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# Tobin Music

ACCELERATING MUSIC LITERACY

# News

## Warwickshire Pilot Tobin Music

*Warwickshire County Music Service has over 170 teachers teaching on a weekly basis which consists of instrumental and vocal teachers, curriculum teachers, ensemble directors and music therapists. Many of these teachers also teach whole class instrumental and vocal lessons (wider opportunities) which currently happens in 106 school across the county.*

*We believe in teaching the whole child to be musical e.g. teaching generic musical skills as well as technical instrumental and vocal skills and part of this holistic approach is musical literacy. Working closely with Tobin we will be training our staff in the method with the intention that once having experienced the benefits of the method our teachers will choose to embed the methodology using the resources provided into their every day teaching.*

*It will be an exciting time piloting the method on a county wide basis. Richard Tobin is hoping that following our unique pilot more music services will want to be involved in training as a complete service. Certainly where we have introduced Tobin to our teachers on an area project (Nuneaton and Bedworth area) the results have been excellent and our teachers have embraced the methodology to the point many gave up their own time at a weekend to attend extra training.*



*We are hoping to create a Tobin 'Champion' in each of the 5 areas of the county who will be responsible for working with our own staff and also to involve schools in signing up to the training programme. This will be overseen by our own Tobin expert Julie Hall who is our direct link between CMS and the Tobin organisation and will also be leading our own training events.*

*Only time will tell how successful the pilot will be but every indication is that it will significantly improve teaching and learning within Warwickshire.*

Andrew Atkins - Director of Warwickshire County Music Service

## Young Musician of the Year

*Stephen Smithers started the Tobin System in 2001 at the age of four by attending Candida's magical Saturday morning classes. After a year he began his piano lessons using the Wizard Way books under Candida's guidance and with "help" from mum and dad. He still has his books with pictures that connect the titles of the pieces together and showing his original colourings-in and filled with Candida's beloved tetrachords. The books provided an excellent grounding for his piano studies and his musical confidence. Today Stephen says that the pieces seem advanced for a five year old although the use of colour made them possible for Stephen to play.*



*Stephen benefitted enormously from Candida's tutelage and encouragement and we are delighted that Alex Andrijevic, a Tobin Trained teacher continues the excellent work. Stephen has now progressed to grade VI piano and grade V theory. On the evening of 28th March he won the cup for Harlow area under-12 Young Musician of the Year playing Chopin's Waltz in C# min op 64 no2, having won the Piano section cup earlier in the day. In the final he was up against the winners from woodwind, strings, brass, voice, and accordion sections.*

*Mum and Dad still "help", although Stephen does not always use this description while he is practising.....*  
 Colin Smithers

# Rapid Success by Julie Hall

*I have used the Wizard's way Piano method in my studio for four years now; to me it is the most natural way to teach the beginner pianist as they progress quickly and everything is presented in a logical manner that engages the children. I think I sometimes forget just how brilliant it is compared to other methods because like the children I am so motivated and absorbed by it. The past month has reminded me of why I immediately connected with Candida and her philosophy – my young pianists have confidence and it shows.*

*Learning the piano is incredibly challenging; the combination of reading (both vertically and horizontally), coordination, getting to grips with the geography of the keys and developing a good hand position are all crucial factors. Other methods I've tried have the beginner rooted in a five finger position for many months. This slows down the understanding of the great stave and makes the youngster fearful of moving across the range of the piano.*

*I now only take new pianists if they have participated in my Saturday morning classes and these children certainly reap the rewards with such a secure grounding of rhythm, the great stave and harmony. We can literally cover a third of the book in a couple of lessons because they are already musically literate. The students all play beautifully in time thanks to their knowledge of fractional values and French time names. The method quickly introduces all notes across the great stave and when we get onto learning tetrachords the children can soon transpose with ease the parents are stunned. I just expect these results and responses but to the observer it is remarkable; and that is because other methods do not enlighten the student to the patterns that unlock what music is all about.*

*Candida always maintained that the most important thing for the young musician is to develop confidence; thankfully she backed this up by writing us the most wonderful piano tutor books! She nurtured confidence by illuminating the way through the maze of dots, she thought of ways to get them playing all over the keyboard with ease, showed them how to see the patterns and how to improvise.*

*Consider my 8 year old pupil Arthur; he is rattling off his grade 2 pieces with ease and won first place in his class at the Tamworth Music Festival. I asked him to play Russian Dancing Bear, a piece from Wizard's Way Piano Book 2. He opened the book and turned to me in all seriousness asked; "Which key would you like me to play it in Mrs Hall?" The piece is written in A minor but happily played it in E minor, B minor, F sharp minor (and F sharp major for a change!) and G sharp minor. The lad has knowledge and a true understanding of what he is doing, no wonder he is confident!*



*Many people have been debating how long it should take a student to get to grade 1 standard. I'm delighted to say that I have an 8 year old student who has been playing for just under 10 months and she has taken her grade 1 piano exam today. Olivia can learn a grade 1 piece in a week and in addition to the grade 1 scales she can play C, G, D, A, E, B, F majors and a, e, d, b minors scales and arpeggios hand together. More importantly she bounced out of the exam with a big smile and said everything went really well and that the sight reading was easy. Her father considers the Saturday morning classes taken before starting the piano have been the key to Olivia's accelerated progress and her confidence.*



*Finally; 6 year old Sian Hall came first in her piano class for the 7 and unders. It was her first competition and she was delighted. I am encouraged by the report from the adjudicator who noticed how easily she navigated around the five octave range of the piece and controlled her dynamics; she was the only child not playing in a fixed five finger position. You can see from her smile that she is very happy with her achievements; Sian also attended Saturday morning classes before taking up the piano*



*The first piano lessons are the most important and I have total confidence in being able to provide these children with firm foundations for a lifetime of music making; thanks to the system.*

# Improved piano musicianship by Mimia Margiotta

About a year ago I started teaching Murray, a 13 year old boy who arrived at my piano studio particularly discouraged about his progress with his sight-reading and understanding of keys and scales. Murray, who had been learning the piano for about one year, was rather scared and de-motivated about the possibility of ever being able to master the above areas and only decided to try a different teaching approach under his mum's advice.

A year later Murray is a proficient sight reader, has an extremely good grasp of keys, and plays most scales with remarkable understanding (and by the way, he passed his ABRSM grade one with Distinction last July!). All these achievements were possible thanks to the Tobin Wizard Way Piano methods, which I started using when Murray joined my piano studio.

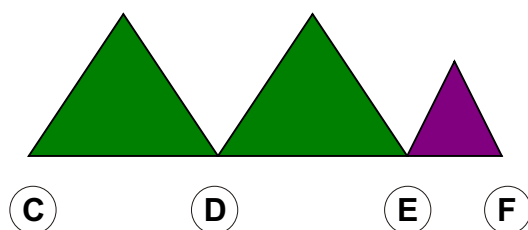
The Wizard's Way Piano Books develop the pupils' awareness and understanding of keys, chords, tetrachords and scales, with the ultimate goal of equipping learners with the most important tools for improvising.



In order to tackle the sight-reading problem, I introduced him to one of the most distinctive features of the Tobin's Piano method; that is the use of colours associated to notes and keys. Book 1 comes with a set of coloured stickers which, once put on the keyboard, will help the young learners to quickly associate the coloured keys with the coloured notes, thus considerably speeding up the learning process.

Alongside the colours I used the simple yet very effective strategy of tucking a cloth into the piano lid so that it covered Murray's hands. This way Murray was not tempted to look down at the keys and hands, but to keep his eyes on the book thus learning how to feel and internalise the keyboard's geography and use the correct fingerings. Murray absorbed the coloured notation so quickly that after about 3 months we decided to remove the stickers from the keys and he could comfortably sight-read all the notes on the book and move confidently on the keyboard.

From the very early exercises Murray was encouraged to transpose tunes in order to get familiar with the concept of different tonalities, key notes as well as intervallic distances. Tones and semitones were introduced by the means of the notation ruler (or strip) which allowed him to visualize the distance between keys and helped him understand tetrachords and consequently how scales are built. Through the visual aid of the notation ruler Murray was able to find on the keyboard the tetrachord sequence of Tone-Tone-Semitone, starting from any key.



By doing this exercise routinely Murray was able to set the very solid foundations for playing scales, working out key signatures as well as improvising.

The Tobin Wizard Way Piano method can undoubtedly be considered as the missing tile in the mosaic of music making where the understanding and handling of the harmonic and tonal structure of music will give the users a very precious tool to develop the freedom of improvisation.

# Adult Beginner

*When my arrangement with a piano teacher to have piano lessons following traditional methods fell through, I think it was probably my lucky day, because I was then invited by Sarah Spare to consider learning using the Tobin method.*

*I was mildly apprehensive that the little music knowledge I already had would get in the way, but I needn't have worried: the moment Sarah told me the story and the colours of the musical alphabet I knew that this would be something totally different!*



*The first huge revelation was the Great Staff: not two individual and separate staves but one big staff, the lines linked in an ascending pattern of colours representing the notes, and a central-anchor point on a ledger line. OK, so now I had nailed Middle C! Suddenly the lower staff no longer seemed to be shrouded in mystery, and was consequently a lot less scary. I was beginning to think that maybe I could crack this after all.....*

*Alongside this of course there are key signatures, sharps, flats, naturals, tetrachords, and the first tentative fingering of the piano keys, and a long way to go after that, but I thoroughly enjoy the therapeutic effects of colouring in notes and notation rulers, and I now know that in the few weeks I have been learning with Sarah, whilst barely realising it, I have actually assimilated a lot of information. I leave every session on a 'high' because I am getting so much more out of the whole experience than just learning to read music.*

*The fact that my 61-year old brain has been able to take in the information so easily is a tribute to the Tobin approach to music teaching, and would indicate that the system is suitable for almost any age group. As I said, it was definitely my lucky day!*

*Fiona Andrews*

## Tobin Music training in Belfast

Thelma is going to run a 5 day Associate Teacher Training course in Belfast during summer 2009, dates and venue to be confirmed. Julie and Chris Hall would be providing the training.

**If there are teachers in the Belfast area who would like more information please contact Thelma directly:**

*Tel: 07809 872550*

*Email: [thelma.worthington@mac.com](mailto:thelma.worthington@mac.com)*

# Outstanding Pupils

*I have been teaching the piano for 15 years and had always struggled with that strange interface between dots on the page and ivories beneath. In the last few years I have become an ardent fan of Candida Tobin's colour method. I had the pleasure and stimulation of studying with her in her final years and now I introduce notation with only this system.*

*The bright colours are instantly memorable and those boring ivories become a glorious pattern, repeated up and down the keyboard. Thus no more slavery for beginners to the worn out keys around Middle C. Pupils are encouraged to explore the nethermost regions of the keys with transposing tricks that Mozart used regularly...and this with pupils of only a few weeks' tuition.*



*My photos show Om , renamed Omadeus for his passion for the piece entitled Little Mozart. He gives acclaimed performances of this in at least 2 different keys. The lady is Linda, a Town Councillor and recent Ph D in Mathematics. Her mind is fast and she is playing Edelweiss with all the primary chords and suitable inversions to create a flowing bass line!*

*I wish to explore how the system can help with singers. Any thoughts, anyone?*

Harold Chaplin, Hertford



## TOBIN TEACHER TRAINING

Associate Tobin Teacher training courses are available in Saffron Walden as well as Tamworth. Please book as soon as possible to ensure a place.

### Tamworth, Staffordshire

To book contact Julie Hall tel: 01827 282949

Email: JulesDuceHall@aol.com

MODULE 2	Sunday	26th April	Full Day	£80
MODULE 3	Sunday	3rd May	Full Day	£80
MODULE 4	Sunday	7th June	Full Day	£80
MODULE 5	Sunday	21st June	Full Day	£80
ASSOCIATE EXAM	Saturday	4th July	1.00pm	£30

### Saffron Walden, Essex

To book contact Maggi Griffiths tel: 01799 500899 Email: maggigriffiths@hotmail.com

MODULE 1	Saturday	4th April	Full Day	£80
MODULE 2	Sunday	5th April	Full Day	£80
MODULE 3	Sunday	10th May	Full Day	£80
MODULE 4	Sunday	14th June	Full Day	£80
MODULE 5	Sunday	28th June	Full Day	£80
ASSOCIATE EXAM	Sunday	5th July	1.00pm	£30

#### NEWS CONTRIBUTIONS

We would love to hear about your news and any outstanding pupils. Please send all contributions, of no more than 200 words, to [newsletter@tobinmusic.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@tobinmusic.co.uk)

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