

# Diploma Day

## Frances Wilson's notes

### Why take a Performance Diploma?

- develop your playing by learning and studying advanced repertoire
- develop your musical knowledge by reading and listening around the music you are playing
- for teachers - gain useful insights into teaching at an advanced level by studying with a master teacher
- gain a recognised professional qualification

### Preparation Preparation Preparation!

Preparation is not just about thoughtful, careful practising. Your preparation should also include:

- Practise performing by playing through the whole programme: this allows you to see how the individual pieces fit together as a whole programme and to judge the pauses between pieces.
- Play the programme through as a performance either at home to a friendly audience or in a more formal concert setting *at least three times* before the exam This kind of preparation will also enable you to find strategies for managing anxiety and will highlight any weak spots in your programme
- Play a variety of different pianos
- The day before the exam - light, quiet practising. Keep body and mind rested On the day: get to the exam centre in good time to warm up, get changed etc

### Presentation skills

A performance diploma is exactly that - a *performance* - and should be treated as a proper concert. How you conduct yourself in the exam should be as if for a public performance and your demeanour and clothing should reflect this. In the Trinity performance diplomas 10% of marks are on presentation skills and programme notes and you can pick up easy marks by making sure these aspects are properly covered.

Be sure to read the exam board's regulations *very carefully* to make sure you fulfill all the requirements, for example

- be pedantic about the word count of your programme notes
- be precise about the timings of your pieces. You must include the timing of individual works and the whole programme (not including pauses between pieces)
- Prepare copies of your music for the examiner and include these with your programme notes together with any approval letter from the exam board if playing own-choice repertoire (if relevant)
- dress appropriately (Trinity syllabus states "as if for an afternoon or early evening recital"). Choose clothes which are comfortable to play in and do a "dress rehearsal" in your diploma outfit to make sure it is suitable.
- Page-turners are allowed as are photocopies to facilitate easy page turns if doing it yourself – and if you find turning yourself adds an extra layer of anxiety, get a page-turner and practise the turns with them ahead of the exam so you both feel comfortable

## **Programme notes**

All diplomas require some form of written content

- Word counts given by Trinity College and ABRSM syllabuses are the total word count for the whole written programme notes (not including the title page/front page).
- Include the total word count of your programme notes at the end of the document (remember you may lose marks if your notes are too short or too long). The same applies to your programme timings
- Programme Notes must be printed in black, and the title page should contain: the full title of the Diploma; the date of the exam; the works in your programme in the order in which you will perform them; the timings for each piece the word count (excluding title page)

As a guide, programme notes should be of a similar level of scholarship and style to the kind of notes you find in a Wigmore Hall programme. Do not include any biographical information about yourself

Bear in mind that for ABRSM Diplomas you must verify or understand everything you quote in your programme notes so that you can answer questions on it in the viva element of the exam.

## **Selecting Repertoire**

- Try to steer clear of very well known works such as the most famous Beethoven sonatas, Chopin Etudes, Ballades, Scherzi etc. unless you have a burning desire to play this repertoire or feel you have a particular affinity with it. Maybe consider contrasting it with some lesser-known pieces or contemporary music
- Examiners tend to hear many versions of these very well-known works and some have very set ideas about how they should be played. Also the "special status" of such works in the repertoire adds extra responsibility when learning them.
- Don't pick repertoire just because you think it will impress the examiner. Instead select repertoire which you like (because you're going to spend a long time with it!) and which will demonstrate your strengths.
- Choose pieces with a variety of contrasting styles, moods and tempi.
- The programme does not have to be chronological; instead think of how the pieces work with each other as in a concert programme
- You can play a programme of pieces selected entirely from the published syllabus, a mixture of syllabus pieces and own choice or entirely own choice. For Trinity Diplomas programmes with own-choice repertoire you need to seek approval from the exam board. Check the regulations to ensure you submit your programme for approval in good time

## **Performance Anxiety**

*See separate document for longer notes on managing performance anxiety*

Some general thoughts on managing anxiety

## **Preparation Preparation Preparation!**

Good preparation is essential - as Horowitz used to say before a performance "I know my pieces".

- Being well-prepared means that you are less likely to be upset by slips or errors in your performance.
- Take every opportunity to practising performing and try as many different pianos as you can.
- Recording and videoing yourself is also very helpful
- Accept that anxiety is normal and try and turn any negative feelings into positive ones.
- Draw confidence from knowing you are well-prepared
- Exercises such as Pilates-style deep breathing or power poses can help shift the focus away from the symptoms of anxiety in the immediate hours preceding the exam.
- Use positive affirmation - talk yourself confident!
- Carry with you positive endorsements from teachers, colleagues and friends

If you would like further advice on preparing for a performance diploma, including advice on choosing repertoire and writing programme notes, please do not hesitate to contact Frances Wilson on [info@franceswilson.co.uk](mailto:info@franceswilson.co.uk)

© *Frances Wilson* 2016