



Piano Teacher Talk – your quick update on what’s going on in EPTA

Key dates to note:

ABRSM-EPTA

Teacher development

days:

24 February, 31 March, 2
June, 30 June, 21 July at
Chetham’s School of
Music in Manchester.

EPTA is delighted to
highlight these brand
new development days
supported by **ABRSM**
£100 for each day, £80
for members of EPTA UK
and £50 for students.
Special offer of £350 if
the remaining 5 days are
booked together.
Contact [admin@epta-](mailto:admin@epta-uk.org)
uk.org for further
information and for
securing your place on
this course.

Dear Piano Teachers

Welcome to our fifth online newsletter!

This month's newsletter for EPTA is a little bit different. At the beginning of the new year and now that we are middle aged (following our 40th Birthday) we have three exciting things to tell you about. We will be doing this over the next few weeks on Pianodao - thank you so much to Andrew Eales for making this possible.

The **first** news is about **our new partnership with ESTA**. The press release with all the details about this is on the following page. We are working with ESTA sharing resources, ideas and expertise to provide the best and most cost effective services to our membership. The new post graduate qualification for Piano Teachers is being run in partnership with ESTA and EPTA with Chichester University.

The **second** news is about our new initiative, **EPTA Education**. We will be giving you fuller details about EPTA Education in the middle of this month. We have a team of people ready to work with EPTA Education from the ABRSM to course leaders and mentors. Our first plan is to run an EPTA summer school at Chichester University, alongside ESTA where they also hold their annual summer school. A whole programme of other events and services are also been put together and EPTA Education will be delivering the development days at Chetham’s School of Music - the very first was last Sunday - January 27th. Our next is February 24th, do check out the others here <https://epta-uk.org/event-type/coursedevelopment-day>

The **third** news is all about our plans to **improve what we offer our membership**. With discount offers, a free digital download resource pack, yearly free regional events at locations South, Midlands and North and a new appointment of a member of staff to support the regions. We will be further communicating with members to find out how we can better support them in their work. Our members are our top priority.

So, it is exciting times at EPTA, we are working very hard to grow and develop to better meet the needs of piano teachers who are our absolute priority. Do look out for more notifications about our plans. The full EPTA Education plans will be revealed the middle of February and our membership package at the beginning of March.

Very best wishes to all
Murray McLachlan on behalf of EPTA Management Committee

Please send us feedback, news and ideas for teaching and piano playing on our EPTA Facebook and Twitter pages or on the Pianodao site. We are very grateful to Andrew Eales for featuring the newsletter on Pianodao.



ESTA and EPTA working in partnership to provide accredited training opportunities for teachers.

At a historic meeting in London on November 15, the European String Teachers Association and European Piano Teachers Association agreed to share expertise to deliver a variety of accredited teacher courses. These instrument specific professional development opportunities would range from foundation to master's level and be designed to fit around a busy teaching life.

ESTA already has a postgraduate course, the ESTA PGC, now in its second year for string teachers, and is extending it to include piano in August 2019. EPTA have agreed to endorse and promote this course to its members. The course is jointly run, and accredited, by Chichester University. EPTA already has plans to support teachers in preparation for the DIP ABRSM teaching diplomas as well as offering CPD for pianists and teachers at all stages of their careers. EPTA's own new teaching diploma certEPTA will also be launched in 2019.

At the meeting ESTA and EPTA agreed to offer membership of each other's organisation for a considerably reduced subscription of only £20.

"We are delighted to be working so closely with our sister organisation EPTA." said John Shayler, Chair of ESTA, "The two organisations have a similar history and have worked alongside each other for 40 years. This new cooperation, though, marks a considerable development in our relationship and we hope it will lead to more initiatives in the future."

Murray McLachlan, Chair of EPTA, said "We are delighted to be working with ESTA on these professional development courses. Their ability to develop accredited qualifications is a real inspiration for us, and we are very happy to promote them to our members."



A Thumbs-up for the Thumb

Pianists tend to think of the thumb as being the root cause of unevenness, bumps and a host of other undesirables. In truth, the thumb is the most articulated, powerful and adaptable digit we have. Without it, we'd find it indescribably harder to negotiate the expansive register of the modern keyboard, either by stretching or leaping – let alone execute the humblest C major scale. Beyond this, composers entrust our thumbs with some of the juiciest tenor melodies, such as Rubinstein with his Melody in F, and I love to use my left thumb (rather than the more conventional 4th or 5th finger) when reaching deeper down the keyboard to pluck out isolated quieter notes. Borrowing the thumb to play notes written for the other hand is something pianists could be even more alive to, especially in romantic and contemporary pieces. And in thickly textured repertoire, notably by Liszt, Rachmaninov or Messiaen, a willingness to play two notes simultaneously with the thumb opens up a raft of possibilities. When Debussy composed his thumbless Étude No.6, he of course knew precisely how *indispensable* the thumb usually is, though this may seem a far cry from the pre Bach era when the thumb was perhaps less pivotal to how keyboardists moved around their instrument.

The thumb is my go-to digit for playing trills in the left hand; and when tackling repeated notes, either thumb can be trusted to pull its weight. But to think of the thumb as unruly is to miss an opportunity to spot weaknesses in our posture, arms, wrists or elbows, which are from where many of a pianist's ailments actually stem. Passing the thumb is something pianists need to revisit and self-police on a regular basis to ensure that optimal movement – supple and tension-free – is really taking place. As for the knotty issue of black notes and thumbs, pianists need to be imaginative and resourceful, not slave to text book dogma concerning 'correct' fingerings. The piano will not explode if we dare to be unorthodox, especially if a workable finger pattern can then be mirrored up and down the keyboard. Certainly, if we minimise using the thumb in *leggiero* passages we can iron out unnecessary rough spots or jerkiness, but bear in mind too how useful it can be to coincide the two thumbs in complex passagework, both to give anchor points and as an aid to memorising. With the lightest of wrists the thumb can play with agility and impressive dexterity. And where would we be without our thumbs when reeling off octaves, chords and arpeggios? So, let's hear it for the thumb, the only digit with two rather than three phalanges, yet the only one equally capable of lateral as well as up-down movement, and a rescue digit *par excellence*.

Mark Tanner, January 2019

DENIS MATTHEWS 1919-2019 A TRUE ALL ROUND PIANIST AND MUSICIAN.

The 27th February 2019 sees the centenary of the birth of Denis Matthews. Denis launched the founding of EPTA West Midlands in 1986 at Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham. He gave a three hour lecture recital on 'Bach's 48, a Pianist's Rightful Inheritance.' From memory, he demonstrated the teaching points from most of both books of the Well Tempered Clavier (Bach's 48) to an astonished and appreciative audience. The announcement of his tragic death in 1988 is included in the current issue of Piano Journal in Nancy Litten's column 'From the Archives.' Page 31. Denis lectured, taught, performed and held masterclasses for EPTA audiences at various EPTA conferences. He was friend and colleague to EPTA's founder Carola Grindea and was a distinguished performer, teacher and recording artist. He taught at the then Birmingham School of Music, now the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

Look out for an article in Piano Professional in which two of his celebrated pupils Sarah Beth Briggs and Julian Hellaby recount their lessons with Denis.

Melvyn Cooper

Newsletter compiled and edited by Carole Booth with Karen Marshall