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Team of Pianists at Glenfern

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NATIONAL TRUST



of Australia (Victoria)

Artists-in-Residence

Max Cooke OAM
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Team of Pianists Spring Piano School 2011

Question: Where can you find 440 piano keys, 78 hands, 12 bicycles, one crate of apples, one harpsichord and approximately 680 minutes of solo piano music ready to perform?

Answer: At the Team of Pianists Spring Piano School 2011!



Since 2004 the Team of Pianists has organised an annual Spring Piano School for school aged piano students at *Glenfern*, a 19th century Gothic style mansion in inner city Melbourne. This building is the National Trust's Centre for the Arts and Culture and houses the offices and studio of the Team of Pianists, as well as studios for writers on short

term residencies. Glenfern is normally a quiet tranquil place, with the occasional concert or book launch held in the Drawing Room, but for one week in the Term 3 to Term 4 School holidays each year, it becomes a noisy bustling piano school. In 2011, 39 school age piano students, some piano teacher observers, various staff and helpers descended on the mansion, the verandah and the gardens for 5 days of piano playing activity!



From Monday October 3 to Wednesday lunchtime October 5, Glenfern was populated by 20 young pianists for the **Junior Program**. Their ages ranged from 5 to 13, their standard from Preliminary standard to above 8th Grade. Piano teacher observers, three partners of the Tea of Pianists, and three advanced piano student tutors from Monash

University rounded out the numbers.

The *Junior Program* is designed with two strands: skills development workshops and groups classes on prepared repertoire.



Skills development on Monday included a *Creativity Workshop* attended in turn by all three groups of young pianists. This workshop was given by Keiko Fujii, a highly experienced composition tutor for young musicians. In her sessions *Make your own motif, make your own melody* the students started to compose some music.



The youngest students chose an animal and made up a small piece about that animal. This then became part of the group's Suite: *Let's go to the zoo*.

In each 90 minute to 2 hour session, Keiko worked individually with each student to prompt and develop some musical ideas for their chosen animal. At the same time others in the group were developing and practising their ideas on digital keyboard with head phones while others, particularly in the older groups, were writing down their ideas seated at a table with manuscript paper.



At the end of the session each student performed and recorded their small composition. So, for example, Group 1's suite *Let's go to the Zoo* consisted of 1. Kangaroo by Gleda Ho,

2. Monkey by Keefer Ho,
3. Giraffe by Megan Nguyen
4. Snake by Jaden Traveira
5. Giraffe by Ashley Ting
6. Rabbit by Leonard Liu
7. Crocodile by Jennifer Chin

For the other two groups “the seasons” was the creative springboard. This resulted in two seasonal suites:

Suite 1 – The Seasons with

1. Process of cyclone Tracy by Raymond Wu
2. Autumn afternoon by Debra Grace Lim
3. Autumn by Kim Cavrak
4. Winter flakes by Daniel Ho Wai Keong
5. Winter snow by Eric Su
6. Spring fall by Rachel Cordeiro
7. Rain in spring by Ron Chen

and, from the third group, comprising students who already had compositional experience, *The Four Seasons* with

1. Summer by Xiao-Xiao Kingham
2. Autumn by James Earl
3. Winter by Joshua Jinu
4. Winter by Emily Jinu
5. Winter Reflections by Christopher Chamberlain
6. Spring by Kithmini Atapattu



It was fascinating to see how each child responded to this creative challenge, some found it easy to come up with ideas, some could improvise easily and endlessly but had to be guided to structure their ideas into a coherent form, others found

remembering their ideas a challenge. The most accomplished young composers could develop a few distinctive contrasting musical ideas and knit them together with apparent ease. It was also fascinating to hear varying levels of confidence in performing their compositions, music that had been called into existence only in the last 90 to 120 minutes. After the Spring Piano School, Keiko produced an mp3 files of the performances of each suite which we emailed to the students and their parents. This provides not only a souvenir but a concrete example of their work at the school and of their child's personality and talents.



Other skills development workshops for the Junior Program included *Practice time: improving it, enjoying it, using the metronome* with Darryl Coote, which all the students found most useful, and, on the second day, *Playing Baroque music on the Harpsichord* with Max Cooke OAM.



Here Max Cooke demonstrated to the children the differences between the modern piano and the harpsichord, supervised their playing of their Baroque repertoire on this instrument and gave them a very hands-on introduction to issues of Baroque style in performance. The *Technical Work Tournament* with Robert Chamberlain used elements of competition and team work to bring some challenges to technical work at the keyboard.

The group lessons on prepared repertoire are designed to help the students improve their 4 to 5 repertoire pieces, often in preparation for exams and recitals. Max Cooke,

Darry Coote and Robert Chamberlain were the teachers for these lessons, ably assisted by Seul Lee, honours piano student from Monash University School of Music Conservatorium.



For the youngest groups an impromptu tour of Glenfern and its grounds, with features such as the possibility of ghosts under the stairs, the story of a large tree from the garden that was blown over in a storm and location of the old well, provided a mid session break.

It was very enjoyable to see the social aspect of the Junior Program at work, morning recess and lunchtime were marked by bicycles whizzing around the Glenfern driveway, groups of the older children chatting in the garden while others playing cricket and other ball games. What a joy to see these serious young piano student making new friends and having an enjoyable social time!





The final morning of the Junior program featured a *Bernies Music Land* Sponsorship Presentation from Bernie Capicchiano and Lester Cheung, our superb piano sponsors. This talk and demonstration was entitled “Why pianos go out of tune” and came complete with showbags for the students as well as a few interesting questions for the presenters.

At the all important final concert for family and friends all the Junior pianists performed and were then awarded their participation certificates and in some cases Scholarship certificates, courtesy of the generous support of the Friends of the Team of Pianists Inc.



Just as the 20 Junior pianists left Glenfern, 19 **Senior Program** pianists, of secondary school age, arrived at Glenfern. They ranged in age from 11 to 18, with students from Melbourne and various areas of Victoria. The **Senior Program** skills development workshops included Darryl Coote's *Practice Time: improving it, enjoying it, using the metronome*, and Max Cooke's *Playing Baroque Music on the Harpsichord*, but the main focus for the Senior Program was on repertoire group lessons, to help many of the students prepare for upcoming exams and performances. Here Max, Darryl and Robert were assisted by Monash University honours piano student Daniel Liston, and Masters graduate Zhang Chi, who manned the digital pianos in the practice spaces, giving explanation of points, patient support and individual attention to each Senior Program participant in turn.

The Senior Program was also greatly enhanced by a masterclass from visiting Canadian pianist Dr Roger Lord, in Melbourne for the final 2011 *Rigg Bequest* recital at Glenfern the previous night. He gave a masterclass to four VCE students within the Senior Program, as well as a public masterclass on Thursday night. Another sponsorship presentation from *Bernies Music Land* and the final student recital to family and friends recital with scholarship and certificate presentation brought the event to a fine conclusion late on Friday afternoon.



The Team of Pianists is greatly indebted to **Bernies Music Land**, our trusted instrument sponsor for the Spring Piano School since 2004! Bernies Music Land supplied two high quality digital pianos, stands, piano benches and headphones as well as a fine Bernstein HP033 Concerto model upright piano for the third teaching studio.



These instruments greatly enhanced the 2011 *Spring Piano School* and enabled best use of the unique historic spaces at Glenfern. The digital pianos allowed flexible use of our limited space at Glenfern: on one day they were studio instruments for the Creativity Workshop paired with the Schimmel 213 grand, while for the other days they became most valuable tutorial and practice instruments in our

office and on the upstairs landing. The Roland and the Casio had not only great sounds, but the flexibility to be moved and used with headphones in a silent mode. The Bernstein upright piano had a very solid touch and fine rich sound and was a great third main teaching instrument, as well as a popular practice instrument during the breaks.



With the support of our other major sponsor, the *Friends of the Team of Pianists Inc* (FOTOPS), a number of scholarships were awarded in the form of reduced tuition fees. These were awarded by balancing factors such as Regional Award to students from outside Melbourne to help with extra costs, student application & enthusiasm, and student talent & ability. We were very pleased to welcome a students= from as far afield as Malaysia, as well as from regional areas such as Benalla, Geelong, Dhurringile, Melton, Paynesville, Kangaroo Flat, Metung, in addition to metropolitan Melbourne.

FOTOPS also provided invaluable time and energy with the set up of the school in particular Greg Brown's collection of bikes, and the supervision of refreshments during the breaks



The Team of Pianists greatly enjoyed presenting the Spring Piano School 2011 at Glenfern and would like to thank our sponsors, volunteers, and of course the students, their teachers and parents, who make it such an enjoyable event to run and direct.

Robert Chamberlain
Director Spring Piano School 2011
October 2011

