



Welcome to Matrix and the Junior Music Course!

Traditionally, music is taught as an intellectual activity, often starting with reading music. This is not a suitable approach for children at this age. We start by listening, then singing what we have heard, followed by playing what we sang and finally reading and writing the notes. This natural and musical approach mirrors the acquisition of language skills.

Progression The *Junior Music Course* (JMC) lasts for around three years, with four sets of books. Students can then take the *Fundamental Skills Survey*, and continue on to the *Junior Extension Course* (JXC). We have found that this is a good time for children to take up a second instrument if they wish. The *Junior Advanced Course* (JAC) follows JXC, at which point children start regular individual piano lessons alongside their weekly group lessons.

It is exciting to watch more advanced JMC and JXC children pick up music that they hear around them and teach themselves how to play it – and wonderful to hear JXC and JAC students playing music they have composed themselves! We have now established the Junior Original Concert at Matrix: an annual concert celebrating children's compositions.

Listening All activities in JMC start with listening. Ear training is the most important element of this first course (next to the enjoyment of music, of course!) because of the developmental stage of the children: their extraordinary receptiveness is demonstrated by the ease at which a second language can be taken on at this age. The keyboard playing is therefore just an expression of what the children have already learned through listening and singing activities.



Music Appreciation The three music appreciation pieces in Book 1 have been composed by JMC graduates. This activity is used to teach many things about music (e.g. form, feeling, style, instrumentation etc.) and develops the children's ears to listen more deeply to music. Please enjoy listening to these pieces at home with your child – your teacher will give you something specific to listen out for each week.

Singing Through songs, children learn about different moods, images and many musical points in an enjoyable way. In addition to learning fun songs with lyrics, we sing solfege songs. 'Solfege' is a fixed-do system of notes (that means 'do' is always C, 're' D and so on):

DO RE MI FA SOL LA SI DO

It is a fundamental part of the teaching method, as it is the way that children can learn music as they would learn a language; and it is extremely important for pitch awareness. Listening for the special pitch of each note is a key aspect of JMC: children gain a very good aural ability by the end of the course, often acquiring relative or perfect pitch.

A note about letter names: These are used to describe the key that music is in (C major or A minor and so on) and are introduced more formally in the extension course. We find that children having lessons on a second instrument become happily bilingual!

Rhythm Step This activity encourages children to listen and respond to the rhythm of the music by using different parts of the body. Feeling rhythm and pulse with the whole body results in more musical singing and playing; and rhythm step is also useful in gaining co-ordination skills.

Playing consists of keyboard games, repertoire and ensembles. Keyboard games introduce new keyboard concepts in an enjoyable way, each game having a specific purpose. For example, 'Fly Far Rocket' can teach children many things, amongst others: listening for the cue from the music, playing in time and together with others, concepts of high and low, aspects of performance (quiet at the beginning and end), the different mood of the interlude, and registration (sounds).

Repertoire is the name given to the pieces that the children learn to play and perform. Book 1 focuses on playing with both hands, but not together; this happens in Book 2. As all the playing work is the expression of preparatory listening and singing work, finding the correct note with the correct finger is not the main purpose; *how* the music is played is our goal.



In the lesson The parents' role in lessons is to support the child to respond directly to the teacher, and at home, to be a practising partner. We would encourage you to revisit things at home in a similar way to how they were presented in the lesson. Regular attendance is necessary to keep up with the class.

Concerts We hold an annual concert for the younger courses, where all children have the opportunity to play and sing to family and friends. You are also welcome to attend the other concerts for the more advanced students, giving you a insight into the progression of the courses and giving your child something to aspire to!

Practice Homework is an important part of JMC, as it confirms work done in the lessons, but we never expect children or parents to do anything new at home. Each week listening, singing, writing and playing homework is given, all of which has been covered in the lesson. This consolidation work makes a huge difference to a child's progress if done for a short time (a few seconds at the start) four or five times a week: 'little and often' is the key phrase. It is important to sing with all playing at home as well as in lessons. To make practising more exciting, you could position a CD player near the piano or keyboard to accompany your child's playing. Another way to help is for you to keep up with them when they reach trickier pieces, so that you can play the left hand while they play the right hand and vice versa. Your teacher will give you further practising support once the course starts.

Notation is part of the lesson each week, and a workbook page is given as homework most weeks. When children know how to sing a piece, sometimes you can encourage them to follow the notes with their finger as they sing, but please do not point to the notes as the children play or write the names of the notes in your books, as these things do not encourage musical performances or help with reading skills. The more academic approach of reading is gradually introduced during the Junior Extension Course.

We hope all this is helpful – of course, if you have any questions or worries, always mention them to your teacher, or to our principal teacher, Lindsay MacKenzie. We are keen to support you if you need help with anything and would encourage you to communicate with your teacher about your child's progression.

Enjoy the course!