

Listen to your Hands!

William Coyle

Tasmania: William Coyle Piano Teaching 2007
 ISBN 9780646478500 40 pp
 www.listentoyourhands.com.au
 Reviewed by Rachel Hocking



Back in the day when I sat for piano exams part of the requirements involved playing a chord progression of I, IV, V in the keys of the scales that I had prepared to assist with understanding of basic functional harmony. As time is even more limited these days, exercises such as these sometimes are not part of regular studio lessons or exams. Enter William Coyle's small but sophisticated-looking volume.

Coyle attempts to bridge the gap between sound and feel in an attempt to free the student-musician from the confines of the notated score. Essentially, this method is about grouping known sounds from Western music into chord progressions and identifying them as patterns that can be widely applied. While this is usually covered in theoretical courses, it is not often related directly to the instrument (unless the teacher has knowledge and time to do this) and is even less attempted when the student is at a third grade AMEB level (Coyle's advised level for this).

Coyle's philosophy behind the book is explained in the opening six pages. The course is intended to be used in the first ten minutes of each lesson and practice session, for nine months. Students are asked to rely on muscle memory, reciting the chord labels as they play the progressions. As the title of the book suggests, students are also directed to listen to the way the chord progressions move.

In the book proper, each page consists of at least one lesson with exercises given as music examples with clear written instructions. Coyle recognises the importance of relevance to the

average student and so includes a paragraph or two detailing the benefits of each of the lessons. The method begins with playing the tonics of the entire circle of fifths (major keys) in the right hand, descending. Each lesson increases the harmonic language until the entire circle of fifths can be played as tonic triads. Prerequisite knowledge is required for the understanding of some musical concepts and jargon. More importantly the ear is continuously relied upon to produce the correct intervals and chords, as only the first two progressions per lesson are written out as music notation. As the lessons progress, different triads are introduced, until the student can play in "piano style" (i.e. single note in the left hand, chords in the right hand) a chord progression in every key involving every chord and its inversion within the key and the key's relative minor.

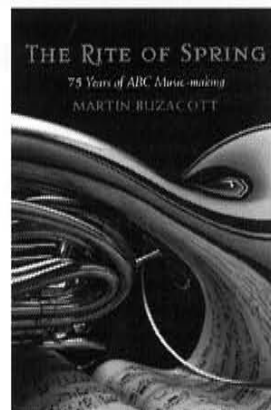
Coyle is hopeful that this method will assist with memorisation and improvisation, and it is up to individual teachers to extend this. The method will also assist with sightreading, analysis, and the realisation of charts. Coyle's method gives students the language on which they can build these vital skills. The price and its potential expiry after nine months could result in a hard sell to students (and more importantly their parents), but for some piano teachers this may be the glue that's been missing from their students understanding of "how it all works".

[Thanks to piano students Carine Ma and Dean Gaffor for trialling this method]

The Rite of Spring. 75 Years of ABC Music-Making

Martin Buzacott

Sydney: ABC Books 2007
 ISBN 9780733318849 487pp
 Reviewed by Elizabeth Silsbury



Warning: Readers will note that there are very few names named in this review. There were so many deserving of mention, I had no idea how to choose, and no wish to suffer the wrath of those omitted. Do it yourselves.

For the first 15 of my 75 (happy birthday to us, me and the ABC) years we had no radio in the house. We all sang and played the piano. When a kind neighbour gave us an old wireless we listened to *Much Binding in the Marsh* and *Gently Bentley*. Music didn't come out of a box. It was to be heard live, at the very point of its making.

To this day, recordings and broadcasts, however faithful, come a poor second to the on-the-spot, unmanipulated, undoctored (well, nearly) honesty of musicians doing their stuff in real time as I watch.

Now, of course, and for the last 50 years at least, life without the ABC would for millions of Australians be immeasurably poorer. The boost in quality to ABC-FM, established in Adelaide in 1976, has undoubtedly increased the discrimination of listeners and challenged the standards of performers.

Martin Buzacott's book is a treasure trove, a goldmine of information, anecdotes and even the odd bit of gossip.

His starting point is the death of Dame Nellie Melba on 23 February 1931, followed by *The Heinze Era 1932-1945*. Politics and politicians, musicians and administrators are woven into the story of how small orchestras became big ones and survived, how dance bands, brass bands and choral groups came under the broadcaster's umbrella and eventually all went.

Himself a respected music critic, Buzacott enlivens what might have been a bald and uninteresting narrative with the artistic verisimilitude of comments such as the "agricultural roughness" of conductor E J Roberts, nicknamed "Shellshock" and better known as golfer than conductor for the National Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra at the inaugural ceremony for the new Australian Broadcasting Commission on 1 July 1932.

Throughout, Buzacott refreshes our memories of the distinguished Australian and international conductors and soloists who have endured sometimes arduous schedules flying around the country and were always expected, and usually managed, to deliver their very best. Pick out your favourites from the comprehensive index and follow their trails and trials. And note the increasing numbers of Australian composers whose careers were supported by broadcasts of their works.

Among the most distinguished is Sir Thomas Beecham. Although he is quoted at length, the story about him quitting a three-hour rehearsal (maybe in Sydney?) after ninety minutes, the second after thirty and cancelling the third, replying to the manager's