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# Team of Pianists at Glenfern

Cnr Hotham & Inkerman Sts  
East St Kilda



Artists-in-Residence

Max Cooke OAM  
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## ***Report on Spring Piano School 2013*** *Monday September 30 to Friday October 4*

This year's Spring Piano School was a five day event at *Glenfern* held in the second week of the Term 3 – Term 4 school holidays.



Gender balance was definitely not a feature of the packed two and a half day *Junior Program!* 22 Primary school age pianists filled this program, but of these 20 were girls and only 2 were boys - the first time since 2004 that the genders have not been evenly balanced! Nonetheless, Michael and Benjamin managed to hold their own and perhaps even enjoyed the attention, as the 22 young people worked through a program of skills development workshops and repertoire group classes, culminating late on the Wednesday morning, in a concert in the Drawing Room and a certificate presentation.

Darryl Coote taught the students how to make the most of their practice time, Prof. Max Cooke OAM introduced them to playing Baroque music on the harpsichord, and guest teacher Peter Hurley had them all composing and improvising, with his presentation *Making it Up – Get Creative at the Piano*. Kevin Suherman was a popular teacher in the repertoire group classes (as witnessed by the evaluation form from one young student who wrote:

*He was so funny... because at the end of session 2 he played famous songs/music and we had to guess what it was and he said "you can't get your lunch until one of you guessed!"(sic).*

The other teachers and I also enjoyed coaching the students, many of whom were preparing for exams, recitals and competitions, on their repertoire. Junior Program students came from many areas - as well as various inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne, we had students from Tarneit, Kialla, Shepparton & Bairnsdale. During the recess and lunch breaks the children were busy in the Glenfern gardens with bike riding, ball games, badminton, getting things down from the trees that others had throw up into the trees, and even pogo stick bouncing!



After staff consultation, 11 Junior Participants were awarded *Friends of the Team of Pianists* scholarships. Many of the parents and students wrote sincere thank-you emails when they learn of their scholarship award:

*please accept our family's heartfelt appreciation to both you and the school.  
....[Student name] did have a wonderful time at the piano school. ...  
This is the first scholarship ...[she] accepts in her career! She feels so excited!*

*Thank you for offering me this scholarship. I am really excited to hear this news.  
The teachers from the Team of Pianists have taught me a lot and I have been  
playing better at piano ever since. I really enjoyed the Spring Piano School and I  
look forward to coming back again....*

The *Senior Program* ran from Wednesday afternoon to Friday afternoon, with a full cohort of 15 students from Melbourne, Benalla, Geelong, Malaysia, Metung, Sale and Bairnsdale. Guest teacher for this program was Marie Cull, an award winning piano instructor from the ACT. At one stage I walked past a teaching room and noticed that her engaging manner had one group of girls all collapsed with laughter! I never did find out what was causing such amusement!

The skills development strand of the *Senior Program* covered my *Mastering the Mystery of Memorization* workshop, Peter Hurley's improvisation and composition workshop (for the youngest group), Darryl Coote's *Make the most of your practice time*, Max Cooke's *Improve your performance of Baroque Music*, as well as group lessons on repertoire with some of these teachers plus Kevin Suherman and Marie Cull. As in the *Junior Program* a recital in the Drawing Room and certificate presentation rounded off the program. While these older students were perhaps not as active on bikes and ball games as the Primary school kids, it was gratifying to see how they supported supported and encouraged each other. Certainly some new friendships were made.



10 Friends of the Team of Pianists scholarships were awarded in the *Senior Program*, on the basis of helping with travel and accommodation - for those coming from outside Melbourne, high ability, working particularly well during the school, and for encouragement. The *Team of Pianists* gratefully acknowledged the generous scholarship donations and financial support of *Spring Piano School 2013* by FOTOPS. This support multiplied the overall value of our unique educational event, by supporting so many students who travelled significant distances to attend. One of the students in the upper secondary group wrote:

*Thank you Friends of Team of Pianists for the scholarship, I am very honoured and grateful to have received such scholarship as it means a lot and encourages me to continue striving towards my musical endeavour. I attended the spring piano school during the school holidays in preparation for my VCE unit 3/4 music performance piano exam. I found the advice from the leading pianists exceptional, as it was my first time experiencing such an event. It was invaluable learning from the pianists, to absorb key ideas and techniques used by the very experienced, and being able to learn how to incorporate it into my own performance.*

Students were not the only attendees at this year's event, each day some piano teachers purchased professional development observer places. At *Glenfern* they could observe, in one day, many different individual teaching styles across a wide range of students with various ages and abilities.

While *FOTOPS* was the most important financial and scholarship sponsor, our invaluable and loyal instrument sponsor *Bernies Music Land*, provided at reduced cost extra pianos in the form of a sturdy and attractive Bernstein H33 upright for the group classes and two Roland digital pianos, which were used excellently used for extra lessons, and individual practice in our upstairs office! The students also viewed a fascinating DVD about the history, development and manufacture of Schimmel Pianos during Lester Cheung's *Bernies Music Land* sponsorship presentation *How Pianos are made*.

Special thanks are also due to two of my Monash University undergraduate students, Christine Walshe and Melissa Kwok, who so ably supported the five days of the school with their administrative assistance, organization, and care for the students and observers. Special thanks are also owing to FOTOPS members, Anne Robertson and especially Greg Brown, for in person support with refreshment catering, organization and and trick bikes for young people (and staff) to ride!

I finish with some amusing evaluations from two of the youngest Junior Participants:

*I learned about how to practice, how to play harpsichord, how to make your OWN music, how to play better at your pieces and always be confident.*

And about various presentations:

*It was interesting and fun...*

*It was strange and interesting...*

*It was very useful...*

*It was helpful...*

*It was very educational...*



Robert Chamberlain  
Director, Spring Piano School 2013  
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