



BEYOND THE PLATEAU

Gil Jetley introduces his individually tailored coaching weeks for amateur pianists that take place each summer in the heart of Italy

What motivates a person to commit to seven days of exhausting individual coaching, simply to become a better amateur pianist? It all begins, of course, with a passionate love of the piano repertoire, and the joy of expressing new depths and heights of emotion through one's fingers. This sense of achievement is always underpinned by a feeling of unfinished business – the humility to know you could do better, if only you were able to recover lost skills or extend those that are already mastered.

There are no shortcuts to developing skills on any instrument, but none makes so many demands on time as the piano. And time for piano practice is in short supply for those with busy careers or families to tend. As a result, many amateur pianists find their skills reach a plateau – albeit often an impressively elevated one – beyond which the

constant demands of daily life bar them from progressing further.

At Music Holiday Italy, it seemed that the traditional 'group masterclass' format, though a fun way to meet fellow musicians and an effective tool for fine-tuning pieces, didn't quite satisfy what many amateurs were actually seeking. After all, they are not conservatoire students or budding professionals. What they really hope to find is a key to lift them beyond their personal plateau. This provided the stimulus for launching our 1-on-1 coaching weeks. In fact, demand has proved so strong that we've now abandoned masterclasses altogether, and focus exclusively on our 1-on-1 format.

How much can be achieved in a single week? If only there were a secret shortcut to make you into an instant virtuoso – but there isn't! Strange as it may seem, our aim is not necessarily to ensure that you are able to perform

your pieces better when you leave than when you arrive. If that happens (and it generally does), it's really no more than a satisfying by-product. Instead, four hours each day are devoted to intense, highly concentrated personal coaching, where participants learn to scrutinise technique, delve into relevant theory, probe implications behind the written score, understand the relationship between brain and fingers, and explore new ideas for efficient practising. In short, they discover how to break through that personal plateau of achievement and move on to a higher level of pianism.

The process can be exhausting for both participant and tutor. It's a very different approach to a traditional lesson or masterclass, and as relevant to beginners as it is at diploma level. Concepts explored are often so long forgotten or even unfamiliar; it's unrealistic to expect participants to

succeed in applying them instantly. This is why we aim far higher than merely improving specific pieces. Rather, participants leave understanding just what it takes to get to the next level, and how best to get there in the limited time they have. Enough to do and think about for the coming year certainly, quite possibly enough for the rest of their life!

For me as tutor, perhaps the most rewarding aspect is to see this deeply foundational approach generate a new confidence and motivation in each participant – almost as if they have been presented with the solution to an enigma they've tried to unravel all their adult life. There's a determination to put what they've taken in to good use, an awareness that former barriers to progress were more illusory than real. Best of all they can see new opportunities over the horizon: perhaps a long wished-for diploma, competing in

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an international competition, the chance to perform at an international amateur festival in one of the great concert halls of the world. Or simply to play the music they love in the way they always wished they could.

It's quite common for an amateur pianist to wonder whether such a course is appropriate given their life/work commitments. I would say, definitely yes! If daily responsibilities encroach on your pianistic ambitions, it makes a great deal of sense to know how to make the most of your time. And to the poignant question, 'But is it too late?' the answer is a resounding, 'Never'!

Gil Jetley is Director of
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His teaching spans the globe from UK



to New Zealand. In October he performs Addinsell's Warsaw Concerto with the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra at London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane