

# Working Week

## MONDAY

8.20 a.m.: What better way to start the week than with a class of 5 year-old violinists and their parents? *Little Violins* introduces technique through games and playing by ear; this year's group are progressing beautifully and are a delight to teach.

Class over and it's time to pack my box of tricks and move to the playground yurt for parent and toddler music, set up this term to encourage local families to discover our small and wonderful prep school. The parents particularly enjoy singing 'Morningtown Ride' as we pretend we are on Prokofiev's train travelling to his 'Winter Bonfire'. The toddlers love building the bonfire with sticks and cooking pretend sausages on it as we sing '3 fat sausages'.

My coffee break is spent assembling the much-needed new music stands that have just arrived, and afterwards I am plunged into an intensive set of lessons with Nursery, Reception and Year One. Highlights include tiny 3 year-olds confidently using Italian terms and identifying major and minor keys, and Reception children reading their first rhythms from the giant music stave. Ten minutes to grab a quick lunch before my lovely string ensemble descend on me; all of the members started off in the Little Violins and it is wonderful to have witnessed their progression from tentative rhythms on one string to beautiful bowing and a developing vibrato.

1 pm and I'm finished at St Joe's; a quick dash to the supermarket as I realise that I have a couple of extra teenagers to feed tonight, then just a few minutes after I get home the doorbell rings announcing the arrival of one of my adult piano pupils. I teach about ten adults at the moment, all with different reasons for learning: some are newly retired and want to learn a new skill or rekindle an old one (one lady hadn't played for 50 years!); others are working professionals or busy mums who enjoy the contrast that playing the piano gives to the rest of their lives. All, however, share the same complete dedication and determination to progress -and the same self-depreciatory mindset ('I'm rubbish at this!'), so my main job is to encourage and inspire.

The rest of the day flies by in a whirlwind: nursery pick-up, two teenage pupils, tea, bath and bed for my 3 year-old, another two pupils. I resist the urge to flop into a chair and go out to the gym, rewarding myself with a sauna afterwards.

## TUESDAY

Back to St Joe's for a morning of peri violin and piano lessons followed by my lunchtime Music Theory Club. As an ABRSM theory examiner I am well aware of the danger of theory being 'taught to the test', and try to make sessions fun, practical and above all relevant to instrumental learning. Today the children run around the room in a race to collect pairs of cards showing keys and key signatures, then jump out scale patterns and intervals on the giant floor piano. A quick turnaround again at home as two more adult pupils are due, one of whom is new- I feel immensely privileged to be giving a lovely 71 year-old man

his very first piano lesson. I reassure him that his fingers will soon start to do what he wants them to instead of flying up in the air every time a key is pressed. Before long my mother-in-law arrives, not just to look after my little one but also to have her own piano lesson- it must be something in the water... Five young pupils ensue, then a quick dinner, two teenagers and another adult; finishing at 9.30 p.m. I work out that I have taught 17 lessons today. I am always aware that for each pupil this is their special and very important time, and try to give the same amount of energy and input to every one. No surprise that I fall into bed feeling rather drained.

#### WEDNESDAY

Something of a quiet day- hooray! It is spent with my 3 year-old, playing, doing some homework, taking him to swimming. He has just started Suzuki piano lessons and we have a little practice. I don't teach Suzuki myself but have always been interested in the method and its benefits for developing technique and tone. I conclude that the process will be just as useful to develop my patience as much as his piano skills- by the end of the session the piano is covered in toy dinosaurs and an assortment of vehicles. Only four pupils this evening but a complete mixture of instruments and standards which keeps me on my toes.

#### THURSDAY

Back to St Joes again for six peri lessons, then 2 adults and 7 youngsters at home- phew! One teenager is working on a programme of Nocturnes for her A-level recital, one of which is unfamiliar to me so I have embarked upon the learning process with her; it is good to have something to practise that isn't yet another exam accompaniment and I am enjoying it immensely.

#### FRIDAY

Usually a very quiet day at home unless it is a theory marking period, but today the whole family is travelling to London to watch our eldest daughter in her performing arts college graduation showcase. She had to give up music to focus on dance but in one number plays a Bach cello suite to accompany the dancers; wonderful evidence that musical skills are never lost and lessons never in vain.

#### SATURDAY

A lovely family day, the house springing to life with teenagers coming and going. To add to the madness I have an extra lesson with a violin pupil who is auditioning for a music scholarship next week (she is given a special violin award so I am thrilled!). In the afternoon I visit a lady who is in a wheelchair and can't come to me for lessons. She does extremely well in her first piano lesson and is great fun to teach.

#### SUNDAY

I play the hymns in church- we use Gadsby's original hymnbook and the 4-part harmony and antiquated time signatures are a world away from everything I have been playing during the week.

A roast dinner and a spot of gardening in the afternoon, but all too soon it is time to turn my thoughts to the coming week, check my planning and pack my bags for another manic Monday.

**About me: I am an Early Years music specialist at St Joseph's in the Park school in Hertingfordbury, Herts, freelance piano and violin teacher and ABRSM theory examiner. I have four children between the ages of 3 and 21.**