

Welcome to RSL Classical Piano Grade 8

Welcome to the RSL Classical Piano Syllabus 2020. This syllabus is designed to support pianists in their progression from Debut to Grade 8 through an engaging and rigorous pathway. The grade books contain a diverse repertoire selection supported by techniques and musical skills required for success as a classical pianist. For students engaging with contemporary styles such as jazz, rock and pop, we have included improvisation tests from RSL's contemporary piano syllabus, which are an optional alternative to sight reading tests all the way through the grades.

Piano Exams

At each grade you have the option of taking one of two different types of examination:

■ Grade Exam

A Grade Exam is a mixture of music performances, technical work and tests. You are required to prepare three pieces (two of which may be Free Choice Pieces) and the contents of the Technical Exercise section. This accounts for 75% of the exam marks. The other 25% consists of: either a Sight Reading or a contemporary Improvisation & Interpretation test (10%), one Ear Test (10%), and five General Musicianship Questions (5%). The pass mark is 60%.

■ Performance Certificate

A Performance Certificate is equivalent to a Grade Exam, but in a Performance Certificate you are required to perform five pieces. A maximum of three of these can be Free Choice Pieces. Each song is marked out of 20 and the pass mark is 60%.

All elements required to participate in an RSL exam can be found in the grade book. These are as follows:

■ Exam Pieces

The 2020 syllabus includes ten pieces at each grade, selected to give students a fun, engaging and rewarding learning experience. Students may also submit alternative pieces from extended lists, or alternative selections as Free Choice Pieces. Please see the website for more information.

■ Technical Exercises

There are three groups of technical exercises at each grade:

Group A: Scales

Group B: Broken Chords / Arpeggios

Group C: Technical Study

■ Supporting Tests

There are three types of unprepared supporting test in the exam:

1. The first type of test can be one of two options (this is the candidate's choice):

Either:

Sight Reading: developing the musician's ability to read and perform previously unseen material;

or:

Contemporary Improvisation & Interpretation: developing the musician's ability to develop previously unseen material by performing improvised passages of melody or chordal accompaniment to a backing track. These tests are in contemporary music styles, and offer an alternative route for students interested in contemporary music.

2. **Ear Tests:** Candidates are tested on their ability to recall melodic content.

3. **General Musicianship Questions (GMQs):** Five questions asked by the examiner at the end of the exam.

Note: The grade book contains examples the supporting tests – equivalent 'unseen' examples will be provided for the examination.

Prelude And Fugue In C Minor, BWV 847



Composer: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Nationality: German
Source/Date: *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I* (1722)

Prelude & Fugue in C Minor, BWV 847 was composed by Bach for his first prelude and fugue collection, *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I*, which featured compositions in all major and minor keys. Bach later began composition on a second collection in 1739.

Johan Sebastian Bach was born in 1685 to an exceptionally musical family. Having been orphaned at just ten years old, Bach was raised by his eldest brother (who was also a musician) before going on to begin his career as a working organist at just 15 years old. His compositions for organ, piano and strings have become some of the most famous in the world and he continues to be viewed as one of the most influential composers of the 19th century.

Preparation



The underlying harmonic progression within the prelude will help you to make an informed decision regarding your phrasing. A simple way to hear this harmonic framework is to take the notes from each half bar, ignoring the passing notes, and playing each as block chords. Once you can strip back the music to hear the harmonic progression, you will be able to consider shaping each phrase with dynamics, tone and expression.

Once the notes are secure, the opening 24 bars of the prelude can create a useful technical warm-up exercise, experimenting with varying the rhythmic pattern and combinations of *legato* and *staccatos*. As the opening section builds into the dramatic *presto* section, the following *adagio* interlude provides welcome contrast, sounding free and improvisatory in style. Be careful not to rush through the final *allegro*, particularly in placing the C on beat 3 of bar 37, before the final flourish leads us to the picardy third ending.

The fugue introduces the melody, known as the 'subject' in the middle line before the two counter-subjects enter one at a time. As with all contrapuntal compositions, the challenge lies in delivering three independent lines that work together in balance, allowing each line to sing out. The intricate construction of canons and sequences that help to drive the music forward will benefit from rehearsing at a slow tempo and parts in isolation to secure finger patterns ahead of assembly. A useful study technique is to record one part, then play the other along to your recording, allowing you to focus on one part at a time, while shaping and responding to the recorded track.

Performance



A good performance will be technically accurate, well balanced, and with intelligent phrasing. The contrapuntal lines should be phrased as independent voices while also working together with a sense of symmetry and balance. You will notice the lack of phrasing and dynamic guidance within the score, in keeping with the style of music. It is advisable to take time to listen to different performances of the piece and similar works from the same era to help make your own artistic judgements regarding phrasing and expression.

Prelude and Fugue in C minor, BWV 847

Johann Sebastian Bach

Praeludium

The image displays the musical score for the Prelude of BWV 847 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is written for piano and consists of six systems of music. Each system contains a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is C minor (three flats) and the time signature is common time (C). The piece is in a single melodic line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass. The score includes measure numbers 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16. There are some performance markings such as '4' and '2' below the bass staff in the later systems.

Technical Exercises

In this section, you will be asked to play a selection of exercises drawn from each of the groups below. The examiner will be looking for the speed of your response and will also give credit for the level of your musicality.

- Scales and arpeggios (including those from previous grades) need to be played:
 - hands together
 - ascending and descending
 - either legato or staccato articulation (as directed by the examiner)
 - across four octaves (except half-whole and whole tone scales, which must be played over two octaves)
- Candidates must prepare natural minor, melodic minor and harmonic minor scales
- The examiner may also ask for *legato* or *staccato*.
- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. You may use your book for Group C (Technical Studies).
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- Candidates will be marked on tone quality and consistency, maintenance of pulse, and accuracy. Performances slower than the stated minimum tempo may be subject to qualitative judgement by the examiner, according to extent and commensurate with the grade.

Group A: Scales

The minimum tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 176$ bpm.

1. C half-whole diminished scale

Musical notation for the C half-whole diminished scale. The exercise is written for piano in two staves (treble and bass clef). The scale is played in both directions (ascending and descending) over two octaves. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below the notes. The key signature has one flat (Bb).

2. C whole tone scale

Musical notation for the C whole tone scale. The exercise is written for piano in two staves (treble and bass clef). The scale is played in both directions (ascending and descending) over two octaves. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below the notes. The key signature has no sharps or flats.