

## 7. How to choose a music teacher for your child

As parents, there is nothing more frustrating and annoying than hiring the wrong music teacher (MT) to teach your child. Every month, you pay a few hundred dollars to a MT to teach your child a musical instrument. After some time, you may notice very little improvement in your child's playing. You may also notice that your child has been playing the same pieces over and over again, or that your child is struggling with the instrument. But the MT still sings praises of your child, telling you how talented your child is. You could sense that something was not quite right, but you don't know exactly what.

With so many MTs out there, what major qualities should parents look out for?

### A. Qualifications + Background

Always check the qualifications and background of the potential MT beforehand as a MT will either make or break a student.

A MT who can teach well may not be able to play well, and a MT who can play well may not be able to teach well. The ideal is to have a MT who can teach well and play well.

When looking for a MT, find out how qualified the MT is, such as, is the MT a Grade 8 certificate holder, or a Diploma, Degree or Masters / PhD / Doctorate holder?

Having a Diploma, Degree or PhD does not guarantee that the MT would be able to teach well, or even teach at all, but having these qualifications does more or less ensure that the MT has a higher chance of knowing the fundamentals well enough to teach accurately. When in doubt, Google Search for more information on the MT. Ask around and find out as much about the MT as possible before deciding whether or not to hire him. This will save you plenty of time and money.

### B. Experience + Fees

Parents have to ask: How many years has the MT been teaching? How experienced is the MT in teaching a particular instrument or a particular level? How much are the fees?

A young piano teacher in his mid-twenties recently returned to Singapore from the USA with a Masters Degree. With hardly any teaching experience, he immediately charged \$150 per hour per lesson. His reason for this high rate was that he had a Masters Degree.

Similarly, a young cellist who recently graduated from XXX conservatory charges \$200 per hour per lesson, simply because she is a full-time musician with XXX orchestra. It is unbelievable how she can charge such a high rate when she has yet to prove herself as a capable and responsible teacher.

Remember Point A?

Having impressive credentials does not guarantee that the MT is able to teach well. An "expensive" MT does not equate to an experienced and good teacher. Parents must not judge how good a MT is by the rate he charges.

### **C. Teaching Method**

Every MT has his own teaching method. It is important to note that one size does not fit all, meaning that a good MT will not use one teaching method to teach every child. He has to look at your child's strengths and weaknesses and decide on the best approach to teach your child.

He also has to take into consideration your child's character. Is your child able to take criticisms? Is your child so sensitive that a little criticism will send him crying? For the former, a stricter and more direct approach could be used. For the latter, softening the words and attitude would be more appropriate.

Besides, a good MT will do his best to get to the root of any problem your child faces, and will do his best to solve it.

Please ensure that the MT teaches your child more than three exam pieces a year. Playing only three pieces a year is very boring. Even if your child were to score a Distinction for the exam, it does not mean anything if all your child ever did was to play three pieces for the entire year.

### **D. Sensitivity**

"Sensitivity" means how quickly the MT is able to detect your child's mistakes.

When your child is playing for a potential MT during the initial meeting, observe what the MT says and does. Does the MT keep quiet and say nothing much, or does the MT point out immediately mistakes made by your child? After showing your child the correct way to play the piece, does your child play better or worse?

Ability to detect your child's mistakes immediately shows that the MT is alert. Some MTs may allow your child to finish playing the piece before pointing out the mistakes. This is ok too. Most importantly, the MT must be able to pinpoint mistakes accurately and quickly.

### **E. Responsibility**

A responsible MT ensures that your child has lessons regularly, and that your child makes constant progress. He will not "disappear" for a few weeks nor will he ask an "assistant" to take over his teaching job.

There is an exception if, right from the start, the MT tells you that he would be travelling overseas often to perform or conduct masterclasses, and your child may have to miss lessons once in a while. Are you ok with this? If yes, hire him. If not, look for someone else who is able to give regular lessons to your child.

### **F. Ability to demonstrate**

A competent MT will be able to demonstrate on the instrument for your child. He doesn't need to be as proficient as a world-class performer, but he should at least be able to demonstrate well enough to bring the message across to your child.