

The Perfect Theatre

The perfect theatre should make you feel as if your presence has made a difference. Going to the theatre, going to any live performance, is an event and the staff need to have a sense of that, too. It's terribly alienating if you feel that it's just any old job for the people working front of house.

The theatre itself needs to create a relationship between the performer and the audience – no one in the audience should feel that they're getting an unreasonably prejudiced view of the actor. It's important that they're not too far away, they can hear, they can see, they can feel in some sense in contact with what's going on on stage. The proportions of an auditorium are important. They have to respond to the human voice and the scale of the human body. If an auditorium dwarfs the human body, there's something wrong with it because you can't deny the human form at the heart of drama. A lot of theatres in the late nineteenth century got it right because they managed to shape an auditorium that somehow embraces the stage.

I like theatres that have a sense of the past in them. Like worn stone steps in a church, you get the sense of layers of human presence. From the point of view of the plays, you can't have something for everybody. You can't second-guess an audience because they don't know what they're going to want to see. When you visit the theatre, you want something done in a way you can't imagine, otherwise you may as well have stayed at home.

- 25 What does the writer regard as being essential from theatre personnel in contact with an audience?
- A an efficient approach to the job they do
 - B treating members of the audience as individuals
 - C a feeling that they too are also performers
 - D fostering a feeling of a special occasion
- 26 Why might the audience lack involvement with a play?
- A They arrive with a negative viewpoint.
 - B They do not have the seats they expected.
 - C They are put off by the design of the theatre.
 - D They fail to relate to the play being performed.

Part 3

You are going to read an extract from a newspaper article. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A–H** the one which fits each gap (27–33). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

Joanna's Lessons

Joanna MacGregor has a hectic schedule as a concert pianist. So why has she added the task of writing books for young children learning the piano?

Even a member of that mythical species, the completely tone deaf, could not fail to be stirred by a Joanna MacGregor performance. Simply to see her zipping around a keyboard grabbing fistfuls of notes at the behest of some unfeasible contemporary score is to watch a pianist pushing the human frame to its limits.

27

How many veterans of the concert hall platform would be floored by such a request? For Joanna MacGregor, though, it was simply a hoot. 'In his eyes, until I played that, I hadn't passed the test. I wasn't a proper pianist.' Needless to say, she sailed through and doubtless logged the experience for her next children's recital.

28

There hardly seems to be a festival this summer she is not gracing. Tomorrow she is in the thick of an all-day collaboration between nine young composers and artists. She runs her own recording label, Sound Circus. And by her own admission, she cannot meet an artist of any sort without being tempted to suggest a joint project. So why on earth take on the extra burden of writing a book?

29

In producing the first three books, MacGregor is drawing on vivid experience. Between the ages of 18 and 25, before she was getting concert engagements as a pianist, she taught a stream of beginners the piano. But most important in her make-up now as a musician who is unsurpassed in the breadth of her eclectic repertoire was the endless procession of small boys and girls traipsing into her childhood home, where her mother taught the piano.

30

Just as everyone should be able to learn how to swim or to speak a smattering of French, so, in her view, should everybody be able to make a stab at learning the piano. Some kids have a flair and make rapid progress. She is fascinated by the others: those who chug along at varying rates of progress, enjoying it for a while, but all too often giving up. This falling off happens at any stage. Some kids find the beginning too frustrating. Others rebel further down the line when the stakes get higher and parental pressure is driving them 'to be like those children on the telly'.

31

The production of her own training manual begs an obvious question. Does she have a poor opinion of the existing corpus of tutor books, or indeed of the general quality of piano teaching? 'I'm very reluctant to criticise other people's teaching or others' tutor books,' she says. What she does do is readily accept that her books, colourful and eye-catching though they are, are by no means the only books on the market designed to make the first steps enjoyable.

32

'You have to allow them to improvise and give them a reason to play at either end of the keyboard and on the black notes and use the pedals.' As progress is made, bigger obstacles loom. Children need to be coaxed quite hard to read the music rather than rely on ear. Having relied for so much of her own childhood on her very keen ear, MacGregor has considerable sympathy on this score.

'I have enormous sympathy with people who find it difficult. I don't think people talk about it enough.' The

secret, whether you do it for twenty minutes or five hours, is to work out beforehand what it is you are aiming to do, she says. Other tips: treat yourself – play the whole piece through, however many wrong notes. And mix hard with easy.

- A** MacGregor is rare among top-flight concert pianists for the interest she takes in how young children learn the instrument. She has just published her own elementary piano tutor for children: *Joanna MacGregor's Piano World*. And she has managed it despite a crippling work schedule.
- B** But she believes the single most important factor is practice. How can children be persuaded to play a passage even once again, let alone many times over? She admits to not having practised rigorously until she went to the Royal Academy of Music, where she began building up a contemporary repertoire whose formidable difficulties demanded practice. Now she loves it. The eight hours a day that she gets through are the core of her musical life, she says, more important than performances.
- C** 'Not only was I fiddling around at the keyboard, but there were all these other children of all backgrounds wanting to play every sort of music – bits of classical, jazz, pop, improvisation. I wasn't part of that hothouse thing of forcing exceptional talent. I grew up with the idea of trying to make music available to people of all abilities.'
- D** Her own special wheeze for luring these neophytes, the fives, sixes and sevens, through those bewildering times is to weave a storyline into the books and their accompanying CDs. The challenge at this fragile stage is to make the work interesting. And so, from lesson one, there are accompaniments in a variety of styles for teacher – or parent – to play beneath a child's line. For kids whose parents aren't pianists the accompaniments are recorded on the CDs. Learning should be unadulterated fun, MacGregor insists.
- E** But even her dazzling virtuosity was not enough to wow one small boy at a recent concert she gave for kids. Like the rest of the audience, he had been cascaded with bits and bobs of pieces in every style from her vast repertoire of classical, jazz, ragtime, blues, techno, African, etc. He'd coolly watched her dive under the lid of the concert grand to pluck the wires – normally a surefire knockout for kids. Then as she drew breath and invited questions, he piped up: 'Can you play *Match of the Day*?'
- F** And so the odyssey begins. It's a long journey but the first task for the young enthusiasts is easy, find the Cs – they're always to the left of the two black keys. In Book 2, the characters fall inside the piano and open up opportunities for making a whole lot of weird noises. Something parents, unlike MacGregor and the youngsters, may find a strain on the eardrums.
- G** 'I worry that some people use music, like sport, as a way of making their children achieve things, rather than just saying: it's music, it's there to enjoy. The reason children fall by the wayside is because they feel they are not going to match up to their parents' expectations.'
- H** 'People who know me are clearly surprised. But I think the very first lessons are absolutely crucial. It says a lot about the music profession that we tend to concentrate on the top end, on this idea of the child as nascent virtuoso. Most people's interest in music is much more ordinary and everyday. I find that far more interesting.'

Part 4

You are going to read an extract from a novel. For questions 34–40, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

We are talking Big Boots here. Really BIGTIME Boots.

I stood in my 800-dollar-each designer-label cowboy boots on the rocks of an old formation in the Arizona desert sand. Money no object. I wore the whole truly cowboy outfit and if *you* had the outfit you might be a cowboy. But I was not. It wasn't working. I squinted into the morning sun looking out at the Arizona mountains and I had to admit, I was not at home on the range.

Flying in from Denver just after dawn, I had the feeling that I just might pass for an ol' cowhand coming in from the sky. The feeling didn't last past the first real cowboy in the luggage hall of Phoenix airport. He was wearing a sweat-stained T-shirt, needed a shave, and was hoisting a dirty canvas bag off the conveyer belt when he caught sight of my brand new cowboy boots. He slowly raised one eyebrow and moved off out of the door without looking back.

There ought to be, somewhere, hanging in a closet, a suit of clothes an ex-racing driver can put on without feeling like he is from another planet. Something he could wear so that wherever he goes he doesn't get the feeling that everybody is talking another language and doing whatever they do at half speed. I liked, no, not liked... I flatout *loved* being a racing driver, driving racing cars. I am addicted to it and it is all I know how to do. But I don't do it any more. I couldn't if I wanted to. Question is, I thought, looking into the mean, rust-coloured rock of the mountains in the distance, what do I do now?

A racing driver should have one or two fall-back identities lined up for when he climbs out of his car. I thought I did, but when I reached for them they just disappeared. How about: an ex-racing driver adds colour to the commentary direct from the trackside? 'We got fifteen guys, all of them former Indy and Formula One drivers, fifteen guys in front of you, Forrest, standing in line to be colour commentators. We'll call you.'

Well then, how about: an ex-racing driver joins a partnership to sell classic cars? That lasted nearly all winter with phone calls, lunches, lawyers and meetings with bankers. But it was the year nobody was buying old Ferraris and Honda was 'reviewing' its dealer list. So in the end I gracefully withdrew before there was nothing to withdraw from. Being an 'ex' anything is depressing work. I mean you tell me; how badly do you want to hear about how I was almost the World Champion? Nobody wants to hear a story that ends in 'almost'. And even if I had been world champion you could probably just about stand to listen to the story for five minutes before your ears turned to cement. Last year's champion was last year.

Not that I want sympathy. Which is just as well, since I don't get any. Well, why should I? I had a good run, made money and hung on to enough. But oh, man, I miss the heat of slipping into that graceful, elegant, shrink-wrapped super-tech machine with seven hundred horsepower behind my neck. Zero to a hundred and fifty miles an hour in 4.9 seconds. And yes, I miss coming within an eyelash of killing myself every race or so. I miss the bright and gorgeous people and the reporters who acted as if what I said mattered. Being famous, even in a minor way, isn't all bad. Businessmen and politicians bragged to their friends that they knew me. Little boys slid under fences to get my autograph. And now that I don't drive a racing car... Only last week the phone rang twice. I have time in the morning and I have time in the afternoon. And let me just check, but I think tomorrow is free. So much empty time.

I looked up into the soft blue morning sky. No buzzards overhead. Maybe Arizona doesn't have buzzards. But a couple of little brown birds in a saguaro cactus just in front of me were giving me advice; something like 'get away from our nest before we sing our hearts out'. It had never occurred to me that the desert had songbirds. It did occur to me that a bogus cowboy in designer boots had a lot to learn.

- 34 How did the cowboy at Phoenix airport react to the narrator's appearance?
- A He was shocked.
 - B He was unimpressed.
 - C He was angered.
 - D He was disturbed.
- 35 According to the narrator, ex-racing drivers in the company of others feel a sense of
- A superiority.
 - B pride.
 - C alienation.
 - D failure.
- 36 The narrator did not get the first new job he tried for because
- A he was not so well qualified as others.
 - B his contacts had misinformed him.
 - C he applied at short notice.
 - D his experience was not unique.
- 37 Why did the narrator give up selling cars?
- A He could see the future of the operation was bleak.
 - B He did not enjoy the constant entertaining involved.
 - C He felt unequal to the demands of the job.
 - D He did not feel comfortable as a salesman.
- 38 When the narrator was a racing driver, he
- A enjoyed having his opinions respected.
 - B was embarrassed by the attention he received.
 - C used his position to make influential contacts.
 - D had occasional fears for his personal safety.
- 39 What impression does the narrator try to create by using the phrase 'And let me just check' in the penultimate paragraph?
- A that he regrets finishing as a racing driver
 - B that he is not open to new opportunities
 - C that he has a busy schedule
 - D that he is not enjoying life
- 40 As he looked at the birds on the cactus, the narrator
- A came to terms with his new life.
 - B realised the extent of his ignorance.
 - C felt apprehensive about making a new start.
 - D decided this was not the place for him.