

Moving on

*In the following extract from his book, **The Virtuoso Teacher**, Paul Harris discusses how music teachers can keep up-to-date with an ever-changing world.*

Looking outwards

The world is moving faster than ever before. Values and beliefs are changing, and no one simply accepts things without question any longer. We, as Virtuoso Teachers, need to move with it. We can't afford not to.

Moving with it means keeping ourselves up-to-date and we can do that through occasional 'research' – reading pertinent blogs or articles on the internet or relevant magazines, for example. We can only know a fraction of what's actually going on, but the important thing is to know that it is going on.

There are four main areas of which we need to be aware. The first is *Applied Psychology*, which is making use of psychological principles to help understand and deal with some of the issues and problems we might encounter in our teaching. It's an area that has grown enormously over the past twenty years or so and there are now regular conferences, articles (on the internet and in journals) and books devoted to the subject as well as university departments researching into the psychology of music education. Topics such as how the brain processes pitch, rhythm, melody and harmony; how such specific skills are acquired, developed and objectively measured; how we memorise music, and how we develop improvisational expertise are among the many areas under the microscope. Virtuoso Teachers share these kinds of particular interests and they can now be explored further with relative ease.

The second area is *Applied Physiology* which will help broaden our knowledge in treating and using the body to its optimum. One particular area of research is very practical in nature: for example, knowing the best ways physiologically to warm up or how to avoid tendon inflammation when practising. Another is exploring relatively new territories such as how we might access different brain states to deepen creativity and observation on eye movement when thinking.

The third area is *Technological Advance*: how might the internet come to play a part in instrumental or singing teaching? Will we be giving lessons 'online' sooner or later? I've seen a masterclass being delivered where the 'master' was over a thousand miles away from the action, watching and listening to the performers via an internet link. I've seen many lessons where teachers use a laptop or a 'smartphone' as an important tool. One creative teacher had composed some 'sound pictures' in different keys to act as backgrounds to scale playing. It transported each scale into something quite magical – the pupil was entranced and played her scales with a rare focus and enjoyment. Another teacher used a tuner on his phone for a quick 'competition' between two pupils playing long notes. Apps and other online resources are growing by the day.

The fourth area is the *Global Forum* – the ability and desire to share opinions, beliefs and experiences. It's a sobering thought to know that soon after a lesson pupils could, if they so wished, let the world know about it via one of the many networking sites and forums now available.



Moving on

Looking backwards and forwards

There have always been great, enthusiastic and inspirational music teachers of course, but as the number of young musicians has increased (considerably over the past fifty years or so), teaching has often come to rely on less-than-ideal strategies. Too much of it has been driven by immovable external curricula and delivered via an unimaginatively reactive style of teaching.

Nowadays more than ever we need to see teaching as a personalised initiative with each pupil: *here you are, the individual in your world as it is now, this is what I think would help you to realise your musical ambitions and here's a route to take you there.* And the whole package is served up in a much more proactive manner.

Looking inwards

We must also look inwards, into the deep personal values that drive our work. Like the four areas of outward development there are also four qualities that we need to seek.

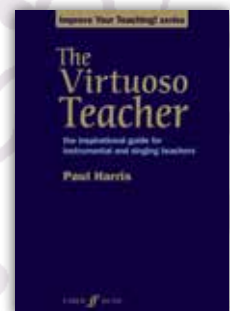
First we need to look for *wisdom*: we need to make the best use of our knowledge, we need to be astute, aware and perceptive and be guided by good judgement and research. We need to develop an ever-deeper understanding of what music is about, its importance and ways to communicate this. Knowledge alone is not enough.

Second, we need to look for *honesty and integrity*: honesty to be true to ourselves and our values; honesty in our motivation – are we teaching because we want the best for our pupils, for music, or for some other, perhaps less lofty, reason? Integrity in telling parents and pupils what is best for them rather than just doing what they want. That also takes ...

Courage, the third quality we need. Courage to change; courage to take risks; courage to be humble; courage to leap into the unknown; courage to teach with passion; courage to be honest. Courage, for example, only to do an exam if it really is right for the pupil (rather than to satisfy the parent or because it's an easy way to teach).

Finally, we need to teach *unconditionally*. We must care about all our pupils whether their abilities will take them to Grade 1 or virtuoso level. We must remember that all pupils have something to offer; we must be equally delighted, prepared and able to teach a beginner as we are someone with phenomenal talent.

For further information about Paul Harris's *Simultaneous Learning approach* read *The Virtuoso Teacher*, published by Faber Music.



Paul Harris has established an international reputation as one of the UK's leading educationalists. As composer and writer he has over six hundred publications to his name, and is in great demand as a workshop leader and adjudicator around the world. Paul's innovative teaching techniques, especially his concept of Simultaneous Learning, have found support all over the world and combine thoroughness, imagination and practicality; the defining qualities of his outstandingly successful work.

This extract is taken from Paul Harris's *The Virtuoso Teacher*, first published by Faber Music in 2012.

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