

## Free Choice Pieces

### Guide to selecting pieces and studies of a suitable standard

#### Piano

The expected technical difficulty of pieces for Free Choice Repertoire will align to the general requirements of the technical exercises for each grade. Teachers wishing to select suitable Free Choice pieces should therefore look at our technical exercises for each instrument at each grade to establish whether pieces reflect the range of technical demands demonstrated by the exercises. Pieces which are significantly easier (technically) than the technical exercises would not be suitable.

The scale requirements for each grade demonstrate the type of 'keys' that would be suitable per grade. Pieces which do not cover keys of similar complexity would be unlikely to be suitable Free Choice Pieces.

The range of rhythms suitable for each grade can be judged by viewing the 'Reading Skills' on the MTB Exams syllabuses (additional resources pages). Pieces or studies should demonstrate a rhythmic complexity equivalent to the Reading skills for that grade. The rhythms do not necessarily have to be the same but should demonstrate equivalent complexity.

An outline of the appropriate technical and expressive expectations at each grade are listed below. Pieces would not be expected to include all of these but should include a selection of them. If you are unsure whether your free choice pieces or studies meet our criteria, we recommend that you use our optional Approval Service. This service requires you to provide an image of the music along with the following information: instrument, grade, title, composer and the book in which it is published, if applicable, along with a short description of why you believe it meets the required standard. We are currently offering this service for free.

#### **Entry Level - Pre Grades**

##### Technical expectations

- Pre Grade Introductory –Understanding of Semibreves, minims, crotchets and tied notes, Ability to play simple repertoire with both hands together in one position.
- Pre Grade Higher –Ability to play with both hands together and with some minimal position changes.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above and be very basic and short in length. (often approx. 8-16 bars). At Pre Grade Introductory the music will have very simple hands together ie: Melody in one hand, single notes or 2 note chords in the other and no change of position but by Pre Grade Higher, there will be 3 note chords and some limited independent working of hands and simple position changes.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is very basic expectation of expression at this level. Avoidance of awkwardness musically is sufficient. Awkwardness may include inappropriate sudden forceful, loud or sudden uncertain quieter/hesitant playing. The use of dynamic contrast will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

### **Level 1 – Grades 1-3**

- Grade 1 – Independence of hands is limited to chord or single note plus a melody. There is very little simultaneous movement and it is in parallel or contrary motion if at all.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 2 – There is some element of hands moving independently of each other. Greater expectation of gradation of tone.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values and dotted notes at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 3 – More complex coordination expectations. Hands are moving independently. Expectation of ability to bring out a single part  
Comfortably with rhythmic patterns utilising compound time signatures at a variety of tempi.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be basic and relatively short in length (often approx. 16-32 bars). Players will be expected to display a clear touch and clear articulation including attention to some subtlety of articulation including staccato, tenuto and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently at an appropriate tempo with a developing sense of shape and line. Players should also display a good basic level of dynamic range.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is basic expectation of expression at this level. Performances should avoid awkwardness musically such as inappropriate emphasis of notes which distorts the phrasing or line. The use of some basic dynamic contrast is expected at this level such as piano/forte. More detailed dynamic contrast such as crescendo and diminuendo etc. is appropriate by grade 3 and will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Similarly, performances should display a developing awareness of articulation and phrasing at this level including such elements as correct basic legato/detached notes in appropriate places, Although performances should show an increasing awareness of articulation moving from grades 1-3 such as the use of staccato, tenuto and accents, more detailed use of these will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

#### Level 2 – Grades 4-5

- Grade 4– Greater dexterity required in scalar passages, possibility of 2 parts in one hand. Ornaments, some use of pedalling, more complex chords.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising dotted quaver rhythms at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 5– Greater use of pedalling and multiple parts/independence of hands.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising a variety of semi-quaver patterns at a variety of tempi

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be straightforward and of moderate length (often approx. 32-64 bars). Players will be expected to display a strong, clear touch at all dynamics and clear articulation including paying full attention to the subtlety of articulation including staccato, tenuto and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently and at an appropriate tempo with an established sense of shape and line. Players should also display a good dynamic range and clarity of articulation.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a developing degree of expression at this level. Performances should include use of

straightforward dynamic contrast including piano or pianissimo/forte or fortissimo/crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando etc. More detailed dynamic contrast such as staccato accents/semi staccato and a detailed understanding of phrasing etc. will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Similarly, performances should display correct articulation and basic understanding of phrasing at this level.

### Level 3 – Grades 6-8

- Grade 6 – Large leaps in both hands. Multiple parts. Comfortable with a developing high degree of independence of hands/counterpoint. Display a developed facility in passagework and pedalling

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including swung rhythms at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 7– Keys of up to 6 sharps or flats. Large leaps in both hands. Multiple parts. High degree of independence of hands/counterpoint. Some demanding passagework/dexterity/control displayed.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including syncopation, ties and triplets at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 8 – Expectation of knowledge of all keys/modes. Large leaps in both hands. Multiple parts. High degree of independence of hands/counterpoint. Demanding passagework/dexterity/control required Comfortable with complex rhythmic patterns including changing time signatures, irregular time signatures, irregular subdivisions of beats (e.g. quintuplets) at a variety of tempi.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be complex and full length concert items often several pages in length (including movements from Sonatas). Players will be expected to display a strong, clear, focused, refined and nuanced touch at all dynamics and in all ranges with a variety of tone colours as appropriate to the demands of the music (solemn, fanfare, majestic, jazzy, lyrical etc) and clear articulation including paying detailed attention to the subtlety of complex articulation including staccato, tenuto and a variety of accents etc. They should show the ability to play fluently and at an appropriate tempo with a detailed sense of shape and line.

Players should also display a high level dynamic range and clarity of articulation.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a wide range of expression at this level. Performances should include use of a full range of dynamic contrast from pianissimo to fortissimo and utilising crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando to enhance the performance and create contrast and interest as appropriate etc. There is an expectation of an understanding of the complex stylistic demands of music such as baroque/jazz etc. Correct/appropriate articulation and phrasing is expected at this level.