

Music

Preparing for Year 12

The A Level Music course is very similar to the GCSE course – Performing, Composing, and a Listening exam based on set works.

However, there are a lot more set works to cover in A Level and the level of theory needed to be comfortable with the course is higher.

Theory

The best preparation you can do for A Level is to brush up on your music theory. Even if you have passed Grade 5 theory, regular practice of certain exercises (key signatures, intervals, score reading) will be a huge help when it comes to accessing the curriculum at A Level.

I've attached a number of sample theory papers from different grades for you to try to work through – do what you can.

You could also work through the graded ABRSM theory workbooks which are available online.

I also recommend these books published by ABRSM:

[AB Guide to Music Theory 1](#)

Covers the basics of music theory with examples and exercises. It's a handy go-to guide which could support preparation for A Level.

[AB Guide to Music Theory 2](#)

Covers the more advanced aspects of theory, such as harmony and instrumentation. Very useful for supporting the more advanced and unfamiliar musical ideas found in the course.

Set works – Film Music

The first category Miss Hughes will start with is Film Music, and the first score you look at is to a 2008 film called *The Duchess*. You will also look at 6 short cues from Rachel Portman's score and it's a (relatively!) easy score to access and understand.

Preparation work:

- Read up about the film and the storyline – watch it if you can!
- Research Rachel Portman

- Look at other film music that was released in 2008. Which film scores were nominated for Oscars that year? Listen to a few tracks from 2008 scores and appreciate how diverse they were. In particular, [Slumdog Millionaire](#) and [The Dark Knight](#)

Listening to *The Duchess*

Listening to extracts from the score will refresh your analysis skills ready for A Level. Have a listen to the music over the [opening titles](#). This is the first of six cues we will study.

- What instruments are used in this cue?
- How would you describe the tonality and mood of this music?
- Why does this music suit a film set in the 18th century?
- How would you describe the main melody?

See if you can identify one musical feature from all of these categories in the extract:

Harmony Melody Tonality Texture
Rhythm/Metre/Tempo Structure Instrumentation

Set works – Popular Music and Jazz

With Mrs Choudhury, you will start by studying *Popular Music and Jazz*, specifically a mid to late 20th century British musician called Courtney Pine. His albums combine jazz and contemporary popular music, ranging from early bebop and experimental avant-garde.

In particular, we will study his album *Back in the Day* (2000), which was produced, engineered and mixed by Pine himself.

We will be listening to and analysing **3** songs from the album:

- [Lady Day and \(John Coltrane\)](#)
- [Inner State of Mind](#)
- [Love and Affection](#)

What to listen for:

Instrumental combinations

Fusion of different styles – which styles are being fused?

Can you identify key features of the styles you mentioned above?

Structure

Role of backing vocals (when included)

Wider listening

Listen to further examples of jazz from different periods and different styles. Cornet player Bix Beiderbecke's 1927 album *Jazz Me Blues* and double bassist Charles Mingus' *Blues and Roots* (1959) both show some of the developments in jazz in the 20th century. The rapping of Jay-Z on *The Blueprint 3* (2009) could provide a comparison of different rap styles.