

December 2016 - December at the piano-studio, Shakespeare, inspiration from your environment, how to play a lead sheet, and exam tips



## **Piano Matters by [www.the-piano-studio.com](http://www.the-piano-studio.com)**



### **December at the-piano-studio.com**

Since the holidays fell on the weekend this year, it feels like we didn't have much time off at the studio. Most other places shut down for a week or two, but we dove right back into teaching.

Since exams are fast approaching, I have been pondering exam preparation. It is a fine balancing act to prepare students for exams and recitals. How far ahead of time do you give your students their music? You don't want to have them practicing their songs for so long that they get bored of it. You want them to have just enough time to learn the exam

pieces fully though.

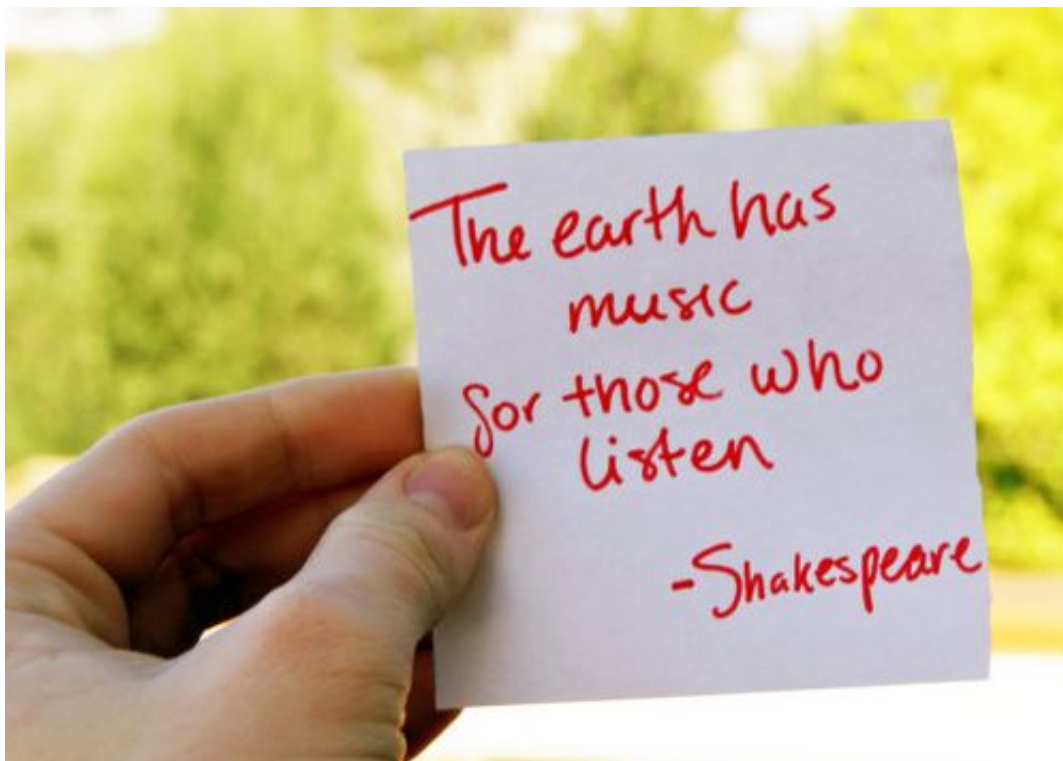
To top off the balancing act, every student is different! You have to take into account how quickly they learn their pieces, how much realistic practicing time they have, and how well they take your instruction.

Royal Conservatory of Music asks that you register for an exam three to four months ahead of the actual examination date. That means that as a teacher (and student!) you sometimes have to take a leap of faith that the progress will be enough to be prepared by the examination date.

I find the winter session hardest to prepare--practical exams are at the end of January and you have to kind of cross your fingers that practice will keep continuing through the holidays! I am all for having a break (but not if you have an exam in January) ha ha!

Taking a break IS helpful to unwind and de-stress though. It is so important to pursue other interests outside of piano teaching/piano practicing. Having a life can only help your music because it gives you something to say!

I've noticed that for most of my students, the break has been a good thing. Sometimes, good interpretations need to 'stew' a little while before a great performance comes out. Having a little break allows them to look at their music with 'new eyes'. And that is often a surprising, and sometimes wonderful, thing!



Even though it's cold outside, I wouldn't trade the snow for anything. I enjoy living in an area which sees four distinct seasons. (Although natives would argue that there are only two seasons: snow and NO snow!!!)

I've been reading about different composers that have their compositions featured in the Celebration Series by the RCM. Many of them take their inspiration from the outdoors and their environment.

I hesitate to even *hint* at a New Year's resolution, but I have been promising myself to stop complaining about the snow and use it as inspiration for playing and for composing. Sometimes, the cold is good incentive to go inside near the fireplace, with a warm mug of hot chocolate, and write music, or practice piano!!

I read an article recently about how musicians are an interesting mix of introvert and extrovert. While musicians need to be extroverted when sharing their music, they also require introverted recharging time to think, ponder, and learn quietly.

I hope you had time off and the opportunity to enjoy some quiet time, rest, and recharge!

## Article: How to Play A Lead Sheet (Basic)

I love this image of what a lead sheet is (Thanks, Wikipedia)!! A lead sheet is basically a shorthand version of a popular song that usually contains lyrics, the melody line, and the harmony in the form of chord names.

One of the most popular articles at the-piano-studio.com website is "How to Play a Lead Sheet". This basic mini-lesson is what I use to teach popular tunes to teenagers and adults, in addition to their regular studies.

My piano background is mainly classical, which used to put me at a disadvantage whenever someone would ask me to play something. The subtext being: Play something recognizable. While that is enough to make

any classical player roll their eyes and teachers turn purple with apoplexy, playing from a lead sheet is a handy skill to have.

Contrary to popular belief, learning to play your own arrangements of songs from lead sheets IS a skill that can be learned.

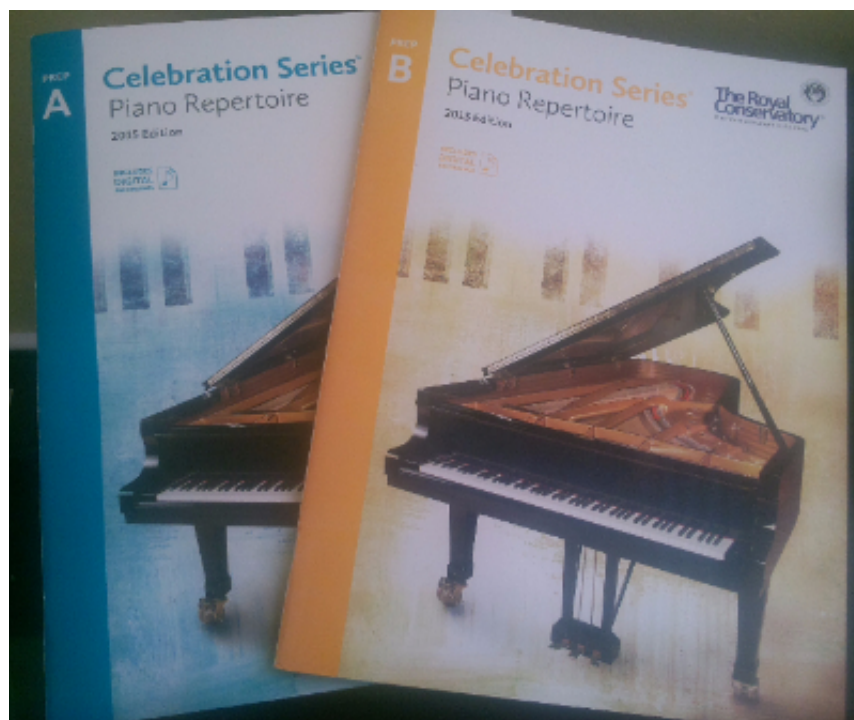
## Exam Tips

I guess I *really* have exams on the brain, but whether you are a student, parent, or teacher, it is always handy to have a few extra tips for navigating the exam process.



For those that are new to the examinations, I will often send an e-mail containing information like the marking scheme, the exam requirements for the student's specific level, what to expect, and how to register.

There's even a little mini-checklist that I have on the-piano-studio.com website that covers reminders and things like: cutting your nails, marking your exam pieces with a sticky note or bookmark for the Examiner to find easily, listening carefully to what the Examiner asks for when doing the technical requirements, etc. A handy resource to have!



**Coming soon to the-piano-studio.com**

So maybe I was a little too ambitious in my plan to record favourite RCM

exam pieces. I have a habit of diving in with good intentions and then life takes over!! However, the Preparatory page is *almost* done, and boy, was it a lot of work! I still plan to offer the other levels, but it may be slower than I'd hoped. My only deadline is getting to the necessary levels before my students take their exams!

The first page has recordings from Preparatory A and Preparatory B books and includes mini composer biographies, a short study guide, an informal list of things that will be learned from each song, and then a recording of the piece at performance speed. I am hoping that it will be a useful resource for parents, teachers, and students.



See you in the New Year!

**Elena** Fortin


elena@the-piano-studio.com December 2016

**the-piano-studio**

P.O. Box 320, Plantagenet, ON K0B 1L0

1.613.686.2197

www.the-piano-studio.com

 SHARE

 TWEET

 FORWARD

lite