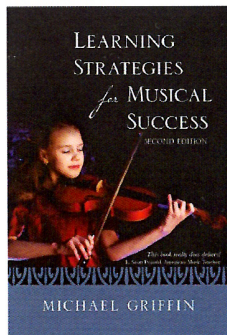


Seminar with Michael Griffin: Unlocking Musical Potential

By Dr Dianne James

Michael Griffin's Auckland seminar distilled much of the content of his excellent book, *Learning Strategies for Musical Success*, into a highly engaging and effective event aimed at the audience of teachers whose attendance was likely motivated by a desire to understand better how students learn and how to teach more effectively.



The day's content was organised loosely around three broad topics – Teaching for Practice; Musical Potential, Mind-sets and Expectations; and The Metacognitive Music Teacher – but there was considerable overlap across the three sessions. Among the many points highlighted was the importance of sleep to the learning process: it book-ends learning, preparing the brain for making new connections and consolidating those newly formed connections so that they are cemented in place: “if you don't snooze, you lose”. We learnt that the most effective teachers ask their students many questions, questions that promote the development of ‘metacognition’, most simply defined as ‘thinking about one's thinking’. ‘What makes you say that?’ ‘Can you explain...?’ These are great starters that can encourage

students to think about their own learning, to take ownership of it, to become autonomous and independent learners motivated by experiencing progress and achievement built on their own efforts. We also explored the differences between growth mind-set and fixed mind-set, and how these attitudes affect students' learning. Encouraging a growth mind-set is one of the most powerful things that teachers and parents can foster in students, since such students show a willingness to work harder, to persist even in the face of set-backs, to embrace challenges, to learn from criticism and to actively seek improvement and feedback. Griffin described mind-set theory as one of the most important factors in current education; as he said, the pathway to expertise begins with a growth mind-set: “If it is to be, it is up to me”. Teacher expectations are almost as important as the presence or not of a growth mindset - this is the so-called ‘Pygmalion Effect’ – “the teachers thought I was smart so I became smart”.

This day-long seminar was full to the brim with information from some of the latest



research into learning by some of the world's leading psychologists and educational experts. Griffin's ability to present this in a way that is easily digested and understood was one of the strengths of his book, and it was also apparent in this seminar, as difficult concepts were explained clearly and simply. The seminar was relevant to teachers of all instruments and those present gained a

valuable set of ideas, tools and concepts to explore further.

Dr Dianne James is the current Chair of the Auckland Branch of IRMTNZ. She is a member of the Wallace Committee, has served two terms on the IRMTNZ Council and was made an IRMTNZ Fellow in 2013. Dianne has a particular interest in the music of the Viennese Classical period, especially that of Haydn whose piano trios were the focus of her PhD thesis. She teaches in her private practice, Sherwood Piano Studio, in Browns Bay.

Recommended Reading ...

PLAY IT AGAIN *An amateur against the impossible*

By Alan Rusbridger

“In 2010, Alan Rusbridger, the editor of *The Guardian*, set himself an almost impossible task to learn, in the space of a year, Chopin's Ballade No. 1 – a piece that inspires dread in many professional pianists... he carved out twenty minutes' practice a day – even if that meant practising in a Libyan hotel in the middle of revolution – as well as gaining insights and advice from an array of legendary pianists, theorists, historians and neuroscientists, and even occasionally from secretaries of state.

But was he able to play the piece in time? As soon as you enter the pages you are hooked ...” *Vintage Books London ISBN978-0-09955-474-5*



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Violin by Nicholas Lupot, Paris 1805

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