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Pianist

No 96

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The art of the
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Editor's note



Slow down. Take time. Find a balance. For those of us whose pace of life feels unrelenting, several articles in this month's *Pianist* may strike a chord. The practice of playing the piano in itself invites us to take time out of our busy schedules, put our phones away, sit down at the keyboard and concentrate on another world, of sounds and notes and songs. More and more people in their later years write to me and say how they're taking up the piano again after years of letting life take over. Melanie Spanswick's guide for adult restarters offers some invaluable advice to anyone who wants to put some piano-centred balance back into their lives.

In Jessica Duchén's interview, the pianist Kathryn Stott discusses the benefits of a balanced professional career: playing by yourself and with others, teaching, organising festivals – even if she has to fly halfway around the world to keep all the plates spinning. But it doesn't have to be a technique-draining showstopper to focus our energies. Even the matter of a simple scale can bring us down to

earth and back to the piano: Hans-Günter Heumann's Keyboard Class is a fun way to begin your practice, whatever your level of accomplishment. And Julia Horton reports from Glasgow on a scheme of free piano lessons that has brought balance to the lives of many people with physical and learning impairments.

Talking of practice, let's reflect on whether we have things in balance. Do we have a calm structure in place? There's no point diving in headlong and playing the speedy, difficult pieces before we've done our warm-ups. Mark Tanner's article on the art of playing slowly, which can demand even more from us than dashing off tricky passagework, tells us that each note matters; even the pauses.

I was reminded of this when I came to record a piece for the covermount CD. Looking at the score of the lovely *Sensitiva* waltz by Granados, I thought it would be easy. The pace is fairly slow and the notes are straightforward (as a superb pianist himself, Granados wrote so well for us). But to get the balance between the hands right, the dynamics soft enough, just the right amount of rubato... there's the challenge, especially when the red light goes on in the recording studio! There's much more to learn about this neglected Spanish composer, from Lucy Parham's lesson on *The Maiden and the Nightingale* to Peter Quanttrill's anniversary tribute.

When I see a pianist rippling through tunes in a dimly lit bar or hotel lobby, I always imagine that they take life as it comes. But it isn't all 'Play it again, Sam': Rick Jones takes you behind the scenes for a delightful account of what it really takes to be a bar pianist. With a quick glance over the Scores section you'll see a range of tempi to keep the pace of your playing nicely balanced: speedy Clementi, moderato Chaminade, Allegro (but non troppo) Tchaikovsky and more. Don't forget to try out *Ceasefire*, the winning piece of our 2017 Composing Competition, marked Andante semplice – at a simple walking pace. That's a tempo to help us set our lives back in balance.

P.S. There's a great competition in this issue: turn to page 7 to find out how to win KORG's latest digital piano!

Erica

ERICA WORTH, EDITOR

Make sure that you keep in touch with me – what I've been up to, which pianists I've spoken to, exclusive extra articles and interviews – by registering for our FREE e-newsletter. All you need to do is go to www.pianistmagazine.com

COMPETITION ENTER ONLINE AT WWW.PIANISTMAGAZINE.COM



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Answer the question below correctly, and you could be one of three lucky winners to receive the new Deutsche Grammophon album of the elusive Russian pianist. It's the Editor's Pick of our CD Reviews this month: see page 86. Deadline for entries: 28 July

Which Rachmaninov piano concerto features in the film *Brief Encounter*?

A: No 1 B: No 3 C: No 2

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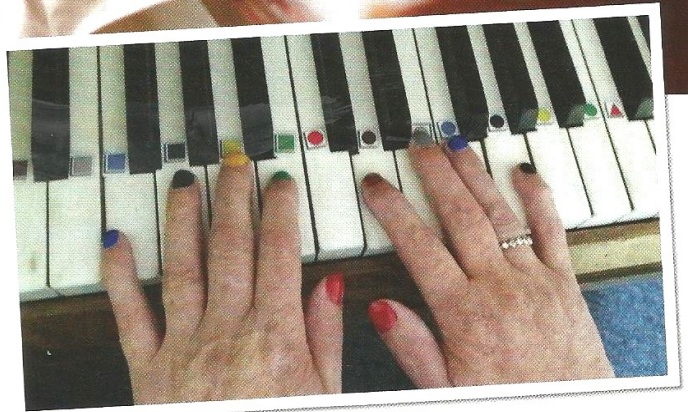


Pianos on Prescription

Talking to patients and doctors, **Julia Horton** finds out how an innovative programme of free piano tuition is improving mental health in Glasgow

A first glance at Lorraine's fingernails might bring you up short. Brightly painted in a rainbow arc of different hues, they look like a fashion statement, and their vibrancy matches her personality. However, this eye-catching manicure has a deeper purpose. The varying shades are the unlikely-sounding secret to her remarkable success in learning to play the piano.

Each nail is colour-coded to both a corresponding key on a piano and specially adapted sheet music, in order to help Lorraine remember which note is which. Trying to master a musical instrument as an adult is difficult for anyone, but Lorraine's achievement is all the more impressive since she has serious brain damage. A house fire caused carbon monoxide poisoning so severe that she has no memory of the previous ten years of her life. She is still unable to go out by herself because she would get lost but, after re-learning how to walk and talk, the 53-year-old philosophy graduate is now enjoying her growing talent as a pianist thanks to an innovative scheme based in Scotland.



Colour-coded fingernails (above): a boon for Lorraine; Edward Reid (left), former *Britain's Got Talent* semi-finalist, performs on one of the pianos at a Maggie's cancer care centre in Lanarkshire, with project founder Tom Binns and charity workers



With lessons made freely available, *Pianos on Prescription* promotes the health benefits of piano-playing for people who are coping with a wide range of medical and psychological conditions.

Pianos on Prescription is run by Glasgow Piano City, a voluntary group founded in 2014. It was part-inspired by the global street-piano movement, *Play Me, I'm Yours*, which places instruments in public spaces around the world. There are now more than 20 pianos across the city in museums, cafes and shops, all named and hand-decorated by supporters. The scheme has received more than £25,000 in funding from the UK National Lottery and Glasgow City Council, plus donations of pianos and cash from supporters. But even heavily discounted weekly lessons would cost Glasgow Piano City around £500 per year for one person alone.

While the pianos are made available to everyone, regardless of health or ability, the project is receiving more and more requests and informal referrals from GP surgeries. With its scheme of free lessons, *Pianos on Prescription* helps NHS patients whose problems are more mental or social than physical, such as depression or loneliness.

Lorraine has had weekly lessons for about 18 months on a baby grand at a community-run cafe in Glasgow's East End where she is a volunteer.



Glasgow Piano City in action: Project founder Tom Binns (left) and a city musician (right) putting instruments through their paces in public

'My life is so much better now,' she says. 'The music relaxes me. I was apprehensive at first about lessons but you get to be more confident and Grainne is a wonderful teacher. I was dying to learn to play the piano though I never thought I'd be able to do that in my life. But I can with Grainne and with these,' as she holds up her hands to show off her nails.

Grainne Rooney is Lorraine's teacher. She also works as a volunteer. Rooney was inspired by a scheme called Figurenotes, which enables those with learning disabilities to play music by giving each key on the piano a

'You're so intent on what you're doing you forget everything else. From the first lesson I loved it.'

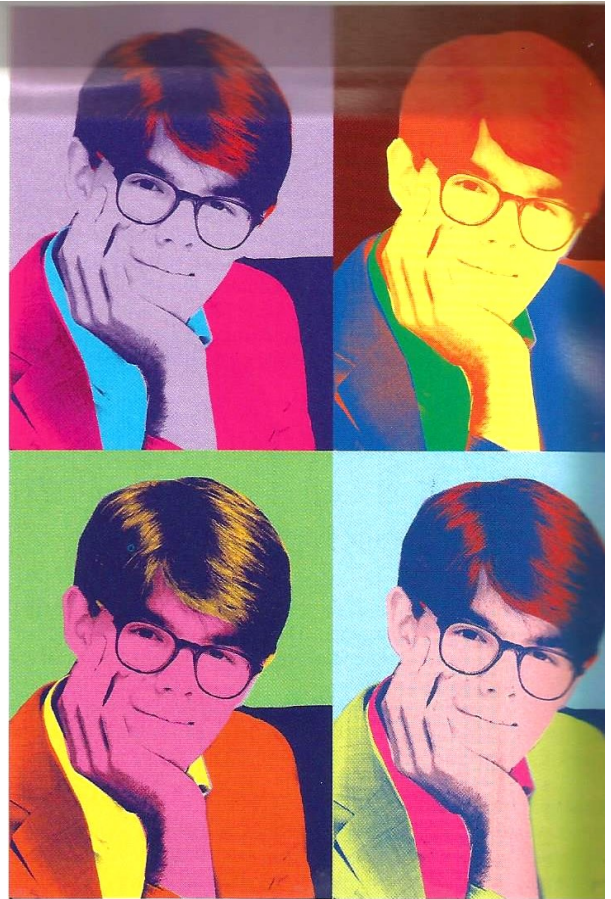
specific colour. 'There was a lot of playing with two fingers at first,' she remarks, 'and I wanted to help Lorraine use all her fingers. So we talked about how we could help her remember the notes and this [painting her fingernails to match the keys] is what we came up with.'

Having learned the themes from *Titanic* and Dvorak's 'New World' Symphony, Lorraine recently played in duet on a Steinway instrument at the Mackintosh Church, Queen's Cross, as part of an awareness-raising event. Her partner was Charlie Michie, a city pensioner who was referred to the scheme through his local GP surgery after feeling increasingly low following the death of his wife and a period of ill health.

Never too late

Michie says with pride: 'When I tell people I'm going for piano lessons at my age – I'm 70 – they look at me surprised, but it's really good. I was looking for something to do and when the GP suggested piano lessons I thought that was great. I haven't had lessons since I was about ten. I like jazz and the big American songbook stuff. I'm playing the melody in my right hand and still struggling with co-ordination with the left hand, but I'm getting there.'

Michie was recommended to the scheme by Gary Nelson, who is one of a network of community practitioners working at GP surgeries in deprived areas of Glasgow. 'A lot of people go to the doctor when they are feeling down because they feel isolated and lonely,' says Nelson. 'When I met Charlie for the first time we were talking away and he had a great passion for old jazz and blues, which I like too. I suggested a few different things and one was *Pianos on Prescription*, which another practitioner had mentioned to me. ▶



THOMAS NICKEL P I A N O

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It's good to get creative and learn a new skill. The piano is an instrument you don't see so often and a lot of people couldn't afford lessons.'

The therapeutic value of music, and pianos in particular, has also been recognized by the nationwide network of Maggie's Centres, which offer free practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer and their families and friends. In September 2016, one of the Glasgow Piano City instruments was featured in a Maggie's Centre Culture Crawl, and another piano was recently installed at a Marie Curie Hospice in the city's Stobhill area. Hospice nurse Diana Schad is also a musician and an advocate for the practical benefits of music therapy. 'Music is part of everybody's life,' says

'This is not about entertainment, and it's not about being a performer. It's a much quieter thing.'

Schad, 'and it really does touch them right up to the end, however old they are. Families sometimes bring in a CD of someone's favourite song, but to have someone play it live is a completely different experience. It makes it feel more like home, more human.'

'And the lovely thing about the piano is that anyone can play it – patients, their grandchildren, nurses, kitchen staff, the pastoral team. I think a lot of people feel they can't play really well but that's not the point of it.'

Foundation aims

Schad's view is echoed by fellow musician Tom Binns, the founder of Glasgow Piano City. He stresses that *Pianos on Prescription* is not about performing or even improving ability: 'It's all about listening, and finding a way to express yourself and facilitating ways of being in contact with other human beings when we are so used to social media. Many people will talk about the way pianos can create a catalyst for human interaction. For me it's really important [to stress] that this is not about entertainment, and it's not about being a performer. It's a much quieter thing that's about being in contact with yourself. The busier I become with the project the more I realise that I need that too.'



KEYS TO GOOD HEALTH IN NEW YORK TOO

Based in New York, The Piano Project (thepianoproject.org) has resettled over 15 pianos into community organizations such as schools and community centres, as another extension of the *Play Me, I'm Yours* programme. While saving rejected instruments from the prospect of becoming landfill, the charity provides instruments for teaching and accompanying music, arts and drama classes.



Above: Charlie Michie playing at a 'Lids Open Day' at Glasgow's Mackintosh Queens Cross church; below, a class at The Piano Project in New York

As an art therapist, Binns is not surprised that the project has had such a positive impact on general health and well-being. 'Lorraine can't remember things from one day to the next,' he observes, 'but she has a beautiful brightness and curiosity about her when she's playing. It's lovely to see.'

A piano was recently installed at Glasgow's Gartnavel Royal Hospital in order to benefit its psychiatric patients. Beverly Dick heard about it and was immediately taken up with the idea that playing would help to counter her own depression. A former intensive care nurse, she had never taken piano lessons before, but she asked her GP to refer her to *Pianos on Prescription*. 'It made real sense to me,' she says. 'I was diagnosed as bipolar and I have been sectioned and taken medication in the past. The side effects made me worse so I've been managing my condition naturally, which is not easy. Learning piano is really helping.' She was wary at first, because her lessons took place in a gallery within a shopping centre: 'I thought people would be coming in and out, but you go to another place when you're playing. It's like mindfulness. You're so intent on what you're doing you forget everything else. From the first lesson I loved it.'

'These lessons have been a catalyst for me,' she adds. 'Before this I wasn't really going out, but *Pianos on Prescription* has given me the confidence to get out and be part of the world again. It's been wonderful for me. We have to think out of the box. There are so many things you can do to help yourself other than taking medicine. I think this would help elderly people with Alzheimer's, too, because music can really help with memory.'

Beverly Dick is determined to learn to read music one day, though for now she is taking it slowly because it can feel 'stressful'. In the meantime she enjoys learning to play tunes like *Summertime* without sheet music.

Amazing grace

At the Gartnavel hospital, regular concerts have had a noticeable effect on the behaviour of patients who suffer from conditions such as schizophrenia and find concentrating and controlling their aggression difficult. According to Derek Toland, senior charge nurse at the unit, there is a 'remarkable' improvement in those patients after seeing a performance. They become calmer, allowing staff to make more progress with other areas of treatment.

'The good thing about music,' says Toland, 'is that most people can benefit from it, either by playing or listening. We have a few patients who can play and they will either join a session or have an ad-hoc go at the piano. These are things that people would normally do in life to de-stress, or for enjoyment. It helps everyone.'

It's impossible to enter Gartnavel without passing the piano, which is placed directly inside the entrance doors. Near the piano is the hospital café, where I find Frank Allen, a retired teacher whose wife is being treated at the hospital. 'She is not normally musical,' says Allen, 'but she thoroughly enjoys listening to other people play. It's an excellent way of cheering everyone up.'

For those in greatest need, that sums up the simple but powerful effect that *Pianos on Prescription* is having on their health and well-being. With plans to extend the programme during 2017 and install instruments in Paisley, Helensburgh and Edinburgh, the fine work of *Pianos on Prescription* is spreading across Scotland. ■

Visit www.glasgowpianocity.org for more information. To learn more about pianos in public places, see the 'Pianos Everywhere' feature in issue 91.