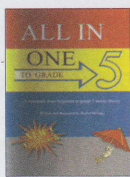


Book review: All-in-one to Grade 5

All-in-one to Grade 5

Rachel Billings

Aaron publications, £16.99



There seems to be an appetite for theory books that take students from having no knowledge to being able to pass the Grade 5 theory exam. Only last year I reviewed another such book for this magazine. Within living memory it was acceptable and appropriate to study and take theory exams sequentially and in tandem with their practical counterparts. It is indicative of the fast world we live in that now there are many scenarios in which it is possible to study music practically without a wide or even sufficient knowledge of its theory. With this in mind, *All-in-one to Grade 5* by Rachel Billings is a welcome addition to theory education.

The All-in-one scheme of work is presented quite differently from most other theory books in that it is divided into three main chapters rather than a dozen different topics. The three chapters, entitled *Notation*, *Time* and *Tonality*, are further divided into *Part One* and *Part Two*. In *Part One* of the first chapter, treble and bass clefs are tackled along with transposition of an octave, which takes the pupil as far as Grade 3. In the second part, the alto and tenor clefs are introduced and there are exercises for transposing an octave.

In the second chapter about time, which is helpfully colour-coded, note and rest values are explored along with simple and compound time. The second part of this section deals with the more complex rhythms such as demisemiquavers, breves, double dots together with quintuplets etc, and irregular time signatures, reflecting the knowledge required for the two higher grades.

Scales provide the backbone for the tonality chapter, which opens with a reference section on major and minor scales, the chromatic scale and technical note names. This reference section applies to every grade and therefore both sections of the chapter. After the reference section, part one follows the previous pattern of dealing with the first three

grades as it looks at accidentals, intervals in major keys, and primary chords in major and minor keys with their inversions. The second part deals with more complex accidentals, intervals and chords.

Finally, these three sections are flanked with what could be a fourth chapter entitled *General Musicianship*, which covers performance directions, ornaments, composition and information on orchestral instruments.

This approach of dealing with notation, time and tonality across the whole body of theoretical knowledge, as opposed to small chunks of information that will hopefully click together like Lego bricks, leads to an integrated scheme of work. Intervals, for example, are introduced on the first page. The idea is for pattern recognition of notes on a staff which, it is explained, will help faster note reading. The author asserts that by recognising an interval from its pattern on the staff it should be easy to read a note in any clef. How eminently sensible! A 2nd is a step, which will be a line and a space or vice versa; the 3rd is a skip, which is line and a line or a space and a space, and so on. The intervals are shown written as music and illustrated with an athlete running over a keyboard just to make the point clearer. The 4th is an uneven jump; the 5th an even jump; the 6th an uneven leap, while the 7th is an even leap, to continue the analogy.

At this point I had a moment of confusion wondering where the names of the notes were going to come in and then I realised that the accompanying *All-in-one Reference Booklet* (£2.99) is supposed to be completed first and used alongside as reference. This additional book is meant for complete beginners and supports the main workbook. Continuing with the main book I could see that counting the interval numbers and then identifying the second of two notes, the first note being named, was another way of connecting into the whole process of reading notation. Mnemonics, such as *Every Good Boy Deserves Football* for the notes on the lines of the staff in treble clef, are only part of the process. I also

reviewed by **Frances Taylor**

like the way in which, throughout the book, simple explanations, such as why it is necessary to know intervals, use good psychology to encourage and inspire pupils.

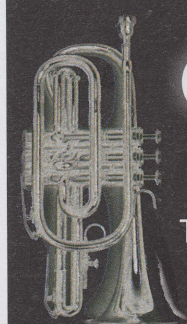
A talented artist, Rachel Billings has illustrated her theory book profusely. I am drawn to the animals, mice and hedgehogs in particular, which lend a Beatrix Potter feel to the book. Some of the other pictures have a slightly retro feel about them, but fans of the children's author and illustrator Shirley Hughes will find them utterly charming. My only niggle is that it would have been fun to have seen a bit of 21st-century life reflected in the illustrations – a mobile phone, an mp3 player or perhaps a computer.

There are also lots of puzzles and games. Note recognition is mostly done through a story in which words are depicted in notation and have to be deciphered for the sense of the story to be revealed – an imaginative touch. Crosswords, anagrams and stories using Italian and French words are really excellent material for making the learning of musical terms enjoyable and successful. The book is worth every penny just for this section alone.

It is also refreshing to have different activities such as in the time section. Rest values are presented as sums, with rests taking the place of numbers. Like the early introduction of intervals this provides another way of connecting into this subject. Instead of only thinking about abstract notation it makes a strong link with number work, which is especially important for younger learners.

The book is always clear, with concise language so that pupils of any age should be able to work through it with minimum dependence on the teacher. Further practice can be achieved with *Supplementary Revisions Booklets* (individually priced at £2.99 or Grades 1-5 at £12.99). This is a book that is well worth investigating, not only for the fast-track approach but because different pupils require different material.

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