

# Team of Pianists at Glenfern

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## Report on Spring Piano School 2012, Glenfern, East St Kilda September 25 to 28

### Junior Program - September 25 and 26

20 young piano students enrolled for the two day Junior Program in 2012. The students who attended ranged in age from 6 to 13 years, and came from the Melbourne metropolitan area, from South Australia and Western Australia. Sadly we had to turn away a number of students from outside Melbourne, who applied after all the places were filled!

Teaching staff for the Junior Program were Team of Pianists partners Darryl Coote, Max Cooke, and Robert Chamberlain, with guest teacher Yoon Sen Lee from Perth, WA. Interesting guest teachers are an important part of each year's program and Yoon Sen Lee brought a new perspective to this year's school. Yoon Sen came to Perth from Singapore in the 1990's, for undergraduate and postgraduate piano studies. Since settling in Perth, he has developed a highly successful teaching practice, largely amongst the Chinese speaking community there, as well as examining, conducting and performing on piano, fortepiano and as a vocalist. He has directed the *West Australian Piano Competition* for the past 12 years and his students have won numerous competitions overseas and in Australia (coincidentally the most recent 12 years and under winner of the National Finals of the Bernstein Piano Competition was one of his students). His piano students have also been admitted to top tier institutions overseas such as the New England Conservatory of Music and the Julliard School.

Tutors for the Junior Program were Monash University Honours Music Graduates Seul Lee and Daniel Liston, with superb administrative support for the whole program from Khei Sze Lew, a work experience student from the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.



The 20 Junior students were divided into three groups and enjoyed workshops by Yoon Sen Lee – *Fun and Effective Piano Practice*, by Max Cooke – *Playing Baroque Music on the Harpsichord*, and by Darryl Coote - *Playing Expressively How to make good sounds*. The students also had short individual lessons with tutors Daniel Liston and Seul Lee, as well as group lessons on their repertoire with Yoon Sen, Darryl and Robert. They all performed in a concert for family and friends on the afternoon of the

final day and were presented with their participation and, for some, scholarship certificates by Dr Julie Waters, Vice President of the Friends of the Team of Pianists.



Morning recess and lunch time were social occasions, where the students made new friends, renewed old friendship, rode bikes around the Glenfern driveway and played games on the lawns. To help some of the youngest ones with concentrating through full sessions, I took our youngest players on an impromptu historical tour of Glenfern, looking at the stables, the covered over water well, some old photos as well as the garden, as we tried to imagine what life would have been like in Glenfern 100 years ago!



## Senior Program - September 27 and 28

Teaching staff for the two day Senior Program were Max Cooke, Darryl Coote, Robert Chamberlain, Yoon Sen Lee (for a masterclass on Day 1) and special guest teacher Betty Vergara-Pink. Betty Vergara-Pink recently returned to Australia after many years as a professor of piano and piano pedagogy at the *Freiburg Musikhochschule* in Germany. Her previous teaching positions were at the *Queensland University of Technology* and in Japan and her performing interests cover orchestral solo and chamber music. Betty brought a vital teaching style and a valuable international perspective to the Senior Program as well as to the panel discussion – see below.



18 students enrolled for the Senior program, with two late withdrawals due to illness. Ages ranged from 11 to 18 years and students came from Melbourne, from country Victoria including Shepparton, Paynesville and Bairnsdale, from Adelaide in South Australia and from Malaysia. It was really nice to see some players from previous years return to Glenfern.

The Senior program focused on the students repertoire pieces, with work in groups classes with all tutors, supplemented by individual consultation with assistant teachers Hsiao-Ni Axtens and Daniel Liston, Masters graduate and candidates respectively from Monash University, as well as three masterclasses given by Yoon Sen Lee, Darryl and Betty Vergara-Pink, plus Max Cooke's workshop *Playing Baroque Music on the Harpsichord*. Many of the Senior Students were preparing for their final year recitals and we are sure that the Senior Program increased their skills and confidence for these important recitals.

### Spring Piano School Forum and Recital – an extra event this year!

The chance to have three Team partners, plus Betty Vergara-Pink and Yoon Sen Lee in the same building at the same time suggested to me a panel discussion along the lines of the ABC TV's Q & A program, but without the political point scoring! Therefore, at the end of Junior Program Day One we offered a *Forum and Showcase Recital* for parents and teachers. The aims were: 1 - to discuss ideas and share experiences about the teaching and earning piano and music to young people, and 2 – to show the work of some bright young people in performance and composition.

This session had the somewhat unwieldy title "*Supporting and directing piano studies for bright motivated children, whilst providing for others as well*". The panel discussion was chaired by Robert Chamberlain, and panel members Prof. Max Cook OAM (well know music

educator and piano pedagogue), Betty Vergara-Pink (formerly Professor of Piano & Piano Pedagogy, Musikhochschule Freiburg, Germany), Yoon Sen Lee (Director of WA Pianists Competition, Perth), Darryl Coote (Past President of Victorian Music Teachers Association), discussed questions such as:

- Why study music in an already crowded curriculum?
- What is the future for high achievers in music performance?
- How can parents and teachers balance music studies with all the other aspects of a child's education?
- What are the signs of a musically gifted child?
- Different ways to undertake piano studies for a bright child e.g., home schooling, a specialist music school such as VCASS, Chetham, Menuhin School, or normal school with music studies in and outside school
- To accelerate or not to accelerate? (In the Spring Piano School some (but by no means all!) children of 10, 11, 12 years, are performing pieces at Diploma level (e.g. AMEB A Mus, LMus). How does this come about? Is this acceleration or is this the new normal?)
- Exams or not?
- Boys and girls, how are they different in teaching and learning, do you teach them differently?

The Showcase Recital featured performances by Shuan Hern Lee (10 year old son of Yoon Sen Lee), who performed Chopin as well as his own composition *War of the Roman Empire*, Eric Su (10 year old student of Darryl Coote), Christopher Chamberlain (12 years old) whose composition *Universe – Duo for Piano and Electone* was presented (composition teacher Keiko Fuji), and Jaden Taveira (6 years old student of Max Cooke), who performed a number of short works with great charm.



An audience of parents and teachers listened to these young performers as well as the panel discussion. Audience members also raised interesting issues such as

- Keeping students motivated, especially when their daily routine is already extremely busy
- Assisting a student who has suffered severe trauma.

Unsurprisingly, given the credentials of the panellists there were many interesting ideas and insights. Indeed I hope that we may be able to put a video recording of part of this Forum on our website soon!

## **Our Sponsors - FOTOPS and Bernie Music Land**

We are grateful for the invaluable ongoing support from two sponsorship partners - the *Friends of the Team of Pianists Inc* (FOTOPS) and *Bernies Music Land*!

Financial support from FOTOPS allowed us to award scholarships, in the form of a reduced tuition fee, to a significant number of students. The scholarships were awarded on the basis of helping with travel expenses, need, ability and for encouragement.

FOTOPS scholarships for the 2012 Junior Program were awarded to Caitlin Little (South Australia), Dennis Melis (Melbourne), Arrifa and Arrimul Nararudin (Melbourne), Emily Zhang (Melbourne), Shue Wei Wong (Melbourne), Shuan Hern Lee (Perth, Western Australia), Annhien Tran (Melbourne), Eric Su (Melbourne), Chloe Chin (Melbourne) and Marcus Wong (Melbourne).

In the Senior Program the following students were awarded FOTOPS scholarships: Kathryn Jannes (South Australia), Debra Grace Lim (Malaysia), Isabella Chau-Yee Chan (Bairnsdale, VIC), Andrew Jarritt (Paynesville, VIC), Conor Barkway (South Australia), Aaron Bhat (Shepparton VIC), Marco Callisto (South Australia), Tracy Wu (Melbourne), Andrew Zamora (Melbourne).

Financial support from FOTOPS also provided the morning and afternoon tea refreshment for the students, and contributed towards with the delicious lunchtime catering provided by Kim Bong for the staff, helpers, and observers in the 2012 school.

FOTOPS committee members Greg Brown helped with purchase and supervision of the morning and afternoon teas, as well as providing and preparing the ever popular bike collection, while Dr Julie Waters Vice President of FOTOPS represented the FOTOPS committee by presenting the students in both concert with FOTOPS scholarship certificates and participation certificates. The FOTOPS committee support comprising both time and skills is greatly appreciated, as is the invaluable financial support.

*Bernies Music Land*, our wonderful piano sponsors provided a fine *Schimmel Vogel* upright piano for our Meeting Room teaching space, plus two portable *Roland* Digital pianos for the upstairs practice spaces. Lester Cheung from *Bernies Music Land* also entertained the students in both programs with a special presentation about the design, construction and manufacture of Schimmel pianos titled "Why pianos go out of tune".

## **Observers**

In this year's program we provided some places for observers - some were teachers and others were parents. The observers moved from session to session, absorbing different teaching and playing styles and comparing ideas in the breaks. Our observers for 2012 came from Malaysia, South Australia, Western Australia, regional Victoria as well as Melbourne. It was a pleasure to share our ideas and teaching with such motivated teachers and parents!



## Feedback and Evaluation

The feedback we received, both through the official evaluation forms and anecdotally, was overwhelmingly positive. In 2012 an old adage seemed to apply strongly. That is, it is best to leave your audience asking for more!

One very enthusiastic Junior Program student wrote: *SPS was really good but if you could extend it to maybe 5 days instead of 2, I think it will be better. I learnt a lot of different things such as different techniques and ways to practise. Extending SPS (Junior Program) to 5 days will mean learning more things that could really help us in the future.*

In response to the evaluation questions one of the youngest Junior participants wrote in very neat hand writing:

Things you liked or found useful: *1- More technique, 2 -More expression, 3- More friends*

Things you did not like or would make the Spring Piano School better: *Like more time next year*

How did the Spring Piano School help you improve your skills? *Help me more sounds better (sic)*

Another flattering evaluation was: *I hope SPS will continue forever and its reputation will grow bigger because it is really good fun and useful*

I am not sure about continuing forever, but given the high number of applications in 2012, the quality and dedication of the students, their teachers and parents plus the wonderful support from *Bernies Music Land* and the *Friends of Team of Pianists* committee, all combined with the unique historical surrounds of the National Trust's Glenfern, I think we can look forward to another exciting program in 2013!

Robert Chamberlain  
Director, Spring Piano School  
Nov 1, 2012 (rev. 3/12/12)