

Subject on a page: Music



In a nutshell:

A Level Music helps you understand and explore the role music plays in the world, from classical symphonies to modern film scores. You'll develop practical performance skills, compose original music, and analyse a wide range of styles including Western classical, popular, and global traditions.

The course builds musical understanding, creativity, and independent thinking—skills that are valuable in higher education and creative industries. You'll also improve your ability to listen critically, communicate effectively, and perform with confidence.

Whether you're continuing to study music or pursuing it alongside other subjects, A Level Music supports your growth as a thoughtful, capable musician.

In Music we:

- Explore and Create Music:** Learn through performing, composing, and analysing music using notation software, audio tools, and collaborative rehearsals in both solo and group settings.
- Work Like a Professional Musician:** Compose and rehearse for real audiences, mirroring industry practice while developing creativity, organisation, and collaborative skills.
- Coursework-Focused Assessment:** 60% is coursework: 30% performance, 30% composition. You'll receive structured support and deadlines to refine your musical work.
- Build Industry-Relevant Skills:** Strengthen your creativity, critical thinking, and independence—skills valuable in music performance, education, production, and academic study.

Think like a musician:

- Understand Your Audience**
Consider listeners' emotions and needs; music connects and communicates beyond just sound.
- Purposeful Composition**
Every piece solves a creative challenge; ask what you want to express.
- Iterative Development**
Compose, revise, and refine through multiple drafts to improve your music.
- Musical Storytelling**
Use melody, harmony, rhythm, and dynamics to guide and engage listeners.
- Constraints as Creative Challenges**
Limitations inspire creativity and unique solutions within boundaries.

Write and talk like a musician:

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| 1. Hemiola | 11. Monothematicism |
| 2. Neapolitan chord | 12. Extended harmony |
| 3. Tierce de Picardie | 13. Retrograde inversion |
| 4. False relation | 14. Polyrhythm |
| 5. Tritone | 15. Stretto |
| 6. Augmentation | 16. Parallel motion |
| 7. Diminution | 17. Recitative |
| 8. Functional harmony | 18. Circle of fifths |
| 9. Modal inflection | 19. Through-composed |
| 10. Chromaticism | 20. Pedal point |

Read like a musician:

- 1. Foundations of Composition**
Book: The Study of Orchestration by Samuel Adler
Why: A comprehensive guide to how instruments work together in composition. Covers texture, timbre, and effective writing for different ensembles. Useful for learning how to shape musical ideas with clarity and depth.
- 2. Engaging an Audience in Performance**
Book: The Art of Performance: A Guide for Musicians by Heidi Westerlund & collaborators
Why: Explores the psychology of live performance, stage presence, and emotional communication. Helps students think beyond technique and into expressive delivery.
- 3. Score Analysis**
Book: The Complete Musician: An Integrated Approach to Tonal Theory, Analysis, and Listening by Steven G. Laitz
Why: Offers detailed analytical techniques, especially around harmony, voice leading, and form. Supports deeper understanding of set works and unseen scores.

Revise like a musician:

- Use your knowledge organisers
- Complete mind-maps and make flashcards for each key theory topic.
- Make clear annotations on your score to use throughout the course, and when you're revising.
- Practise planning and writing, longer style responses for Unit 3 exam.
- Practise past paper questions
- Keep listening - AO4 context is vital!

Experience it like a musician:

- Stay Current** – Follow music news, emerging composers, and performance trends (BBC Music Magazine and Gramophone are good starting points).
- Attend Live Performances** – Go to concerts, recitals, and festivals to experience repertoire in context and observe performance practice.
- Watch Music Documentaries** – Explore how composers, performers, and producers think and work. Try platforms like YouTube and BBC iPlayer.
- Listen to Music Podcasts & Talks** – Find composer interviews, performance masterclasses, and discussions on music history (e.g. BBC Sounds, Listening Service).

Become a musician:

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| 1. Composer | 12. Film/Game/TV Composer |
| 2. Performer (solo or ensemble) | 13. Arts Administrator |
| 3. Music Teacher (primary, secondary, or private) | 14. Musicologist (academic research and analysis) |
| 4. Music Therapist | 15. Music Journalist/Critic |
| 5. Sound Engineer | 16. Choir Director |
| 6. Music Producer | 17. A&R (Artist and Repertoire) Representative |
| 7. Orchestrator/Arranger | 18. Music Librarian |
| 8. Accompanist | 19. Recording Artist |
| 9. Conductor | 20. Instrumental Technician (e.g., piano tuner, luthier) |
| 10. Session Musician | |
| 11. Music Director (e.g., for theatre or film) | |