopin playing in the salons of rich people while they enjoyed their wine or coffee. I talk about the middle part being like day and then the night returns again. I suggest it could be like a solar eclipse. I say that Kelly could imagine these things in her mind as she’s playing. I say that Kelly could take a bit more time between phrases during the middle section. Kelly starts to play and I sit down at the second piano and demonstrate (using gesture too), suggesting that Kelly could play a little more ‘open; not so closed … open up the phrases’. I play along with Kelly to coach her with the rubato. I can’t imagine not being able to do this any other way! We continue on into the return of the A section,
but soon after we stop. I say that while she has ‘forgotten’ a little bit of detail, the piece as a whole is much better. Using gesture and demonstration, I coach her to start softer in order for the rising crescendo to be even more intense. Kelly starts playing from the beginning of the third page; the crescendo is just beautiful. I ask Kelly to land on the notes on the tips of fingers and use the soft pedal for the last couple of bars where the sun comes out. I compliment Kelly on the crescendo, saying that people will get very excited to hear that, and then go on to coach her with the tonal shape of the next phrase leading to the close in C# minor. Kelly experiments and I coach her along the way. I say that her fioritura are really much better and that it sounds like she knows what she is doing. Kelly nods. In summary, I say, ‘Put a candle on, imagine you’re in the past and you’re telling a story for the audience so they will give you more money’. I explain to Kelly that Chopin didn’t play for rich people as a favour, as he was well paid. I ask Kelly what he did with the money. She says she doesn’t know, and I suggest that he lived off it so that he would have more time to compose; Kelly nods. I tell Kelly that he had some piano students, and point towards the dedication (Miss in French). I say that people who are married are usually Mrs, and I start playing *Nocturne in F minor* Op. 55 No. 1, saying that it is very beautiful. I say that that was the first one that I learnt. I also play the E minor that Wendy does is very popular, and the other very popular one is the one E-flat Major. I say that he wrote 20 *Nocturnes*, and perhaps Kelly might record them all one day. I say that if I were Kelly, I would be taking mental notes on the teaching process so that one day she could teach piano to others as well as perform. Kelly nods. I say, ‘Good luck with it, you’re good at the piece Kelly’. I ask her if she feels confident and she says yes with around 85% believability. I ask her to scratch her nose with the fifth finger and land on the keys like this for maximum leverage. I ask Kelly to show me some of the left hand with this type of fifth finger. I remind her to slide off the fourth quaver gently as opposed to quickly. We do a little more work with the left hand, and I suggest that tonight she could do a little more practice with the left hand alone, so as to increase her confidence and thus tonal personality – ‘It has to have its own character’. I sit and demonstrate, and then using gesture, I suggest that the left hand is like a little pet that breathes; ‘the left hand is living’. I do a critical comparison, suggesting the second one is prickly and then say, ‘Ooo, I’m not touching that’. I ask Kelly, ‘Can you make it sound like you want to touch the pet?’ Kelly continues to play the left hand, and I encourage her to slur the top two notes of the left-hand
gesture. I also remind her that it’s a slow piece and she has ‘plenty of time’ that needs a flexible approach. As Kelly continues with the left hand, I play the right hand on the second piano. I say again that it would make a huge difference if she were to practise the left hand alone. Kelly nods. I ask her not to rush, saying that if Chopin played for longer he would be paid more. (Why would you play quickly when every minute is another $100?) Jean laughs. I sit and demonstrate, saying that ‘sometimes you will rush through the bar’, and I play the B section with hands together. I say that music like this is not strict. I remind Kelly that she is only 10 and she has done a good job – ‘you did it! Don’t get too uptight if it’s not perfect. Try to tell a story. Practise some of the left hand tonight, and then just go for it’. Kelly nods. I say that it would be better a bit too loud than too soft, but I remind Kelly not to bang. Jean laughs as I recount how brash Kelly’s Mozart Concerto was. However, I say that it’s better to be like that than the alternative. I qualify that it wasn’t OMG who is that banging or anything, don’t worry. I mention again about the Friday concert, but they have tutoring. I say that it would be good to have another opportunity to play, as performing is also a learning experience and a chance to improve. I talk about concert pianists who travel the world with the same two or three programs all year, as opposed to a single opportunity. I suggest that Kelly could listen to all the Nocturnes, as they are usually approached in a similar way. I summarise, ‘I don’t want you to think that this concert is the be all and end all of that piece, because it’s not … you’ll (probably) be playing that piece for 40 years’. I say that this is the first public performance of that piece, so try to tell a story, listen, don’t be in a rush, don’t play too softly, don’t bang, enjoy and feel proud that you’ve come this far’. We remember that this time last year Kelly was playing Snowflake, Le Cou Cou, and The Simpsons. I ask Kelly how her Debussy sounds and Jean says that she has been playing it a little slower. We clap and Kelly takes a bow. I suggest that if people clap in between the two pieces, she should take a bow or at least acknowledge the applause. I also ask her not to look scared; Jean and Kelly laugh. I ask Kelly to sit with Jean and I dramatise ‘not what to do’, though my face is obscured. I ask Kelly to look at the audience so that they can see your face and your eyes. Kelly settles herself and begins to play the Debussy. While not wonderful, it isn’t too untidy, but she does stop playing at one point. I say that even if she feels disappointed, she should try to look as though that was the best thing the audience had ever heard. I ask Kelly to smile with her eyes. Jean says that Kelly is the first to play. I suggest that they could stay for the second
concert to hear Adrian and Wendy play. I say that Bryn is playing Fantaisie-Impromptu in the first concert, fingers crossed. I tell Kelly that I like the transparency of her playing in the Debussy. I go on to say that I really like the crossing hands parts, though sometimes the righthand fifth finger doesn’t ‘activate’ in transitory chord passage, perhaps due to the hand not refreshing itself. We work on this section, and I ask Kelly to make sure that her arm and hand don’t start ‘losing energy’. She plays again and I say that I was better, though there were a few ‘holes’. I ask Kelly to get her back, elbow and upper arm more involved in the playing; it really does make a difference! I say, ‘When you stop moving with the piece, it will stop working’ and Kelly nods. I say that as the pieces get harder it becomes almost impossible to play them without ‘moving’. Jean says that she noticed that Kelly has a habit of leaning backwards. I sit down and demonstrate two versions of the beginning of Adrian’s concerto (tutti) and I say that the piece comes alive when I ‘get into it’. I say that I love the way that Kelly plays the transition into the middle section. I say, ‘I think it’s good, I think there might be a few rough notes, but you are clearly playing the pieces really well. Be confident and smile … there will always be another opportunity … be happy’. I coach Kelly with using a touch of pedal for the final chords, in order to ‘open up the sound’. Jean asks if Kelly can come early to warm up.
Appendix 4: Examples of Questions from the Initial Interview

Examples of the questions posed to the research participants at the initial interview are presented below:

1. Can you tell me how old you were when you started learning the piano?
2. Do you remember why you started learning the piano?
3. What aspects about piano playing do you enjoy most?
4. What do you enjoy least about piano playing?
5. Why are you learning to play the piano?
6. How do you imagine that playing the piano might help you in the future?
7. Has there ever been a time when you really wanted to quit your piano lessons? Why do you think this was? How did you feel at the time?
8. Has there ever been a time in your lesson or during practice when you felt really happy and that time seemed to go by very quickly without you really noticing? Why do you think that was so?
9. When you imagine an excellent piano player, how do you think they might look and how might they sound?
10. Do you think that people need to be talented in order to be good at the piano?
11. Do you think you could become a good player? How do you think this might happen?
Appendix 5: Examples of Questions from the Second Interview

Examples of the questions posed to the research participants at the second interview are presented below:

1. How do you feel when you are playing the piano?
2. Tell me how your body feels when you play the piano
3. Do you like to watch a recording of yourself, where you can hear and see your playing? What is it like watching yourself?
4. Do you ever imagine in your mind’s eye, like watching a movie, what you might look like and sound like when playing the piano?
5. What do you like about playing the piano? What is it that keeps you going with your piano study when there are lots of other hobbies that you could choose from?
6. How do you feel when playing the improvisation activities? Are they fun? Do you feel scared that you won’t think of any good ideas?
7. Can you describe what you like best about your lessons?
8. Do you do any sport or dancing? If so, what kind?
9. What sort of instrument do you play at home? Do you like it? If yes, what do you like about it? If no, in what ways do you think it could be better?
10. What does expression mean to you?
11. Do you find the expressive gestures that we use useful?
Appendix 6: Examples of Questions for the Parents of the Research Participants

Sample questions for the parents of the research participants included:

1. Why did your child start piano lessons?
2. What value do you see in your child learning to play the piano over the short and the long term?
3. Within music, what does the word *talent* mean to you? What do the words *musical expression*, suggest to you?
4. Does your child practise willingly? How much do they practise and when?
5. Do you help your child organise their practice? If yes, what aspects do you encourage them to focus on?
6. How would you describe your child’s personality and temperament?
7. What ways do you think your child learns best?
8. What are their strengths? What challenges do you perceive?
9. How do you view the relationship between your child and the teacher?
10. How do you view the relationship between the teacher and yourself?
11. How do you view the relationship between you and your child?
12. Do you feel that your child’s skills have improved in recent times? In what ways?
13. What kind of instrument do you have in the family home? Do you think that it suits your child’s needs at the stage of their musical development?
Appendix 7: Solo Performances of the Research Participants

A7.1 Final Four Participants

The recordings presented below represent the solo performances of each research participant. In each instance, the first recording was taken at the time when the research participants were identified as potential case studies (June 2013) and the second was taken during the final stage of data collection (November 2014).

A7.1.1 Case Study 1: Jade

https://vimeo.com/196420777/7e3e194981
https://vimeo.com/196420777/7e3e194981

A7.1.2 Case Study 2: Finn

https://vimeo.com/196783940/37ca6ba7e6
https://vimeo.com/196779922/3e98acdb3b

A7.1.3 Case Study 3: Adrian

https://vimeo.com/195664559/a153a98cbd
https://vimeo.com/195650555/ee9c4a8cdf

A7.1.4 Case Study 4: Kelly

https://vimeo.com/196785714/cd3c943148
https://vimeo.com/196208651/a72fae436d

A7.2 Other Participants

The following participants were not included in the final case analysis, but their performances are included here for reference.

A7.2.1 Andrew

https://vimeo.com/197722476/81d1fed6ab
https://vimeo.com/196805213/78dbe843b0
A7.2.2 Wendy

https://vimeo.com/197668750/6f160e4a55

https://vimeo.com/196815347/4e27966cff
Dear Dr Carey,

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the provisional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project “Examining the pedagogical concepts and environmental factors of the one-to-one studio that might best foster the development of musicality, creativity and expressive skills in pre-tertiary pianists.” (GU Ref No: QCM/12/13/HREC).

The additional information was considered by Chair.

This is to confirm that this response has addressed the comments and concerns of the HREC.

Consequently, you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

Dr Kristie Westerlaken

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Researchers are reminded that the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research provides guidance to researchers in areas such as conflict of interest, authorship, storage of data, & the training of research students.

You can find further information, resources and a link to the University’s Code by visiting

http://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Code%20for%20the%20Responsible%20Conduct%20of%20Research.pdf

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Appendix 9: Information Package and Consent Forms for Research Participants

Information Package for Children and their Parents

*Examining the pedagogical concepts and environmental factors of the one-to-one studio that might best foster the development of musicality, creativity and expressive skills in pre-tertiary pianists.*

Who is conducting the research?
Student Researcher: Mark Griffiths
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Contact phone: (07) 3735 6254

Why is the research being conducted?
This study will form the basis of my PhD research. The children who participate in the study will be drawn from those enrolled in the Young Beginner Piano / Intermediate Piano programs at Young Conservatorium Griffith University and are students currently taught by the student researcher, Mark Griffiths. The participants selected for the research have been identified as being of late elementary / early intermediate level and are of varying age, gender and levels of demonstrable commitment. The study will contribute directly to the field of piano pedagogy by offering alternative strategies for fostering musicality, creativity and expression in the one-to-one studio, and could contribute to an increased understanding the factors involved in the long-term engagement of young pianists at a critical stage of their musical development.

The expected benefits of the research
In addition to the benefits listed above, this research aims to encourage the development of each child's musical expressivity, learning autonomy and critical thinking skills, whilst allowing the student researcher, Mark Griffiths, to document a reflective process of professional development within the one-to-one studio context.

What will you be asked to do?
Children and their Parents will attend their usual weekly 30-minute, 45-minute or 60-minute piano lesson with the student researcher, Mark Griffiths, at Young Conservatorium Griffith University. All lessons will be recorded audio-visualy over a period of one year (approximately 30 lessons). For students who have 30-minute weekly lessons, the recordings will be approximately 15 hours long. For students who have 45-minute weekly lessons, the recordings will be approximately 22.5 hours long. For students who have 60-minute weekly lessons, the recordings will be approximately 30 hours long.

Children and their Parents who attend the lesson will be interviewed periodically - once at the commencement of the study, again at six months, and then again at twelve months when the study concludes. The interviews will be approximately 30 minutes in length for students and 30 minutes in length for their parents. Therefore, the total time commitment for interviews will be 1.5 hours for students and 1.5 hours for their parents. Children and their parents will be interviewed separately, but within view and earshot of each other. All interviews will be conducted on site at Griffith University Queensland Conservatorium. All interviews will be recorded using audio-visual mechanisms. The interviewer will be the student researcher, Mark Griffiths. A summary of the interview procedure will be explained to all participants before the interview commences. Debriefing for all participants will take place following the completion of interviews and upon completion of the entire study.

Questions from the semi-structured interviews are of an inquiring yet unobtrusive nature. Sample questions for children may include: “What aspects about piano playing do you enjoy most?” and “How do you imagine that playing the piano might help you in the future?” and “When you imagine an excellent piano player, how do you think they might look and how might they sound?” and “Do you think you could become an excellent player? How do you think this might happen?”
Sample questions for parents may include: “How did your child come to start piano lessons?” and “What value do you see in your child learning to play the piano over the short and the long term?” and “How would you describe your child’s personality / temperament?” and “How do you view the relationship between your child and his / her teacher?”

As part of the study, you will be asked to provide the student researcher, Mark Griffiths, open access to the original scores of the music studied by the students during the research project, from which copies will be made and utilised as part of the data collection. The original copies of the music scores will be returned to you after data has been collected and copies have been made.

Risks to Parents and Children
All participants may reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation, but because of their age, child participants may not understand this right or feel uncomfortable in asserting it. Therefore, parents may exercise this right on behalf of their child at any time. Please be assured that participation in this study poses no greater risk than would normally be posed during the course of usual lessons and conversations. The likelihood of risk is therefore very low and Young Conservatorium Griffith University provides a risk management strategy as evidence of its commitment to minimise any perceived risks to its clients and staff.

Your confidentiality
In accordance with the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 and the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 this research will protect the information gathered for the purposes of analysis. While initial data will be collected in an identified form to allow matching between data sources, data will be de-identified during the writing up process to protect the anonymity of research participants. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or reporting, nor will anything that could identify them indirectly.

Upon completion of each interview, the interview participants will be invited to check the accuracy of their statements. Participants will be invited to recheck their statements at the reporting stage and prior to publication. To ensure your confidentiality, all data, including video images, interview transcripts and archival material collected during the study will be securely stored in a locked cabinet located within the Research Centre. Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University. While audio and audio-visual recordings are to be erased after transcription in accordance with Griffith University policy, there are minimum periods for the retention of research data. According to retention requirements outlined in the Annexure to the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, the public dissemination of research findings in a refereed publication requires that that research data be retained for a minimum of five years after the end of the year of publication of the last refereed publication that is based on the research data. According to retention requirements outlined in the Annexure to the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, the dissemination of research findings in other forms of public release to an audience outside Griffith University requires that research data be retained for a minimum of five years after the end of the year that research findings are released.

After transcription and prior to erasing audio and audio-visual recordings, the student researcher, Mark Griffiths will offer the research participants the opportunity to retain copies of the recordings for their own personal use.

Privacy Statement – Nondisclosure
“The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 4375.”

Your participation is voluntary
You and your child can help in this study by consenting to having lessons and interviews recorded using a digital video camera. The children will be asked to provide consent via digital recording. The children’s rights will be explained to them and to their parents. You and your child’s participation in this study are entirely voluntary and all responses will be treated with the strictest confidence. You or your child may withdraw your consent at any time during the study, at which time your recordings and
or transcripts will be destroyed. If you or your child, decide to withdraw from the study or decide not to take part, you and your child can be assured that this will in no way impact upon your existing relationship or the level of care that you receive from Mark Griffiths or Young Conservatorium Griffith University.

Why is digital recording necessary?
Digital recording is a very important part of this research. It is not possible for me to directly observe all of the events and behaviours that occur during the lessons and interviews, as I am myself involved in the research process. Digital recording allows me to keep a record of the lessons and interviews for later observation and analysis, and is necessary for checking of accuracy and to fulfil purposes of validity. Digital recording will allow me to demonstrate to the university that I have explained the rights of the children and their parents to them, obtained their consent to participate, and to confirm that they are participating willingly and are not under any duress. Access to the digital recordings will be reserved for individual research participants and members of the research team. No third party, including other research participants will have access to your recordings. Digital recordings of your lessons and interviews will be destroyed after transcription and analysis has occurred.

Feedback to you
The overall findings and results of the research will be made available to you and your child as they become available. Participants will not be identified in the reporting process.

Questions / Further information
If you or your child have questions or require further information, please contact a member of the research team. Contact details can be found on page one of this information package.
The ethical conduct of this research Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 54375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

PLEASE RETAIN THIS DOCUMENT FOR YOUR RECORDS
Examining the pedagogical concepts and environmental factors of the one-to-one studio that might best foster the development of musicality, creativity and expressive skills in pre-tertiary pianists.

Research Team

Student Researcher: Mark Griffiths
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Contact phone: (07) 3735 6254

Parent’s Name
Signature

Consent Form for Parents

By signing below, my child and I confirm that we have read and understood the information package and in particular, have noted that:

☐ I understand and agree to audio-visual recordings being made of my child’s weekly 30-minute, 45-minute or 60-minute piano lessons at Young Conservatorium: Griffith University over a one-year period (approximately 30 lessons). For students who have 30-minute weekly lessons, the recordings will be approximately 15 hours long. For students who have 45-minute weekly lessons, the recordings will be approximately 22.5 hours long. For students who have 60-minute weekly lessons, the recordings will be approximately 30 hours long.

☐ I understand and agree that the contents of the audio-visual recordings may be used in whole or part by the student researcher, Mark Griffiths, for the purposes of research dissemination, for example, extracts being used for illustration purposes during a conference presentation.

☐ I understand and agree that my child and I will be interviewed periodically – once at the commencement of the study, again at six months and then again at twelve months when the study concludes. I understand that the interviews will be approximately 30-minutes duration for the students and approximately 30-minutes duration for parents. I understand that as there will be three separate interviews – one at the beginning, one at the middle and one at the concluding stages of the study, the total time commitment for interviews will be approximately 1.5 hours for my child and 1.5 hours for myself. I understand and agree that my child and I will be interviewed separately, but within view and earshot of each other. I understand and agree that all interviews will be conducted on site at Griffith University Queensland Conservatorium and recorded using audio-visual mechanisms. I understand that the interviews will be conducted by the student researcher, Mark Griffiths.

☐ I understand and agree that as part of the study, I will be asked to provide the student researcher, Mark Griffiths, open access to the original scores of the music studied by my child during the research project, from which copies will be made and utilised as part of the data collection. I further understand that the original copies of the music scores will be returned to us after data has been collected and copies have been made.

☐ I have had any questions answered to our satisfaction.

☐ I understand the risks involved;

☐ I understand that there will be no direct benefit to my child nor I from our participation in this research;

☐ I understand that our participation in this research is entirely voluntary;

☐ I understand that if we have any additional questions, we can contact the research team;

☐ I understand that we are free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty, and that this will have no way impact upon our existing relationship or the level of care that we receive from Mark Griffiths or Young Conservatorium Griffith University;

☐ I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 4375 (or research.ethics@griffith.edu.au) if we have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and

☐ My child and I agree to participate in the research project.
**Examining the pedagogical concepts and environmental factors of the one-to-one studio that might best foster the development of musicality, creativity and expressive skills in pre-tertiary pianists.**

**Research Team**

- **Student Researcher:** Mark Griffiths  
  Queensland Conservatorium  
  Griffith University  
  Contact email: Mark.Griffiths@griffith.edu.au  
  Contact phone: 0411 836 400

- **Principal Supervisor:** Dr Gemma Carey  
  Queensland Conservatorium  
  Griffith University  
  Contact email: G.Carey@griffith.edu.au  
  Contact phone: (07) 3735 6339

- **Principal Supervisor:** Dr Stephen Emmerson  
  Queensland Conservatorium  
  Griffith University  
  Contact email: S.Emmerson@griffith.edu.au  
  Contact phone: (07) 3735 6254

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**Consent Form for Children**

By signing below, I confirm that:

- I understand and will allow my teacher Mark Griffiths to make audio-visual recordings (movies) of my weekly piano lessons at Young Conservatorium Griffith University over a one-year period (approximately 30 lessons);

- I understand and will allow my teacher Mark Griffiths to show parts of my piano lesson movies to other people to help them learn more about teaching the piano;

- I understand and will agree to my teacher Mark Griffiths sometimes asking me questions about learning the piano, but not for a long time, usually about the same length as my usual piano lesson. I understand and agree to these question and answer sessions being recorded like a movie with my Mum or Dad nearby, but it will be a special talk between Mark Griffiths and me – Mum or Dad will just listen;

- I understand and will agree to giving my music scores to my teacher Mark Griffiths to make copies of to help him teach other people about learning the piano, but I know that these will be given back to me soon after;

- I can ask my teacher Mark Griffiths or my Mum or Dad any questions if I’m not sure of something;

- I understand the whole process won’t be scary and each week will be just like a normal lesson with my teacher Mark Griffiths;

- I understand that I won’t get any presents from my teacher Mark Griffiths for taking part, it’s just for fun and to help other people learn more about piano lessons;

- I understand that I don’t have to say yes to being part of this and that I can stop at any time and not be in trouble with anyone in any way;

- I understand that I can ask my Mum or Dad to contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 4375 (or research.ethics@griffith.edu.au) on my behalf if I am not happy about anything or if I feel that something doesn’t feel ok; and

- I agree to participate in the research project.

Signature ______________________________________

Date ______________________________________