

# Music A Level

Board: EDEXCEL, Specification 9MU0

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## Why choose Music?

Music is a subject that combines practical work with academic study of different styles of music. If you have an interest in music and sing or play an instrument what better way to improve your skills and deepen your understanding than to study music at A Level? Universities look favourably at students with musical skills and A Level music is a highly regarded A Level. The A Level music course will give you the opportunity to develop your performance and composition skills and improve your theoretical knowledge whilst gaining a qualification. It is possible to take both Music and Music Technology at A Level and each year several students opt to do so.

## The course

The course involves performing, composing, listening and analysing. You will improve your skills in performing, compose in different styles have access to Sibelius, Reason and Cubase software for composition work. In addition to this, you will analyse and listen to a wide variety of music to develop a more informed appreciation of how and why it was written and performed. You will gain an in-depth understanding of the history of classical and popular music.

## The course caters for musicians with different musical backgrounds and interests:

- For the performance unit you can choose to play either solo or ensemble pieces in any style.
- For the composition unit the exam board issues different briefs you can choose from which will be very broad and will allow for both classical and popular style pieces for instruments and/or voices. You also have a free composition choice.
- For the listening and analysis unit you also have to study a wide range of music covering both classical and popular.

## Course content and assessment

The course consists of three units:

### Unit 1: Performing

(Coursework; 30%; externally assessed; 60 marks)

- A public performance of one or more pieces, performed as a recital. The audience must consist of your teacher and at least one other person.
- Performance can be playing or singing solo, in an ensemble, or improvising.
- The expected difficulty level at the end of Year 13 is Grade 7 although it is perfectly acceptable to perform pieces of Grade 6 standard and below. It is therefore expected that students are at least Grade 5 standard when they start the course in Year 12.
- The total performance time across all pieces must be a minimum of 8 minutes (and a maximum of 12 minutes).

- Final performances for submission must be recorded after the 1st March in Year 13 and all materials for assessment submitted to arrive by the 15th May.

### Unit 2: Composing

(Coursework; 30%; externally assessed; 60 marks)

- Total of two compositions lasting at least 6 minutes in total
- Composition 1 must be from either a list of briefs related to the areas of study set by Edexcel, or a free composition, carrying 40 marks for this component. This composition must be at least 4 minutes in duration. Briefs relating to areas of study (specific briefs will be released on 1st September in the year of certification i.e. Year 13):
  - Vocal Music
  - Instrumental Music
  - Music for Film
  - Popular Music and Jazz
  - Fusion
  - New Directions
- Composition 2 must be from a list of briefs assessing compositional technique, carrying 20 marks for this component. This composition must be at least 1 minute in duration. List of briefs assessing technique (specific briefs will be released on 1st April in the year of certification i.e. Year 13):
  - Bach chorale
  - Two-part counterpoint
  - Arrangement
  - Remix



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### Unit 3: Appraising

(Exam; 40%; externally assessed; 100 marks)

There are 6 areas of study and 3 set works to be covered within each of these:

AREA OF STUDY	SET WORKS
Vocal Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• J. S. Bach, Cantata, Ein feste Burg, BWV 80: Movements 1, 2, 8</li><li>• Mozart, The Magic Flute: Excerpts from Act I, no. 4 and 5</li><li>• Vaughan Williams, On Wenlock Edge: Nos. 1, 3 and 5</li></ul>
Instrumental Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vivaldi, Concerto in D minor, Op. 3 No. 11</li><li>• Clara Wieck-Schumann: Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17: movement 1</li><li>• Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique: Movement I</li></ul>
Music for Film	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Danny Elfman, Batman Returns (selection of scenes)</li><li>• Rachel Portman: The Duchess (selection of scenes)</li><li>• Bernard Herrmann, Psycho (selection of scenes)</li></ul>
Popular Music and Jazz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Courtney Pine, Back in the Day: Inner state (of mind), Lady Day and (John Coltrane), Love and affection</li><li>• Kate Bush, Hounds of Love: Cloudbusting, And dream of sheep, Under ice</li><li>• Beatles, Revolver: Eleanor Rigby, Here, there and everywhere, I want to tell you, Tomorrow never knows</li></ul>
Fusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Debussy, Estampes: Nos. 1 and 2 (Pagodes and La soirée dans Grenade)</li><li>• Familia Valera Miranda: Caña Quema: Alla vá candela, Se quema la chumbambà</li><li>• Anoushka Shankar: Breathing Under Water: Burn, Breathing Under Water, Easy</li></ul>
New Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cage: Three Dances for two prepared pianos: No. 1</li><li>• Kaija Saariaho: Petals for Violoncello and Live Electronics</li><li>• Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring: Introduction, The Augurs of Spring, Ritual of Abduction</li></ul>

### The assessment for this unit consists of:

- One written paper of 2 hours.
- One audio CD with the extracts to accompany questions on the paper will be provided per student.
- This paper comprises two sections: A and B:

#### Section A: Areas of study and dictation (50 marks)

- Three questions related to the set works (audio and skeleton score provided).
- One short melody/rhythm completion exercise.

#### Section B: Extended response

- Two essay questions – essay one (20 marks) and essay two (30 marks)
- Essay one asks students to draw links from their study of the set works to the music heard as an unfamiliar extract.
- Essay two gives a choice of three questions that ask students to evaluate the musical elements, context and language of one set work. Each option will be from a different area of study.

### Where next?

#### How useful is A Level Music?

Edexcel Advanced Level Music is an academic as well as a practical course. You will be able to gain entry to university to follow a wide range of subjects. An A Level in music indicates to a prospective university or employer that you have a broad range of skills, including creative, analytical and practical.

The A Level in music can lead to further study in music or performing arts in higher education or at HND level. Former Robert Smyth students have gone on to study music at The Royal College of Music, The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Birmingham Conservatoire, Leeds College of Music, Oxford University, Leeds University, The Institute for Contemporary Performance and The Academy of Contemporary Music in London. For those wishing to study for a music degree at university or conservatoire an A Level in music is normally required; Grade 8 practical on its own is very rarely sufficient.

A Level would also be useful for anyone considering music as a potential part-time career. Possible career pathways: professional performer or composer, instrumental or classroom teaching, arts and leisure management, music within the media, music publishing, music therapy.