

# music

A Level

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Exam board: Pearson Edexcel



## What is this subject about?

Music students have the opportunity to study in a purpose built centre with access to; industry standard recording facilities and equipment, technician support, rehearsal and performance spaces and a computer suite.

Music is a dynamic, creative, challenging, and exciting subject which draws on the experiences and knowledge you will have gained at GCSE and from years of learning, practicing and performing on an instrument. You should be a musician who is interested in all aspects of listening to music, reading musical scores and playing music in solo and ensemble settings. You will enjoy studying and learning about a wide range of music in its context, period and style and its impact on the history and development of musical genres. There are three components: Performing, Composing, and Listening and Analysis, which involves studying a given set of scores.

## What will I study over the two years?

The first year comprises solo and ensemble performing, for coursework and for concerts; composing to a set brief, music theory and harmony in the form of SATB part-writing; listening to and analysing familiar and unfamiliar music, using an anthology of scores.

The first year set works include vocal works by Bach, and Mozart's 'Magic Flute', symphonic music such as Vivaldi's 'Concerto in D Minor', piano music by Clara Schumann, film music by Danny Elfman and Rachel Portman, modern music by Debussy and John Cage, and popular music by Kate Bush and Courtney Pine.

The second year will cover extended performance skills, in the form of a recital; two compositions (one to a formal brief, one techniques paper) using a range of techniques and harmonic styles; extended listening techniques, including dictation and chord identification; and analysis of set scores, demonstrated through evaluative and analytical essay writing.

The second year set works include songs by Vaughan Williams, Berlioz's 'Symphonie Fantastique',

The Beatles, Bernard Hermann's score for 'Psycho', Anoushka Shankar's 'Breathing Under Water' fusion, and Stravinsky's 'Rite of Spring'.

## How is the course assessed?

**Performing (30%):** This is assessed through a final recital performance to an audience. You can play a solo, duet, trio or quartet but must have an undoubled part. If music is written to be accompanied you must perform it with the accompanist, either as a backing track or live accompanist.

**Composing (30%):** You will submit a score and a recording of your work. Your score can be a traditional musical score, a lead sheet or a series of screen shots, if composing using music technology. You will also complete a harmonisation of a chorale melody in the style of Bach using four-part harmony. This will be a 3 hour exam in the first year and a 6 hour exam in the second year.

**Listening and Appraising (40%):** This is assessed in a written exam paper where you will undertake

questions which assess your aural and listening skills, and some essay based questions. The composition exam is a controlled assessment as are the performance recitals. There is also a 2 hour written exam.

### **What skills will I need for this course?**

Skills needed include a minimum of Grade 5 performance standard on any instrument, fluent notation reading skills to the level of ABRSM Grade 4 music theory, creative skill in order to compose and annotating skills in order to take notes on the Anthology set work pieces you will be analysing. A broad knowledge of music and a desire to listen to a wide range of music from different periods, styles and genres and basic keyboard skills are also helpful.

### **What can the course lead to in terms of higher education and future careers?**

Many employers are interested in Music for its artistic and creative aspects, which can lead potential employees into fields such as media and marketing. Other careers stemming from the study of music are teaching, professional performance and studio-based work including sound engineering (although you may need to undertake relevant work experience or particular studies to secure studio work).

Music at degree level is incredibly varied from institution to institution, so it is necessary to consider which element of music you want to pursue. Some courses focus largely on performance, some on composition, some on academic, analytical and historical study and some on popular music, jazz and world music styles. If, for example, you love performance but you're not keen on academic music, you might want to apply for a performance diploma at a music college rather than a degree. If you're not a strong performer but you enjoy analysis, a traditional university may have a course which suits this balance. If you want to compose music for film and television there are specific universities which offer such course options. There are many career opportunities in the music industry for music composers, song-writers and those with creative flair.

### **What are the formal entry requirements for this course?**

Aside from the general entry criteria that the College requires, you will also need to achieve a minimum of:

- Performance at a minimum level of Grade 5 (you don't have to have taken the Grade 5 exam, but you have to be able to perform at that standard)
- The ability to read standard notation, NOT just tab or other notation.
- We would ideally expect you to be up to the standard of Music Theory Grade 5. The opportunity to take this examination will be offered in the first year to

anyone without the qualification, but you must have already spent a significant amount of time studying ABRSM Grades 1-4 Theory of Music.

### **Do I need Music GCSE to study Music at A Level?**

The skills demanded for A Level are very similar to those required at GCSE, but Music GCSE is not a requirement to take the course. What is important is that you take note of the formal requirements detailed above, and undertake some music composition work over the summer prior to beginning your studies. It is very useful to have followed a Music GCSE course however as you will understand the three strands required in Music education.

### **What extra support/enrichment activities are on offer?**

Music is delivered in a new purpose-built centre allowing students access to recording and practice facilities. There are regular concerts, facilitating both solo and ensemble performance, choir, concert band, jazz groups, contemporary bands and the opportunity to form smaller ensembles. There are a number of trips including the chance to attend Opera, Symphony Concerts, Musicals, Folk and Jazz Events. There are also yearly workshops on composition and performance techniques led by professionals in their field. Students have access to computers running Sibelius, Logic, Cubase and Protools to assist with composition coursework completion. Additionally we take students out for performances in the wider community at Christmas and in the summer term.

### **Subject combination advice:**

In view of the creative element entailed in Music, it may suit partnership with English, Art and Social Science subjects. However, Music is the sort of course you take because you have a long-held interest in it, so many students tend to opt for it purely on that basis and is not dependent on which other subjects they are choosing. Music can be taken with BTEC Music Technology as the two subjects complement each other well.

### **What is the difference between Music and Music Technology?**

In Music we study music from all periods of history, perform, compose and develop listening and analysis skills. Whilst we use studio equipment to record performances and music software to work on composition, we do not study the technical side. Music Technology involves the study of sound recording equipment and methods of studio recording and sequencing with some music elements, whereas the ICT element of Music is really a by-product of the course requirements.