



All These Exams

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As a life-long music student, I think I deserve a prize from the ABRSM¹ for being one of their most faithful patrons: I sat for Grade 4, 5, 7 and 8 Piano (twice), Grade 8 Singing (twice) and Grade 8 Theory of Music examinations. From these experiences, I can draw one conclusion: performance is a risky business and paperwork is not. That's why Pavarotti spends a few minutes on stage singing with U2's Bono and earns a lot more money than a professor of musicology does in a year.

What's so difficult to control in a performance is the piano, or any other instrument you have to be provided with. Of course, this means almost nothing if you bring your own violin or double bass, but the piano remains the most popular instrument in Hong Kong. I would be all too glad if I could bring my own piano, but for this dream to come true, technology has to progress further. For the present, every piano exam candidate has to put up with the pianos provided in their designated exam centres: pianos with keys which don't bounce back, pianos with a touch too heavy for even the most heavy-duty pile rig... and it takes just a little such discouragement to ruin your mood and screw up the whole exam.

Compared with piano playing, singing is a lot easier. So says a voice student who learnt keyboard for a couple of years, found all his talent exhausted, and switched to the exploitation of the human voice. True, a player of Liszt's *Piano Sonata in B minor* may wish to have ten more fingers to meet the stringent technical demands, but a singer of even Verdi's most powerful arias seldom wants one more mouth or two more lungs.

The human voice is, however, the most unpredictable instrument of all. Even if you take care of it extremely well, an unexpected attack of cold or flu can blow it in one go and mess up your exam schedule. What's more, no matter how excellent your physical form is on the day of the exam, once you enter the exam room, your pulse rate may soar, you may be taken aback by the solemn atmosphere, and then your throat may go dry, and remain so no matter how much water you gulp down. Worse still, while a sip of water is allowed in between titles, you definitely appear awkward if you take sip after sip throughout one single exam. How often do you see a singer drink on a recital stage?

After so much dreary home practice and a nightmarish exam experience finally comes the result slip — either as a reward (if you pass the exam) or as a disappointment (if you don't). The reward can be more than that sometimes: my performance in the Grade 8 Theory of Music exam was so impressive that I was awarded £70, a sum almost equal to the exam fee I had paid.

The ABRSM seemed to understand very well the saying that “money can't buy happiness”, so they sent me a money order issued by a British bank with no known branch in the territory. To cash it, I attempted almost all the major banks here, but none of them was willing to redeem it. That's why this beautiful money order still lies flat in my drawer after seven years!

¹ Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

Without music, life is a journey through a desert.

Pat Conroy



說好普通話

小錦囊 一

法定語文事務部有一普通話癡，為要說好普通話，去年，立定決心，捲起鋪蓋，帶上盤川，上京拜師學藝去！

普通話癡直奔中國傳媒大學播音主持藝術學院。這學院是全國訓練國家級播音員的最高學府，也就是說，是普通話口語訓練的最高權威。教授身懷絕技，他們的耳朵要比一台超聲波探測器還靈，學員的語音毛病就甭想逃過他們的法耳。偵測到毛病，教授用上生動和顯淺簡單的方法，就能輕鬆點撥學員，糾正頑固的發音毛病。普通話癡有幸得到高人指點，願把粗淺的學習心得，編成一套小錦囊，在以後幾期的《文訊》，和大家一一分享，歡迎各方批評指正。

錦囊一 —— 以聽促說

“剛才你的zhi音唸成了zi音，一聲成了四聲，還有ang唸成an了，你聽出來了嗎？”如果曾經有老師這麼跟你說，

可你總是丈八金剛摸不着頭腦，搞不懂怎麼老師說的，你就是聽不出來，那恐怕你在聽力方面，需要多下苦功了。

學語言的，首先聽力必須靈敏，能夠分辨讀音和音調的差異，才能夠知道何謂準確讀音和自己發音是否準確。假如閣下自問具備此條件，那恭喜！你在說好普通話的康莊大道上已昂首踏出第一步。假如你自問這方面條件不足，也無須氣餒，只要你有愚公移山的毅力，堅持每天用心地、有意識地聽標準普通話的廣播、朗讀、演講等，假以時日，聽力還是能靈敏起來的。

所謂以聽促說，聽好才能說好。多聽好的普通話，除了鍛鍊辨音能力，還能豐富普通話辭彙，增強口語能力，而通過潛移默化的作用，也能讓你掌握好普通話的語感和節奏。所以說，別儘自顧自地說個不停了，從今天起，記好了——用心聆聽。