

# Putting on a concert or event

KS3/4/5

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### Why is this resource important?

The job of a music teacher is all-encompassing. Not only do we have to run a practical subject in the classroom, but we're also hard at work in the rehearsal room. Most days will involve extra-curricular clubs and activities. There are resources to organise, music to arrange, and instrumental teachers to manage. On top of all this, there's also an annual programme of concerts and events that are integral to the life of a music teacher.

This resource will focus on those very concerts and events. We'll look at how to plan for events, and also how to run them. The simple aim is to provide music teachers with a toolkit that can be used to make sure that any event is a success for staff, students and audiences.

When you're reading this resource, you may stop at certain points and think: that isn't my job. You might be right, but you may also be in a situation where if you want music to thrive, you have to get your hands dirty and build a support network around you.

### Where to start

If you're new to the job, or have moved to a new school, then you might be thinking about concerts or events: where do I start? You might be in a setting that already has a rich events programme, or maybe somewhere that has nothing. Every school is different, and it's good to think about where you start.

Begin by looking at your individual context. Here are a few starting points:

- 1 What events are firm favourites at your school? If you're new, then arrange a meeting with the headteacher to ask this question.
- 2 Are students familiar with performing and putting on events, or will that be something new for them?
- 3 What school events can you use as a performance opportunity without having to organise an entire event yourself?
- 4 Is there a time of year where nothing much happens, and when a new event might brighten up the school calendar?
- 5 Do you have staff on board to help you with events or concerts?

Carrying out an audit of this nature will put you in a good position to start to plan your year. Even if you've been working at a school for a while, it's always good to stop and take stock from time to time.

### Why put on events and concerts?

Hopefully you already know the answer to this question. But it's still important to think about it: your school may not have a culture of putting on events or concerts. As a music teacher, you will want to showcase your department, but if the school is reluctant for you to do so, you need to make a case for it.

- ▶ Concerts provide a platform for students to perform, develop and build on their work in the classroom.
- ▶ A concert is a chance to invite parents and the local community into the school. This provides a way of showcasing the wider school, and senior leaders can have a chance to address the school community.
- ▶ Concerts and events can help to raise money for the music department. This may take some of the pressure off the school if it's running on a tight budget.
- ▶ A concert can also involve other local schools, and this can help with recruitment and attracting new students to your own school.

It goes without saying that every music department should be putting on regular concerts and events. It's part of what we should be offering our students, and as teachers, we should look forward to such events. In the next section we will consider the different types of events that you might consider putting on over the course of a year.

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## What types of events?

There are many different types of events that you can run within your department. Your main focus should be on musical concerts, recitals and soirées. But you should also consider theatre trips, fundraisers, socials and celebrations. Not only do you want to build community, but you also want to get to know students and parents to encourage a culture of music in your school.

### Small-scale events

Small-scale events are those that may include a small number of students or have a more intimate audience. There's also the possibility, however, that they may involve a larger number of students, but be shorter in length. In essence, these are events that should involve less planning time, and shouldn't be heavy on production and front-of-house.

Here are some ideas for small-scale events that you might consider including in your annual programme:

- 1 An A level recital evening is a wonderful way of showcasing your top musicians, but also preparing them for their recital/performing exam. This can be a small-scale event in a smaller venue, and with an audience of maybe just parents and friends.
- 2 A soloists' showcase evening is a useful way of giving a platform to students of all abilities. This could just be a year group event, or one for a specific class.
- 3 You might like to provide an evening that focuses on a specific instrument or genre, for example 'A Night at the Musicals' or a 'Drummers' Showcase' evening.
- 4 You could also consider sharing your whole-school singing with parents. If you run a singing assembly, why not move it to the end of the day and invite adults in to watch when they come to collect students? This is easy to organise and therefore small-scale in one way. But it will also include the whole school in one quick and easy performance of repertoire that you are singing in assembly.
- 5 Assembly performances in school are less of an event, but more of a seizing of an opportunity for musicians. The same goes for using any school event to have musicians perform. You can make any school event a musical event by simply including musicians.

The key message here is to make sure that you put on something, and that it doesn't need to be on a huge scale. Concerts don't need to include the whole music department if you're not at that stage yet. Bear in mind as well that students need a range of performances to help them develop. A smaller recital room is perfect for students who are nervous or new to performing. You can then build up from the smaller event to the larger event, and take the students with you.

### Larger-scale events

Larger-scale events are likely to come around once or twice a year, and unfortunately we only have the space to consider certain issues involved in them here. But as a starting point, it's worth considering where you place your main whole-school concert or musical production: larger-scale events obviously take more time to plan and more resources to put on. The details of putting on a musical theatre production have been covered in two previous *Music Teacher* resources ([December 2019](#) and [January 2020](#)), and school musicals will bring together a large number of students both on and off the stage, as well as attracting a large audience. The ideas in this resource are all transferable to large-scale events, but will just need more planning and potentially the budget to make the event happen.

## Tickets

Ticketing an event is an important part of the process, whether the tickets are free or priced. There are a number of ticketing websites available online, but one that works well is trybooking ([www.trybooking.com/uk/](http://www.trybooking.com/uk/)), which allows the option of priced events or free tickets.

You might be wondering why selling or offering tickets is important. Here are some key reasons why tickets can help your event to be a success:

- 1 Paid-for tickets are a quick and easy way of raising funds for your department.
- 2 When you offer tickets to an audience, it allows you to know exactly who's going to be there. One issue with free tickets is that people will sometimes not turn up on the night because they didn't pay, and therefore haven't 'lost' anything by not going to the event. Where possible, therefore, charge a fee, even if it's very small.
- 3 Having tickets available makes your event seem more professional. This can help to raise the profile of what you're putting on.
- 4 Selling tickets on a website such as trybooking allows you to gather information for marketing future events.
- 5 Where possible, have allocated seating as that will take out the stress of saving seats and organising where people sit. You might like to save the two seats front and centre for some of your senior leaders.

## Bar and catering

One way of enhancing your next concert is to have a licensed bar. Selling drinks to the audience helps to make the whole evening more enjoyable and professional. Not only do we want to build a culture for our musicians, but we also want to think about the parents and friends who gather for concerts. Having a licensed bar adds a sense of occasion to any event, and it can also raise vital funds for your department.

Sadly, however, it isn't as simple as just selling alcohol: you will need either a premises license or a Temporary Event Notice (TEN) to do so. There are very strict rules on licensing, and it's important that you apply in time and display your TEN. Fortunately, the process is simple, and it costs around £20. You will need to apply through your local council, who will be able to advise you on what you need to do. If you're unsure of the rules or where to apply, then visit this website ([www.gov.uk/find-licences/temporary-events-notice](http://www.gov.uk/find-licences/temporary-events-notice)) for more information.

Make sure you apply in time, which is usually around 20 days prior to your event. You can apply for a late TEN, but it will come with restrictions. You should also think about asking for advice from any staff in your school who have applied in the past. It's also worth noting that the whole question of selling alcohol needs to be handled carefully and sensitively: you should abide not only by the law, but also your school practices. It's vital that all rules are upheld by anyone involved with selling alcohol. It's probably wise, too, to ask for support from your music parents' group or your school PTA.

Of course, you might decide to provide a bar that sells only soft drinks and snacks, which is perfectly suitable for most occasions.

## Front of house

What happens on stage is crucial to any event, of course, but the whole audience experience front of house is also key to an event's success. Here are a few things to consider for your next event (some are more relevant to larger concerts):

- ▶ It's useful to have someone assigned to checking tickets on the door.
- ▶ Depending on your school site, having someone in charge of car parking can be crucial, and is often forgotten. Make sure that people arriving are safe, and that they can get to the event on time.
- ▶ Use students front of house to increase the number of students involved in your event. Senior music students are a good place to start.
- ▶ Before your event, make sure that you talk to the cleaners and site team so that the front-of-house area is clean, clear and ready for your event.
- ▶ Ensure that your audience members are clear where they need to go, and where the toilets, bar and any other key areas are.

## Sound and lighting

If you're putting on a concert, you will need to make sure that the audience can hear and see the performers. That might sound obvious, but some schools don't have a PA and lighting system ready for that purpose. The last thing any music teacher wants is to get into the main hall and find that there isn't a way for their performers to use microphones.

Although it's of course dependent on budget, it's almost essential for any music department to have its own PA system that can be used across the school year. If you're lucky enough to have this already set up in your concert space, that will save you some time. You'll also need a set of microphones that are suitable for your musical ensembles: this could be as extensive as individual instrument mics, or as simple as one or two vocal mics.

## Set-up and clear-up

Setting up for any event can take time. It isn't just about putting out music stands: there's also the question of audience seating, PA system, lighting and backstage. What you need to set up will depend on the scale of the event, but it's something you should work out and plan for in advance. Here are some set-up tips that will help you in that planning:

- ▶ Make sure you book the time required for set-up. You may need lessons covered, so put in requests early.
- ▶ Use your students to help you with set-up, assigning them specific jobs and tasks.
- ▶ Consider drawing up a stage plan that might include where music stands need to be put and where larger instruments will be located.
- ▶ Test equipment before set-up so that you know it's all working.
- ▶ Make sure that you have enough cables, stands, lights and power leads. Long extension cables are a necessity for events and concerts.

If you're planning on running an outdoor event, set-up will become more complicated still, and you may need a plan that takes into account changes in the weather.

## Working with parents and volunteers

Parents and volunteers are always useful on event days. Parents often love to get involved, but it's crucial that they're managed and given specific jobs. As well as getting those jobs done, however, having parents and guardians on board will also help you build a wider music department community. Websites such as Volunteer Signup (<https://volunteersignup.org/>) can help manage the roles and the people fulfilling them.

## Using students effectively

Any event offers the chance to include students. Not only can they perform on stage, but you can also use them backstage or to fulfil other stage roles. Some might be studying other performing arts subjects and will therefore appreciate the chance to be involved. Here are some ideas for involving students in your next music department event:

- ▶ Use students as hosts, compères or announcers.
- ▶ Ask a media studies student to create a video montage of photos or videos from the past term or year, which you can use to market the event.
- ▶ Ask any students taking drama to present or maybe interview during your event.
- ▶ Students studying art or design might be able to help with posters, programmes or other online advertising.
- ▶ Photography students could take photos for you on the night, which you can then use in future advertising.

When you involve non-music students in your events, you widen your reach within the school. This will only serve to demonstrate how valuable music – and the wider performing arts – are within the school.

## Concerts and curriculum

A large-scale end-of-term concert is always a lovely way to round off a series of rehearsals. But smaller-scale events linked to the curriculum can be just as effective at showcasing students. The most obvious examples are GCSE or A level recital evenings that link directly to performances you're submitting for the exam season. Further options might include an evening where you share student compositions with an audience. You might even consider doing an online event where you share students' classwork with parents. It could be a live event, or something you create in advance and then share at a specific time.

### Top ten tips

To finish, here are ten tips for your next concert:

- 1** Always make sure you invite your headteacher and senior staff. They should already be aware of what's going on, but at times they will have a lot on their plates and might appreciate the invitation. With all the pressures that face senior leaders, however, we need to be understanding if they can't make every music department event.
- 2** Start as early as possible, but allow enough time to be ready. 18:30 is usually a great time to start a concert: it gives plenty of preparation time, but means that the event finishes at a sensible time too.
- 3** Clearing away chairs after a concert is time-consuming. Asking the audience to help will make this quick and easy. You can do this in a fun way and keep some music playing as they help. Parents who are waiting for students to clear away also usually don't mind doing their bit.
- 4** Programmes don't need to be fancy or elaborate. Giving an audience a running order is helpful, since you can include students' names and year groups. Sometimes, however, you can even provide a QR code that can be scanned to see the programme.
- 5** Make sure that you welcome guests and offer thanks at the end. But also consider using students to compère an event.
- 6** Timing is important, but you should also make sure that all students are given a platform. You won't be able to include every individual student, band, choir or ensemble at every event. Carefully consider who to include, and make sure you provide opportunities for others across the year.
- 7** Take photos and share the event on social media and in your school newsletter. Make sure that the event lives on after it has finished. Concerts provide you with great marketing material, not just on the night, but also into the future through photos and videos.
- 8** When you schedule an event in your calendar, make sure you have time either side of it to organise, clear up and take a breather. Thursday evenings are often a good slot for concerts, but it depends on the type of event you're planning. Similarly, a weekend might not always be practical or desirable, but a Friday- or Saturday-night performance is likely to attract a big audience.
- 9** You don't always need to use your school as a venue. Where possible, get students out into professional spaces, local arts centres or other community facilities. The venue can really make the event, and it's often useful to build partnerships with local venues.
- 10** Always remember that concerts are an integral part of what you do as a music teacher. They are hard work and exhausting, but students will mostly love performing. Start somewhere: not every event has to be huge. Always remember the value you're adding to the student experience and the school you work in.