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**The intermediate piano student:
an investigation of the impact of learning
material on motivation**

Thesis submitted by

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in December 2010

for the degree of Master of Music

in the School of Creative Arts

James Cook University

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Abstract

The intermediate piano student is difficult to define, as the term ‘intermediate’ is ambiguous, meaning that the student is neither beginner nor advanced. The literature provides minimal guidance in terms of how to define an intermediate student, however the general consensus is that the student is defined by his or her skill set and the repertoire being played. At the beginning level, there are many texts, methods and articles that assist both the teacher and the student in learning; however, there is less support in terms of pedagogical guides and resources for the intermediate student and significantly, minimal research on how these influence motivation.

In order to better define the intermediate piano student and what motivates the student, a mixed-methods study was conducted with key stakeholders. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with intermediate piano teachers and students, authors of method books, heads of external examination bodies, contemporary composers and authors of literature guides. In order to examine the issues further, quantitative data was collected through an internet survey which was completed by over 500 teachers from a range of countries. Each stakeholder who participated in the study was asked to define a beginner, intermediate and advanced student and what factors they thought motivated intermediate students. Issues of learning programs were also covered with the teachers and students.

The interviews and survey confirm that there is a significant relationship between learning programs and motivation. The students indicated that they practise more when they enjoy the repertoire, and the teachers and external stakeholders agree that motivation is essential for lifelong learning. A significant finding is that while students would most likely choose to learn popular music, teachers identified that they mostly use classical music as stock learning material. This research provides insights and suggestions for those involved in the intermediate learning process, as well as opportunities for further research and the development of a learning program for the intermediate piano student.

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