



Review by Rachel Hocking:

*Mastering the Piano* Levels 1 to 5 from the Lang Lang Piano Academy published by Faber Music (2014).

In this series for elementary to intermediate piano students, Lang Lang's charisma and expertise is effectively used to teach pianistic concepts. Lang is an excellent role model for the modern piano student as his masterclasses and performances are easily accessible on YouTube, and his enthusiasm for his art combined with his showmanship help to inspire the developing musician. This dynamism translates well onto the pages of these series, with many Lang Lang quotes, directions, suggestions and colourful photos scattered throughout each book. Many of the quotes such as "Scales are so important to me. I play them at the start of every practice and always begin slowly!" are worth hearing from musicians of Lang's ability as a reminder that musicians at every level cover the basics, beginners and pros. Lang also refers to well-known artworks which are included in full colour, drawing on these

to promote imaginative interpretation, emotion and expression when playing music.

Each book is divided into eight units with each unit targeting a specific technical goal. Basic technical directions are given by Lang, accompanied by warm up exercises. Three pieces taken from a wide spectrum of repertoire support each unit's goal, adding up to a total of 24 pieces for each book. There are works from the traditional pedagogical composers such as Heller, Faber Music's own Richard Harris and Pam Wedgwood, standard piano repertoire from composers such as Bach, Chopin, Debussy, folk songs, well-known themes, and works by World Music composers. A good range of concepts are explicitly covered with an end goal to acquiring technique that produces musical performances. Over the five books, the units include:- exploring the keyboard; feeling the beat; legato and staccato playing; developing dexterity; playing chords; the left hand; playing with dynamics; hand co-ordination; rhythmic control; phrasing; finger control; strengthening hands; playing in different keys; independent fingers and hands; posture/movement/hand shape; legato pedalling; accompaniment styles; musical context; rubato; instinctive pedalling; refining the touch; character; ornamentation; interpretation and style; and performing. Each piece is preceded by a performance tip from Lang in easy-to-understand language and in some pieces, students are asked to make their own decisions about musical aspects such as phrasing, dynamics and pedalling, encouraging a deeper engagement with the music.

Some of the pedagogical suggestions won't agree with every teacher but there's enough room in the approach for teachers to adjust for their own preferences and/or individual student needs. Additional resources are available at [langlangpianoacademy.com](http://langlangpianoacademy.com) including the Lang Lang app for iPad which accompanies each of these books, providing interactive scores, information about periods and composers, and practising tips. Scales and arpeggios suggested for each level can also be downloaded as a pdf file.

Importantly, Lang's approach aims to foster a love of playing piano. This goes beyond the practicalities of 'how' and extends the 'why', giving purpose to all the hours a student spends on practice. In Lang's own words, "Music moves everyone. Music makes us more mature. Music changed my life and it makes me a more interesting person."

Level 1 ISBN 0571538517 48 pages

Level 2 ISBN 0571538525 48 pages

Level 3 ISBN 0571538533 52 pages

Level 4 ISBN 0571538541 60 pages

Level 5 ISBN 057153855X 68 pages