

Online music resources for the classroom

KS3/4/5

Simon Rushby

Introduction

With the coronavirus pandemic causing the closure of schools and everyone staying at home, teachers are having to think quickly about the best ways to help students learn and progress in an unusual situation. Although the concept of remote learning has been at the forefront of schools' planning and thinking for some time, suddenly and with little warning we have all been thrown into a situation where it has to be put into practice, and very quickly.

Luckily, we have technology. It's easy to send messages, share resources and speak online with many of our students, though of course every school will have its own policies that dictate which platforms and software can be used, and what the protocols are to ensure proper safeguarding and access.

We can record podcasts, screen-shares and videos, make presentations and worksheets, and set up playlists. And whether we have established VLEs or use cloud-based file-sharing, we can get work out to our classes and give them what they need to fill their time constructively, as well as receiving their work for feedback and – perhaps primarily with older students – have one-to-one time with them to help them progress.

Of course, there are various scenarios that make this more tricky. There are some students who do not have sufficient or reliable enough technology at home, and need special support to ensure they can access the learning available to them. It requires a great deal of reliance on parents, many of whom are already under pressure trying to do their own jobs from home, to support students and ensure they are doing their school work and not simply advancing their gaming skills. And, perhaps most importantly of all, there's the task of managing one's own workload as a teacher operating primarily from home, balancing lesson planning and delivery with giving feedback, replying to an inevitably larger number of emails, often from students and parents needing help, attending online meetings with colleagues and – top of the list – making time for one's own family. Some teachers may still be going into school to supervise key workers' children.

With the aim of easing the burden a little, here's a round-up of some of the most commonly used and popular online resources, which may support different aspects of the music curriculum as it is delivered remotely. The key to all of this is to help learners work independently, something we have been encouraging them to do for many years now, but which has suddenly become critical in subjects like music where one teacher might be providing remote lessons and work for hundreds of students.

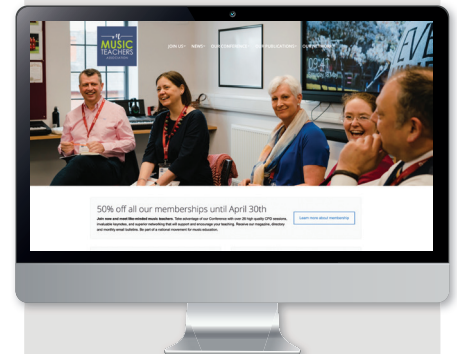
What kind of resources will I find in this round-up?

The resources suggested here are, of course, only a small portion of everything that's out there, and some will be more useful than others depending on what you need. I've done a lot of consultation and research, but inevitably I will have missed some really good ideas and suggested some that simply don't work for everybody. I've focused on resources for secondary teachers at KS3, KS4 and KS5, but there are some that could be just as useful at KS2 as at KS3.

Resources have been loosely organised into the three main areas in our music curricula: performing, composition and listening. The common thread is that these are all resources that could be useful to the classroom music teacher. In the case of performing, for example, I've only included resources that support classroom-based performing. Where a resource covers more than one of these areas, I've put it in a 'general' category.

I've tried to focus on free resources where possible, but where a resource includes some kind of paywall or subscription model, you'll see the £ symbol. However, as more companies offer extended free access to their paid-for resources, it's worth checking all options, even if your budget is zero.

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The ground is shifting incredibly quickly during these uncertain times, so my apologies if any of the information provided in this article has become outdated or misleading in the period between writing and publication.

I'd like to offer huge thanks to the many people who have suggested ideas and helped with the research. Their assistance has been invaluable, and one thing that this work has brought home is how, in times of need, the music teaching community has united and showed fantastic support for its members and for all of our students. There are a number of forums and support networks where more discussion and ideas are posted: I'll start my round-up by listing some of these.

Keeping up-to-date: forums and support networks

Exam board support (£ for online courses, other resources and info are free)

One of the quickest ways to keep up to date with your exam board's support and announcements is to simply follow them on Twitter:

- ▶ @pearsonedexcel
- ▶ @AQA
- ▶ @ocr exams
- ▶ @eduqas
- ▶ @CambridgeInt
- ▶ @iborganization

All of the exam boards are posting links to support networks and resources which are updated frequently. Additionally, their websites include links to online training and meetings that are happening on an almost daily basis. Here are the links:

- ▶ qualifications.pearson.com
- ▶ aqa.org.uk
- ▶ ocr.org.uk
- ▶ eduqas.co.uk
- ▶ cambridgeinternational.org
- ▶ ibo.org

TES (£ but many free resources)

TES is supporting teachers generally with a frequently updated blog (www.tes.com/news). A forum specifically for music teachers, including lots of ideas for resources, can be found here (<https://community.tes.com/forums/music.29/>).

Additionally, there's the very well-stocked resource hub (www.tes.com/teaching-resources/hub/secondary/music), which includes many free resources and opportunities for you to upload your own. Some of them require payment, however.

Music Teachers Association (£)

Formerly the MMA, the MTA (www.musicteachers.org) is a hugely supportive association with a wide membership, and currently it is holding two or three online meetings a week for members to share ideas and experiences. There's also a magazine, *Ensemble*, and the association's staff room feature contains lots of helpful content including recordings of previous meetings and links to resources. There's an annual fee to join, but you get a lot for your money. You can, of course, follow them for free on Twitter (@MusicTeachers_).

General resources

Before we look more specifically at performing, composing and listening resources, there are a number of useful ones that cover all these areas, either by linking them through topics or by providing a range of different 'arms' to their site. Here are some of the ones you might find useful.

BBC resources (free)

The BBC has made available a number of short films for students (www.bbc.co.uk/teach/ks3-music/zbwtrj6), which can be starting points for follow-up work. In the KS3 section, there's Play On, in which celebrities such as Katie Melua and Mylene Klass talk about their favourite pieces; Compose Yourself,

where groups of children collaborate on original compositions; and films about music technology, conducting and pop art. There's also a link to Ten Pieces (see below).

Similarly, there's a page of resources for KS4 (www.bbc.co.uk/teach/gcse-national-5-music/zmgwnrd), some of which are duplicated from the KS3 page, but with the addition of performances by the BBC Philharmonic, some excellent tips for composers, and *Howard Goodall's Story of Music*, which traces the story of music from ancient times to the modern day.

The BBC's Ten Pieces project (www.bbc.co.uk/teach/ten-pieces) is a goldmine of films, resources, lesson plans, arrangements and composing ideas, divided into Key Stages. It's good to start with the films about the pieces themselves, which range from Vivaldi to Hans Zimmer – each piece has an introductory film and a live performance film. Then take part in a live lesson, explore rhythm and pulse, or compose music inspired by one of the pieces.

Dallas Symphony Orchestra (free)

DSO Kids (www.mydso.com/dso-kids) is a slick, colourful and informative resource aimed at bringing music to life for children, and there is a wealth of resources for KS2 and KS3. Start with the instruments or composers sections of the Learn + Listen tab.

Making Music Fun (free)

Making Music Fun (www.makingmusicfun.net) features lots of free resources, including sheet music, lesson plans and listening maps, mainly aimed at younger students. The composers page is really good, with links to downloadable sheet music and videos.

Classics for Kids (free)

Again, Classics for Kids (www.classicsforkids.com/teachers) is mainly aimed at younger students, maybe the Year 7s. There are lots of activities and quizzes, including resources on instruments of the orchestra, musical eras and matching rhythms.

Music First (£)

If you're not already familiar with it, MusicFirst (www.musicfirst.co.uk) is a very popular 'learning management system' for secondary school music, comprising a suite of tools for notation, recording, music appreciation, listening skills and much more. You can purchase a full subscription, including all of MusicFirst's resources, priced per user, or get individual items of software to suit your needs. The premium version includes Rhinegold Education's GCSE and A level resources. To support the delivery of its content, there is a digital markbook, calendar, lesson planner, audio recorder and secure communication channels. It includes:

- ▶ **Soundtrap for Education:** an online DAW
- ▶ **Noteflight Learn:** score-writing software
- ▶ **Soundation4Education:** an audio and sequencing site that works through any internet browser
- ▶ **O-Generator:** beat-making software
- ▶ **Auralia:** ear-training software
- ▶ **Musition:** music theory software
- ▶ **Sightreading Factory:** unlimited exercises for improving sightreading
- ▶ **PracticeFirst:** allows students to practise using their device and gain intuitive feedback
- ▶ **Groovy Music:** music creation software for primary school children

Focus on Sound (£)

Focus on Sound (www.focusonsound.com) is a full resource for music education, packed full of information about instruments, terms, composers, technology and theory, supported by listening tests, study pieces and lessons. It comes in website and app form, and can be for individual or school use, with work graded by age or key stage (mainly KS3-5). Teachers can access test results and monitor progress and activities in real time. It includes support for GCSE. The webpage gives a full, comprehensive overview of what Focus on Sound can offer, accompanied by videos, and licences – in 'standard' and 'pro' versions – allow teachers to assign work to individual classes, including external work not included on the Focus on Sound platform, set tests, upload own content and notify students with direct links to the content that applies to them.

Music Matters (£ but with free YouTube content)

Music Matters (www.mmcourses.co.uk) is a comprehensive collection of courses on music theory, aural, composition, sightreading, orchestration and more. It is geared mainly to preparation for graded practical and theory exams, but also includes a large number of courses in things like chorale harmony, counterpoint, aural dictation and analysis that would support A level and GCSE students in developing their listening and composition skills. There's even a 'learn to play piano' course.

Music Matters is a paid-for resource – individuals purchase courses (which are then theirs on all devices for life). Each course is individually priced, there are some good 'bundle offers' and the courses are competitively priced. There's plenty of free content to explore on the Music Matters YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/channel/UC8y18P7Zi3yYTsypa-IQg), and this is a good place to find short, digestible videos on aspects of composition and theory.

Resources for performing

Other *Music Teacher* resources are looking in depth at sites and other offerings to support instrumental and vocal teachers and students in their work. Here, however, are a small number of suggestions for more general approaches to performing in the classroom, or to support those on their GCSE or A level courses.

ABRSM's apps and practice tools (£, free or with in-app purchases)

ABRSM has just released a new free online hub called Play On (<https://gb.abrsm.org/en/inspire>) with a regularly updated selection of resources to support teachers and learners, and featuring input from noted performers such as Jess Gillam and Jeneba Kanneh-Mason. Students, teachers and parents can send in videos, links and files, and it promises to be a good place for support during the pandemic.

ABRSM also has a large range of apps and tools (<https://gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/apps-and-practice-tools>), most of which require payment. These can be downloaded onto devices to support various aspects of learning and performing, including exam preparation. The following require a small one-off payment before download, except for the 'lite' versions and some that have in-app purchases.

- ▶ **Theory Works** supports ABRSM grades 1-5 theory with engaging and educational challenges. It requires a one-off payment and works best on a tablet.
- ▶ **Sight-Reading Trainer** is available for students working towards grades 1-5 piano.
- ▶ **Aural Trainer** is to help prepare for the aural tests in ABRSM exams. There's one app for grades 1-5 and another for grades 6-8, and both are available in (paid) full and (free) 'lite' versions. Only compatible with Apple devices.
- ▶ **Practice Partner** is currently available for piano, singing, violin, cello, flute, clarinet and alto saxophone. It features play-along practice with options to have accompaniment only, play along with the student's part, change the speed and, for singers, the key. Pianists can work on one hand while the app plays the other. The app is available on Apple and Android devices and is free to download, though there are in-app purchases.
- ▶ **Scales Trainer** is for piano and violin grades 1-5 and offers a fun, interactive way of learning and practising scales. The 'lite' version is free and it is available on Apple devices only.

There are further free resources from ABRSM, again geared to those learning instruments and singing.

- ▶ **Music Case** is a relatively new, free practice app that tracks and motivates progress. Students can organise their practice by setting goals, tracking their practice time and recording themselves, and teachers can view their progress. It's a bit like a practice diary or notebook, but a fully interactive one packed with motivational tools.
- ▶ **On Your Marks** allows students and teachers to watch music exams take place and have a go at being the examiner.

Jess Gillam's Virtual Scratch Orchestra (free)

Popular saxophonist Jess Gillam has had the wonderful idea of inviting anyone who can play an instrument to 'join' a scratch orchestra (www.jessgillamsax.co.uk/virtual-scratch-orchestra). Parts for a variety of instruments and at a variety of levels (from beginner up) are published on her site. These can be downloaded along with a click track, and musicians are invited to upload recordings of themselves playing these parts. Jess adds her own part and the finished, collated version is released when all the parts have been edited together.

Mixcord's Acapella App (free with in-app purchases)

You've probably seen lots of multi-faced singers harmonising with themselves in YouTube videos. Mixcord's free Acapella App (www.mixcord.co/pages/acapella) (for Apple devices only and offering in-app purchases) allows you to sing, play and collaborate with up to nine parts, individually or with other musicians. It has sync and editing features that result in good-quality multi-track audio and video.

Incredibox (£ for the app, web versions free at time of writing)

Incredibox (www.incredibox.com) is an app for creating music using beatbox samples. The lively style and graphics make music creation fun and engaging. Users can share their work.

Melodics (free)

Melodics (<https://melodics.com>) is a free app (with paid add-ons) that will help you increase confidence with the fundamentals of playing your instrument, how to practise and how to play in time with lots of genres and styles. The free app has access to 60 lessons, but you will need to connect a MIDI device such as a keyboard, pad controller or drum kit.

Beats and loops

A search online for 'beats and loops' will reveal lots of free downloadable material for students to jam to, or use in their composing or arranging work.

Resources for composing and creating

Soundation (free, with expanded access requiring payment)

Using professional tools such as virtual instruments, synths, samples and loops, Soundation (www.soundation.com) allows students to create their own music in a web browser and share it with millions of other users. The free account allows ten projects with virtual instruments and more than 700 loops and effects.

Soundtrap (£, but with a long free trial)

This amazing resource (www.soundtrap.com) is allowing extended free trials for teachers and students during the crisis. Proclaimed as an 'everywhere studio', Soundtrap is an impressive creation tool with a large collection of beats, loops and instruments, and a very easy interface that gets students composing in no time. It comes with features such as autotune, automation, a pre-amp that lets you connect microphones and instruments, a large number of high-quality loops, beats and presets, and a patterns beatmaker. You can record, edit and collaborate with others on any device and wherever you are, with cloud-based storage. It also offers podcast-making tools. Pupils can collaborate, and teachers can be added in.

I Can Compose (free at first, then £)

This site (www.icancompose.com) helps students to develop compositions by following courses, the first few of which are free before a paywall is encountered. It has a range of tutorials and a useful 'inspiration page' for those with writer's block. It's specifically aimed at GCSE and A level students, and has won awards for its innovative and helpful approach to composition.

Flat (£ with a free trial)

Flat (<https://flat.io>) is user-friendly music writing software. Students can write, listen to and share their work, with collaborations a big feature (meaning you can work with your students on their compositions as they develop). It's also fully integrated with Google Classroom.

Noteflight (free, and with free trials for the paid features such as Noteflight Learn)

Noteflight (www.noteflight.com) is another piece of score-writing software with access from any device, using web browsers and cloud storage. The Noteflight Learn feature (<https://notes.noteflight.com/distance-learning-support>) allows teachers to create online 'classrooms' and set assignments, with integration with Google Classroom if needed.

Sibelius (free for Sibelius First, £ with free trials for the fuller editions)

Sibelius First (<https://my.avid.com/get/sibelius-first>) is the most basic version of this famous score-writing software, and is free. The larger, more effective versions are bought on a licence basis, though Sibelius Ultimate has a free trial.

Steinberg (£ with free trials)

Steinberg's Stay Home platform (www.steinberg.net/en/home.html) is the best first-stop for this company's range of products. There are links to Cubase and Dorico – Steinberg's DAW and notation software packages – and both come with free trials.

Bandlab (free)

Bandlab (<https://edu.bandlab.com/>) is an award-winning cloud-based online music studio with lots of loops and samples.

Drumbit (free)

Drumbit (<https://drumbit.app>) is an online drum machine. It's huge fun and very easy to use – it had me distracted from writing this article for quite a while. It's particularly good for beginners – perhaps your KS3 students.

Chrome Music Lab (free)

Lots of fun experiments for young musicians here (<https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/>).

Amplify Studio (free)

A free resource (<https://ampifymusic.com/ampify-studio/>) with over 400 sounds.

Ableton's resources (free)

Two excellent, free resources from Ableton (<https://learningmusic.ableton.com> and <https://learningsynths.ableton.com>), currently in beta, that teach the basics of music making – rhythm, bass, chords and melodies, and the creation of synthesized sound.

Resources for listening, appraising and theory

These are presented in no particular order, but cover a range of resources for the more academic side of your and your students' work.

Blitz books (£ but with plenty of free content)

This Australian resource (www.blitzbooks.com/free-downloads) contains many free downloads on subjects such as preparing for aural tests, writing cadences and so on. It also contains worksheets aimed at all levels

Opus Music Worksheets (free)

Opus Music Worksheets (www.opusmusicworksheets.com) is an American site with free music worksheets covering mostly theory from the basics to round about GCSE level.

Musictheory.net (mostly free)

This site (www.musictheory.net) has been around for many years, and for a lot of people is still the go-to place for online theory help. The free resources comprise lessons in many aspects of music theory, ranging from the notes on the staff to chord progressions and analysis. There are also a number of interactive exercises to consolidate each lesson, and some very useful ones for practising aural skills, ranging from note or chord identification to interval ear training. There are also a number of tools – 'calculators' for accidentals, intervals, scales, chords and note rows, a pop-up piano, a beats-per-minute calculator and a manuscript paper generator. Enhanced versions of the theory content ('theory lessons') and exercises/calculators ('tenuto') are now available, for a small fee, for Apple devices.

Teoría (free)

Originating in Spain, Teoría (www.teoria.com) also contains theory lessons, theory and aural exercises and a theory reference resource. An analysis section provides overview analyses of a range of works.

Sequenza (free)

Sequenza (<http://resources.bcmg.org.uk/sequenza/>) from the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group features advice on writing for solo instruments.

Earmaster (£ with some free content)

Earmaster (www.earmaster.com/downloads/free-versions) features some free beginners' modules on interval identification and chord identification.

Keeping Score (free)

Keeping Score (www.keeping-score.org) is an interactive exploration of composers and works from the San Francisco Symphony.

Gresham Lectures (free)

The Gresham Lectures (www.gresham.ac.uk/watch/?subject=music) feature lectures on all kinds of musical subjects from *The Rite of Spring* to 'The Science of Singing', given by eminent musicians and music academics. Gresham College has been providing free lectures in the City of London for over 400 years, and has provided a huge range of these on their website.

Classical 100 (free)

This resource (<https://gb.abrsm.org/en/classical100primary>) is for primary schools – you have to prove association with a primary school to sign up. A result of a collaboration between Classic FM, ABRSM and Decca Classics, experts have picked 100 pieces ranging from the tenth to the 21st centuries, which can be sorted according to mood, instrument, tempo, historical period and so on. There are activities associated with each piece, ranging from short starters to longer pieces of work.

50 Greatest Symphonies (free)

Published in 2014, a fantastic survey by Tom Service in the *Guardian* (www.theguardian.com/music/series/50-greatest-symphonies) of the 50 most essential symphonies. Great for wider listening.

Kahoot (free, but you need an account)

Kahoot (<https://kahoot.com/>) is perfect for interactive quizzes – there are hundreds on the site but you can also make your own.

Inside the Score (free)

One of a great many YouTube channels, Inside the Score (www.youtube.com/channel/UC4ihNhN8iN9QPg2XTxiiPJw) operates a range of different playlists such as Listening Club, Movie Music, Discovering Classical Music, and how great works are composed.

Howard Goodall

The presenter and composer has made numerous educational series over the years and they can all be found on YouTube: *Great Dates*, *Big Bangs*, *The Story of Music* and *20th-Century Greats*.

Podcasts (free)

A small selection of the great wealth of musical podcasts out there:

- ▶ **The Listening Service:** Tom Service presents regular podcasts on all aspects of how music works. Recent editions cover the string quartet and close harmony (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b078n25h/episodes/downloads).
- ▶ **Composer of the Week:** provided by BBC Radio 3 with a new one published every Friday (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02nrvd3/episodes/downloads).
- ▶ **Sticky Notes:** aimed at anyone wishing to increase their classical music knowledge, and there's a new one every week (<https://stickynotespodcast.libsyn.com>).
- ▶ **Program Notes:** great insights into works, interspersed with performance clips by the San Francisco Symphony (www.sfsymphony.org/Discover-the-Music/Listen-to-Podcasts/Program-Notes-Series).
- ▶ **Discovering Classical Music:** each podcast focuses on a great classical work (<https://player.fm/series/discovering-classical-music>).

Live streams and archive performances

Finally, get your students to dip into the fantastic range of live-streamed and archived music currently being made available by the great orchestras and concert halls of the world – here is a small selection. All of these are free.

London Symphony Orchestra

The London Symphony Orchestra is streaming two full-length concerts a week from their archive, on Thursdays and Sundays at 7.30pm (<https://lso.co.uk/whats-on/2019-20-season/alwaysplaying>). These are on the orchestra's YouTube channel, and all the links plus details of upcoming concerts can be found on the Always Playing part of the orchestra's website. There's also a blog, called Read, Watch and Listen, which is updated daily with links to videos, performances and interesting back-stories to orchestral and choral works.

Separately, this archive of LSO past performances (<https://play.lso.co.uk/performances>) has a fantastic interactive feature that allows you to choose your viewpoint from many spots around the orchestra. You can focus on the conductor or any of the orchestral families.

London Philharmonic Orchestra

The London Philharmonic Orchestra (www.lpo.org.uk/lponline) is posting regular content that is well worth a look. There's a Concert Archive featuring videos of LPO musicians, conductors and soloists talking about and introducing works that the LPO were due to perform before the cancellation of all concerts. Each video is accompanied by a playlist of the music in that concert and programme notes. One excellent video is of a live performance of a Beethoven string quartet, with all four musicians playing from isolation in their own homes.

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (<https://cbso.co.uk/cbso-stay-tuned>) has an excellent page full of podcasts, playlists, vlogs and interviews that brings to life great works and gives insights into the work of orchestral musicians, chorus members, conductors including John Wilson and soloists such as Julian Lloyd Webber.

Piano Day

The 28 March was the 88th day of the year – the same number as there are keys on a standard piano – and so it has come to be known in some quarters as Piano Day. To mark the occasion, Sydney Opera House broadcast a range of performances, recordings and interviews (www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u-1ZZNYJE) that are well worth a watch.

Vienna State Opera

The world-famous Vienna State Opera (www.staatsoperlive.com) has started streaming its huge archive of performances, each stream available for three days with subtitles, for free.

Royal Opera House

Under the hashtag #OurHouseToYourHouse, London's Royal Opera House (www.roh.org.uk) is broadcasting a range of performances via its website.