
CONCERTOS FOR INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL PIANO STUDENTS

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Pre-College level piano students—unlike their orchestral instrumentalist peers—can too often lead an almost isolated musical existence, both in the practice room and when performing. While the musical and social benefits of playing duets, either student/student or student/teacher are well known and documented, there also exists a vast array of exciting and expressive concerto repertoire for the Intermediate Level piano student, in all manner of styles, beyond the popular entry-level concerto that is Haydn's Concerto in D major. This lecture-recital proposes to explore the Concerto repertoire suitable for pre-Diploma level students as well as related Duo Piano repertoire that will be of interest to the studio music teacher with students in the Grade 4-8 range. Opportunities to present such concerto repertoire beyond the music studio, in either a two piano format, with string quartet, or with orchestra will also be discussed.

We pianists are surely blessed with both the breadth and sheer depth of solo repertoire available to us. It would be impossible to play through, let alone study and perform, all the keyboard music that has ever been published in a single lifetime. In this respect, we are the envy of instrumentalists, some of whom are lucky if they can count a handful of significant works by major composers amongst their available core repertoire.

Similarly, exploring the piano concerto repertoire is daunting. Despite the wealth of material, my teacher Mack Jost in his *Practice, Performance and Interpretation*¹ lamented that in any typical concert season in London and the surrounding regions, one could hear up to thirty performances of the Grieg *Concerto* or Rachmaninoff's *No 2* and forty of the Tchaikovsky *Bb minor*. That book was written some thirty years ago, but I suspect that little has changed. Jost himself was a keen explorer of little-known repertoire and championed the too-little played Arthur Bliss *Concerto* amongst other infrequently heard works. Luckily today, organisations such as *Hyperion* through their excellent recordings are starting to address the imbalance that we hear in live concert. They are currently up to number 66 in their series of Romantic Piano Concerto CDs—several of which feature our Patron, Piers Lane,² as well as Ian Munro, who is also performing at this conference. The 66 CDs cover over 150 little-known, long-forgotten or previously unrecorded concertos from the Romantic era.

For me, one of the most exciting features of any conference such as this is the exposure to the hitherto unknown repertoire. To this end, I very much enjoy the trade stalls, where you can fossick through new publications and discover new pieces to perform or teach. Of course nowadays, we have the IMSLP as a useful resource as well. But I am of

¹ Jost, M. *Practice, Interpretation, Performance* (Jenkin, Buxton, West Melbourne, 1984. 1)

² Including Volume 1, which includes Moszkowski's Concerto in E major, a work that Piers' teacher, the wonderful Nancy Weir, had previously championed.

a generation that still likes to read broadsheet newspapers and prefers to flick through actual music on the shelf, rather than online.

For today's topic, an excellent resource for teachers is Maurice Hinson's *Music for Piano and Orchestra – An Annotated Guide*, in the enlarged edition from 1993, published by Indiana University Press. Most works are discussed briefly and are rated according to difficulty. Publishers are also given. Chapter 3 has an index of composers who have written Intermediate to Moderately Difficult Concertos though it doesn't mention many of the more recently composed concertos that I will discuss today.

Today, I hope to touch on a few concertos that may prove interesting to explore for the teachers amongst you. It will be impossible to discuss every possible concerto that might be suitable for teenage students who are not yet quite ready for Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky, but there are 'bucket-loads' of concertos, both old and new, that are worth exploring.

Personally, I find that teaching new repertoire provides a constant stimulus to my teaching. Teaching new works often requires finding new and inventive solutions to musical and technical issues that I think equally help inform our teaching of core repertoire. My former teacher Edie Myers, who was an inveterate purchaser of every new publication she could get her hands on, was wont to say that there are some teachers who have had thirty years' teaching experience and there are others who have had one year's teaching experience thirty times over.

Of course, it has to be admitted that there are limited opportunities to perform concertos. Thirty years ago, the ABC Young Performer of the Year, or the Instrumental and Vocal Competition as it was known, used to provide concerto opportunities for roughly 24 or 25 young musicians to play with the various State orchestras. About ten years ago this number was reduced to just twelve, and as of two years ago, only three aspiring young musicians get to play with a professional orchestra in what is now the National Grand Final. No doubt this was a reluctant decision on the part of Symphony Australia, possibly driven by economics.

And yet there remain other opportunities. There are local orchestras who run competitions to select concerto soloists to perform with them. In Melbourne, we have concerto competitions run by the Preston Symphony Orchestra and the Frankston Symphony Orchestra, both of whom run competitions for all instruments to perform with their respective orchestras. There is also the Zelman Symphony Orchestra, in a competition that is administered as part of the Boroondara Eisteddfod, which auditions large numbers of pianists to perform in a public concert at Hawthorn Town Hall. I'm sure

that similar ventures run in other states too. If you read Anna Goldsworthy's book *Piano Lessons*³ her wonderful teacher and mentor Eleanora Sivan is quoted as saying that she doesn't think it worthwhile performing with amateur orchestras, but that's not a viewpoint to which I subscribe. For me, all concerto performances are occasions that are to be treasured, and even if students only get one or two chances to perform with orchestra, no matter what the level, they will remain occasions that will stay fondly in their memories throughout their lives. The Lev Vlassenko Competition in Queensland provides four young pianists with the chance to perform with The Queensland Orchestra biennially.⁴ And nowadays there are many private schools that provide concerto opportunities at graduations, annual concerts at Hamer Hall, or even just a concerto night at school where seven or eight students might get to play selected movements. At the very least there are the *Music Minus One* recordings that can provide a simulated, yet nonetheless thrilling concerto experience for an eager student who is waiting impatiently for the Berlin Philharmonic to call and engage them.

The Argentinian-born pianist Daniel Barenboim wrote in his memoir *A Life in Music*⁵ that as a child, his father Enrique, who was also his only teacher,⁶ never asked him to practise scales or arpeggios. Instead, he worked through all of Mozart's piano concertos as these were seen as a far more musical means of developing scale and arpeggio technique. So if any of you have students who happen to recoil from practising scales—and I'm sure none of you do—try to entice them with a Mozart Concerto movement or two, or three.

Of course, one could easily assign any of Mozart's 27 keyboard concertos with almost all the middle movements approachable by pre-tertiary students. But I would just like to point out one or two that may be less familiar.

One of my favourite Mozart concertos for pre-diploma students and eminently suitable for students Grades 5-7 is the Concerto in C major, K 246, known as the 'Lutzow' Concerto from 1776. I find the third movement to be particularly engaging. Unsurprisingly, it is replete with scales and arpeggios. A 'Rondo', *Tempo di Menuetto*, it is composed with typical Mozartean facility and felicity and would be suitable for a student capable of playing for example, the first movement of Mozart's first keyboard Sonata, K 279, also in C major.

³ This book had a dramatic reading/performance at the previous APPC Conference in Toowoomba, July 2013

⁴ At the turn of the century, Kawai also used to sponsor and administer an Australasia-wide Concerto Competition that provided young representatives from each state and from New Zealand the opportunity to perform with one of the state Youth Orchestras. On one occasion, 1999, this was run in conjunction with the APPC Conference that was being held in Perth at the time.

⁵ Barenboim, D. *Ma Vida en la Música* (Editorial El Ateneo, Buenos Aires, 2002) p. 18

⁶ Apart from a brief initial period of studies with his mother.

Another favourite is Mozart's first attempt at an original full-scale keyboard concerto, the Concerto in D major K 175 from 1773. Again, the finale is particularly engaging. A 2/2 *Allegro*, it is fast and lively, full of broken arpeggios, crossing-hands textures, *Alberti* basses and scale-passages that never sound as such. Hinson refers to this concerto as 'an unjustly neglected work that deserves much more performance...(one) that is a definite crowd-pleaser'.⁷

There are also the three very early concertos, K 107, written when Mozart was possibly only nine-years-old. They are in fact arrangements of three keyboard sonatas from Op 5 by JC Bach. In D major, G major and E flat major, Mozart evidently continued to perform them for many years after their composition. They are scored for two violins and cello, so could easily be performed in a piano quartet format. They sound equally well when the strings are expanded to a full string section, preferably with double bass added. Of the three, my personal favourite is the D major Concerto, and I've conducted this in the larger string orchestra version. The D major also includes 2 original cadenzas by Mozart⁸—cadenzas that were only discovered in 1950. The three concertos are all concise, lasting only 13, 8 and 9 minutes respectively, so the individual movements are very approachable.

Other particularly useful Mozart concertos, if useful is the right word, are the four concertos for which Mozart himself made arrangements for piano soloist and string quartet. These include No 11 in F major, K 413, No 12 in A major, K 414, No 13 in C major, K 415 and No 14 in E flat major, K 449. These chamber music versions are published by Bärenreiter in excellent editions, and if you can't afford an entire orchestra but happen to have a string quartet handy, then you can at least provide your students with an enriching chamber music experience, one that closely resembles the concerto equivalent.

Similarly the new Polish edition, PWM [Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne], publishes Chopin's two Concertos in versions for piano and string quartet.⁹ And although you'd need a fairly musically sophisticated student at Grade 8 or AMusA level, the slow movements in particular of each of these concertos are approachable by students who have already tackled a few of the *Nocturnes*.

⁷ Hinson. 283

⁸ For the opening two movements

⁹ In a letter to Tytus Woyciechowski (31 August, 1830) Chopin wrote, '...this week I am supposed to rehearse the whole [E minor] Concerto with a quartet, so that first this quartet and I could come to an understanding – familiarize ourselves a little, without which, Elsner says, a rehearsal with an orchestra would be no good'. In a further letter of 18 September 1830, mentioning his journey, he wrote that he was leaving right after the rehearsal of the Concerto in E minor with the quartet. Cited in PWM 10 316

Two excellent concertos that are little known in this country are the two *Piano Concertos in the Style of Young Chopin*, No 1 in C minor and No 2 in D minor, by the Polish composer Górecki. This is not Henryk Górecki who is famous for his hugely popular Third Symphony *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, but rather his son Mikołaj Górecki, born in 1971. Each concerto is in three movements and they very much live up to their name by suggesting the melodic lyricism, rhythmic pliability and Romantic harmonic language of the young Chopin. They are suitable for Grade 7-8 students and are beautifully crafted and intensely expressive. Both were commissioned by the Tokyo International Music Corporation and are available together with CD in one volume published by IMC Japan.¹⁰ My personal favourite is No 2. They also can be performed very practically with string quartet and one of my students has performed No 2 with the Primavera Quartet from Poland, when it was a required piece for the ASEAN International Chopin Competition held in Kuala Lumpur. It is difficult to establish an exact date of composition but the accompanying CD with Beata Bilińska and the Krakow State Philharmony dates from 1994 when the composer himself was only 24. They are ideal for any student wanting to play, yet not quite ready for, the original Chopin Concertos.

There is also an excellent and extensive collection of *Concertos for Children* published by the International Piano Schloß Association. Based in Japan, they publish 18 volumes of piano concertos with each volume containing three or four concertos (you can purchase most of the volumes with CDs). Many of the concertos are single movement concertos that last only six or seven minutes. Others are longer, in three movements and last up to 18 minutes in total. Many are by Japanese composers and are based on either Japanese or Western folk-tunes. There is also a representation of concertos, often commissioned for the series, by European composers.

No 1 from Volume 1 is a *Concertino* by Takekuni Hirayoshi. A single movement, it is in two sections, slow then fast. Interestingly the extended slow introduction alternates between 5/8 and 6/8. This is followed by a rollicking 3/4 waltz where the writing is in a consistent two part-texture, mostly with the hands playing the same melodic material one or two octaves apart. This type of texture is common amongst many of the concertos. There is also one short passage where the hands alternate playing *staccato* triads, but the stretch is never larger than a sixth.

The second concerto in the same volume is a single movement *Allegretto* based on the theme of 'London Bridge is Falling Down'. Yet another concerto is based upon the tune 'I've been workin' on the railroad'; the composer is Nobuyoshi Koshibe. Another attractive concerto is the *Penguin Concerto* by Akihiro Komori.

¹⁰They are also available in the International Piano Schloß Concerto Series - Volumes 3 and 6).

The younger Górecki was also commissioned to compose two three-movement concertos, one in the Baroque Style, the other in the Classical Style. Volume 4 features three different concertos specifically aimed at children who cannot stretch beyond a sixth. These publications are highly recommended.

Another fine concerto is British composer Alec Rowley's *Miniature Concerto*. Many teachers will be familiar with Rowley's *Miniature Preludes and Fugues* which commonly feature in early Grades of various syllabi. In three movements, and lasting 11 minutes, its outer movements are well suited to Grade 6 students. The rhythmically-driven energetic gigue-like finale is particularly exciting and just prior to concluding, quotes the opening *maestoso* of the first movement. The central *Menuetto* would well suit a typical Grade 4 student.

If you're looking for something with a local flavour, you could try Larry Sitsky's *Concerto for Young Pianist* commissioned by the Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition in Townsville, 2012. In three movements, each of approximately four minutes, it is approachable by a confident Grade 8 student, especially one who revels in a more contemporary musical language. It exists only in a version with piano accompaniment, but Larry has given permission for any 'creative arranger' to freely superimpose or substitute any combination of orchestral instruments for the second piano part.¹¹

Another is Ian Munro's *Children's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* from 2000. In three movements, the first movement is an *Allegro Energetico* in C major: it has some octave stretches but not many. The slow second movement is cleverly constructed. In G Dorian mode, it is a three-part Canon on a tune by Kabalevsky, the muted upper strings succeeding the opening piano by two beats, the lower strings two further beats later. It also features a rhythmically augmented version of the main theme heard in counterpoint against the main theme in normal rhythm. Not excessively challenging pianistically, it is very approachable by an average Grade 5 student. The rhythmically buoyant finale returns to C major and features *Three Moravian Tunes*. The textures are simple and the hands are often playing at the octave. Extremely well-conceived, this concerto is highly recommended.

Other concertos that will interest teachers and students include Dennis Alexander's *Concertante in G major*, published by Alfred. Its engaging finale an *Allegro giocoso* employs mixed meters that include 5/8, 7/8 and 8/8. There are also some exciting RH *glissandos* that traverse five octaves—always a treat for exuberant young players.

¹¹ The Sitsky Concerto was premiered by one of my students Joyce Zhou in Townsville in the original 2-piano format.

Also of interest is Matthew Edwards' three movement *Concerto for Young Pianists*, published by Hal Leonard. Much of the writing involves the two hands playing an octave apart, either simultaneously or alternating. Suitable for Grade 5 and 6 students.

Other favoured concertos include many of which will be already familiar to you all. Bach's F minor Concerto, and Haydn's Concertos in C major and D major as well as the various Haydn *Concertini*—all of which can be performed with string trio or string quartet. The *Concertini* in particular, can be played by students who can handle the easier Clementi *Sonatinas* and are suitable for Grade 3 and 4 students. Then there is also Kabalevsky's *Youth Concerto No 3* and Shostakovich's *Second Piano Concerto* written for his son Maxim, of which the second movement is profoundly lyrical and particularly approachable by a musically sensitive Grade 6 student.

Apart from concertos there is also a wealth of solo repertoire for which enterprising composers and arrangers have provided 'second piano' parts, creating a Piano Duo format. These can enliven the study of well-known solo exam repertoire.

An excellent example is the Willis publications of Clementi's *Sonatinas* Opus 36 Nos 1-6. The 'second piano' parts provided by Camil van Hulse are stylistically similar and of a commensurate difficulty to the untouched original parts. These are all suitable for students Grade 3–6. The second piano parts provide interest either through being imitative, or by providing contrapuntal interest, and so there is a real sense of duo playing, rather than having mere chordal accompaniments. At times there are touches of chromatic interest that bring a slightly new flavour to the originals. Above all, they encourage the Primo player to listen and interact with the *Secondo*, and thus form an excellent introductory pathway to the study of actual concertos.

Similarly, Alfred also publish two volumes of *Favourite Classics* edited by EL Lancaster and Kenon D Renfrow with second piano parts. All the works contained therein are well-known, found in all syllabi and are staples of the teaching repertoire. Volume One includes JS Bach's *Minuets* in G major and G minor, CPE Bach's *Solfeggietto*, Burgmüller's *Ballade* in C minor, Schumann's *The Wild Rider*, Kabalevsky's *Clowns* and *Toccatina* and much more. Volume Two includes Beethoven's *Sonatina* in F major, Kuhlau's popular *Sonatina* in C major, Opus 55 No 1, Grieg's *Puck*, Debussy's *Le Petit Nègre*, Satie's *First Gymnopédie* and many many more that will be familiar to all teachers of students Grades 2-6. Here, unlike the Clementi *Sonatina* volumes, the second piano part tends to be more simplistic and very much accompanimental, but that does not diminish their value in providing value-added interest to repertoire staples.

Hal Leonard also publish an excellent edition of the popular *Scenas Infantis (Five Memories of Childhood)* by the Brazilian composer, Octávio Pinto. These pieces are often found in Grade 5 and 6 syllabi and the second piano parts are similar in style and standard to the untouched original parts.

Another useful, though somewhat idiosyncratic option, is Grieg's two piano arrangements of selected Mozart's keyboard Sonatas. In all, Grieg arranged four of them for two pianos: the popular Sonata (*Facile*) in C major, K 545, the Sonata in F major K 533/494, the Sonata in G major K 283, as well as the Fantasy and Sonata in C minor K 475 and 457. These have been published by Schirmer, Peters and Kalmus. The original solo sonata part is left in tact, unchanged, (save for a dynamic and tempo indication or two). Grieg has however, added *secondo* parts that are decidedly more Romantic in conception. Textures in the *secondo* are much thicker than those we associate with Mozartean keyboard writing, and they almost seem as if they could be orchestral reductions. Filled-in octaves abound, and stretches of tenths or rolled elevenths are frequent. Grieg also provides added contrapuntal interest. Of course these works are not for those who prefer their music grounded in Urtext, or to be performed on original instruments, but if you are happy to listen to and explore works such as Bach's *D minor Chaconne* in the Brahms or Busoni adaptations, or the Schubert/Liszt song transcriptions, then these works may well prove delightful. Of note, the first ever complete recording of these works was by Australian pianists Daniel Herscovitch, a frequent presenter at APPC conferences, and Julie Adam.¹²

Another beneficial means of developing a sure sense of ensemble and rhythm with students is provided by Elissa Milne in her excellent publications for Hal Leonard: the popular *Getting to Preliminary, Getting to Grade One* etc series. Not only do they have up to 25 well-chosen and well-edited pieces, appropriately graded, they contain excellent tips on Sight Reading, Aural Tests and General Knowledge. Of interest to us however, are the accompaniment patterns that Elissa provides for the scales in each Grade, so that teachers can accompany their students while they navigate their scales. This encourages a sure sense of rhythmic continuity, while developing an aural awareness of how scales can be developed texturally. Ideally played on a second piano, if needed, they can be played an octave or two below the student on the same piano. The patterns are always interesting and vary for each Grade. Patterns are normally provided for one major scale and one minor scale in each book, so teachers can avail themselves of this heaven-sent opportunity to develop their transposition skills when required for other keys, or if needed, they can buy the accompanying CD with all the accompanimental patterns provided in the required keys.

¹²ABC Classics 481 0853, 1995, re-issued 2014.

With such a wealth and variety of concerto repertoire available to pianists, even from the earliest levels, it would be a shame for teachers and students not to avail themselves of the exciting opportunities afforded therein to develop a sense of ensemble, surety of rhythm, unity of musical purpose, as well as the ability to interact musically and meaningfully with either peers or more advanced musicians.

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