A Comparative Analysis of the MTAC Certificate of Merit Program and the Carnegie Hall Royal Conservatory Achievement Program (TAP)

In the United States there has never been a national standard for pre-college music exams. Now with Carnegie Hall Royal Conservatory - The Achievement Program (TAP) a standard is created with practical and theory exams for all instruments, including speech arts, fairly assessed and graded by trained examiners so that the score attained means the same from a small town in the outback as in New York City. The program has actually been available previously under the RACE (Royal American Conservatory Examinations) and NMCP (National Music Certificate Program), and was sponsored by the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, an institution which for 125 years has been dedicated to developing human potential through music and the arts.

In California for years music teachers have embraced the Certificate of Merit, which offers judges from the local music community who are music teachers and who want to work. This program ranges from Preparatory through Grade Advanced and offers differing theory exams for different instruments. Theory exams are taken on the same day as the practical (performing) exam, and ear-training is included in each instrument’s theory exam. Those students achieving high marks in higher levels are invited to play at the state teacher’s convention and eligible for Panel and Young Artist Guild Auditions. Adjudicators are neither subject to intense training nor extensive professional development. This results in a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes a mediocre, average, good or great evaluation.

In the past year, Carnegie Hall has partnered with the Royal Conservatory of Music to create a commonly understood set of standards for students studying music in the U.S., assist parents who wish to better understand their children’s level of performance and musical growth, and support teachers through high-quality professional development and with resources. The Achievement Program, TAP supports all teachers in promoting music study as an integral and fundamental part of human development. Its finely tuned and defined standards have been honed over many years by developing highly trained adjudicators.

The College of Examiners is a group of exceptionally qualified musician/teachers who are constantly monitored, trained and encouraged to give feedback both through aural and especially written critiques. The exam incorporates a comprehensive program of musical development encompassing four main areas: repertoire, technique, musicianship and musical literacy. The musical literacy area is particularly unique among examination criteria around the world. This area supports students in acquiring the theoretical and historical knowledge necessary for music literacy and academic levels are tied to performance levels, reinforcing concepts encountered in repertoire, technique and musicianship studies. Theory exams are not offered at the same time as practical performance exams, but considered a separate discipline of achievement, complementary to practical exams. Students studying various instruments take the same theory exams. These include three levels of Rudiments: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced; three levels of Harmony and History, and Counterpoint in the very advanced levels. Theory exams are not required until students reach Grade Five in their primary instrument. Scoring practical piano exams include levels Preparatory A and B before advancing to Grade One. All other instruments have an Introductory Level with written evaluation.

More than one states teacher organizations, e.g., Ohio, have adopted TAP and integrated it into their exams. As a professional third party, this evaluative program is superb in every way for fairness, completeness and encouragement. Embraced by CAPMT (California Association of Professional Music Teachers) this system of exams is recognized as a superior and fundamental guideline for not only the casual learner but the future of professional musicians, and the representative organization of MTNA (Music Teacher’s National Association). Many teachers in California belong to both the MTAC and the MTNA.

Author’s Biography


She had private studies for eleven years with Professor Emeritus Aube Tzerko of UCLA, pupil of Artur Schnabel, and five years with Leonidas Lipovetsky, pupil of Rosina Lhevinne, Juilliard School.

She spent several years in professional companies as music director, composer, and actress including regional theatres, Actor’s Theatre of Louisville and the Asolo Theatre of Florida.

Kranz is currently the President of La Jolla Conservatory of Music, with its chief advisor Professor Emeritus Bertram Turetzky and advisor, Joseph McNalley, bassist, Founder and Director of Hutchins Consort.

She is affiliated to and as: member of MTAC since 1978, member of MTNA since 2003, CAPMT District I Coordinator for four years, and member of the College of Examiners, Royal Conservatory of Music since 2006.