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Finding your way in music

Practical advice for young musicians and their parents

FINDING YOUR WAY IN MUSIC

Who should read this booklet?

If you are **the parent of a young person** who

- has an interest in music and would like to find out how to start learning to play an instrument...
- is already enjoying learning to sing or play an instrument...

Or, if you are **a young person with a talent for music** and

- you want to know how to take it further...
- you are considering a career in music...

...then this booklet is for you.

Each section will help you understand the different choices young people encounter along the road to becoming a musician – and by that we mean someone who has music in their life, no matter what job they do.

There's no 'right' way to become a musician, but in order to become a professional musician – someone who makes music as a career – it's important to know a bit about the different stages of learning music, so that you can avoid making choices that lead in an unhelpful direction.

This booklet focuses on more formal music education, but there is also a huge amount of music activity going on through community music and youth services. It would be impossible for a booklet of this size to cover all the different ways into music, so be sure to follow up this general introduction with your own research!

Further information

We hope this booklet will contain something of value for everyone, but because it covers everything from starting an instrument to considering higher education, you may find that you know some of the information already or that some things aren't relevant to you. In this case, you can either skip to the next section or access further information by contacting Awards for Young Musicians (www.a-y-m.org.uk). You'll also find a list of other helpful websites on the last page.

If you can't find the answer to your question in this booklet or on our website, just give us a call on 0117 904 9906 or email enquiries@a-y-m.org.uk and we'll try to help.



A LIFE FULL OF MUSIC

Why choose music?

Almost everyone enjoys some form of music – so much so that it’s become a part of everyday life. Think about the music you’ve heard today (whether it’s been played live or on CD, the radio or TV) and the effect it’s had on you.

Music is...

- **a means of communication**, just like a language such as French or German. We can tell stories, express emotions and share experiences all through the language of music.
- **positive**. There’s a special kind of joy that’s created through playing and writing music, and sharing that joy with others through performance is a very special feeling.
- **a social activity**. Through group rehearsals, we get to meet new people and learn about their passion for music while they learn about ours. Sharing our unique views through music often leads to strong friendships.
- **for everyone**. There are many kinds of music to enjoy. People from every kind of background and culture can play music together. So whether we’re short, tall, disabled, able-bodied, black or white, music brings us together and gives us something in common.
- **a way of expressing yourself** and making the listener feel a certain way. Being able to change the way people feel through music is one of the things that makes it such a special subject to study.

Where can it lead?

You might imagine a professional musician to be someone who performs on stage but the music industry is constantly changing and **these days the term ‘professional musician’ covers a huge variety of jobs**. Orchestral violinists, jazz singers, club DJs, sound technicians, classroom music teachers, music therapists, music researchers... it’s a long list!

There is more work for professional musicians than ever before, however relatively few musicians are employed in full-time jobs. It’s more common for professional musicians to be freelancers, taking on an exciting variety of musical projects in different areas to make up what is commonly referred to as a “portfolio career”.

Depending on a musician’s chosen area, they might find themselves performing with an ensemble (a group of musicians) or band, teaching, leading community workshops, broadcasting, touring abroad, or writing music for film or television.



GETTING STARTED

School music

In most UK schools, instrumental lessons are given by employees of the Local Education Authority Music Service.

To begin learning an instrument:

1. **Speak to the music teacher in your child's school.** If your child isn't sure what instrument to play, the music teacher can help them decide. (Their choice may be limited to what instruments the school can offer.)
2. **Meet with the person who teaches the instrument(s) your child is interested in.** The school music teacher will put you in touch with them.
3. **Find out the cost.** Many primary schools will offer free or relatively inexpensive instrumental lessons for a while as part of a small group or a whole class lesson.
4. **Get an instrument.** (see below)

You might also want to ask:

- whether your local Music Service offers lessons after school at a music centre near you.

Finding an instrument

Because your child will need to practice regularly you need to rent or buy an instrument for them. There are several options:

- Hire an instrument from your local Music Service for a small annual charge. Sometimes there is no charge at all depending on your income.
- Hire an instrument from your local instrument shop.
- Purchase an instrument through an instrument shop.

- Purchase an instrument through your child's school. With this option, you will not have to pay VAT.

Things to consider:

- During the first couple of years, it's a good idea to hire an instrument, just in case your child wants to change. However, as they become better at playing, they will need to own their own.

Lessons for very young children

Absolute beginners can start learning about music at three years old or even younger. At three they can begin learning a stringed instrument, through special programmes run at certain conservatoire (music college) junior departments and other specialist music centres, as well as many independent providers. All lessons for the very young are designed to develop a combination of instrumental and musical skills, such as rhythm and listening.

Some programmes focus on singing, Kodály (understanding music through singing) or Dalcroze Eurhythmics (using movement to create an understanding of music) alone, while 'young strings' projects usually combine these methods with the teaching of violin, viola, cello or mini-bass.

To find out more, ask your local junior conservatoire or specialist music centre for a prospectus and an application form. Please see the contacts on pages 10 & 11 for more information, or call AYM on 0117 904 9906.

Finding a good teacher

You may want to consider paying for lessons outside of school hours with a private teacher or additional lessons through your Music Service if your child:

- wants to learn **an instrument that isn't available** at school
- prefers an **out of school environment**
- wants to start a **second instrument**
- wants to learn **a style of music** that is not covered in their lessons

When looking for a teacher:

1. **Ask other young people** taking lessons nearby and ask if you can go with them to watch one of their lessons.
2. **Check the web.** Both the ISM (Incorporated Society of Musicians) website www.ism.org, and the FMS (Federation of Music Services) website www.federationmusic.org.uk list teachers and/or give useful advice.
3. When you find a teacher you and your child like, **ask for a trial lesson** to see if you all get on.



Practice

Practice is a very important part of learning an instrument. Even if your child has a natural talent for music, it's important that they practise regularly and in a structured way. This will help them to develop a good technique and will make it easier to learn more advanced things as they progress.

How much practice is enough?

Your child may do some practice with their class teacher. They will then be expected to practise what their teacher has shown them in their lesson at home several times a week. Your child's teacher will advise on how long they should spend practising, but as a very general guide:

- **Beginners** might start with a few minutes practice several times during the week.
- **Intermediate players** should work up to practising every day and should aim for between 30 and 60 minutes a day.
- **Advanced players** will need to practise for at least an hour a day.

Things to consider:

- As your child becomes more advanced, practice becomes more important. If they have an active life, they may find it difficult to fit practice around other things. To keep up their music, they might need to cut down on other activities. This can be a hard choice, but in order to succeed in music, their practice must come first.



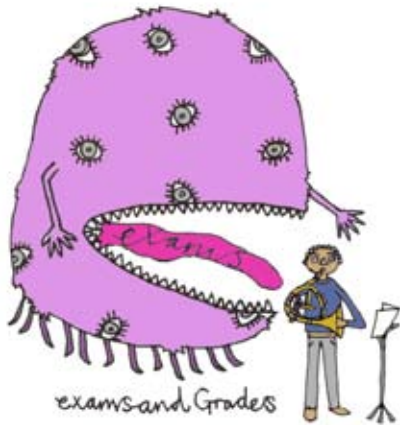
finding a good teacher

EXAMS AND GRADES

Just like in school, there are 'grades' in playing music. Music grades are not related to how old your child is or how long they have been playing, but to how advanced they are on their instrument. You achieve grades by doing exams.

Why take exams and grades?

- Grade exams give your child and their teacher a **useful target** to work towards.
- They provide a good source of **feedback**. Examiners aim to give constructive criticism.
- They can help your child **deal with exam nerves**. Your child's teacher will only suggest that they do an exam when they are ready, so they can enjoy progressing without feeling scared.
- If your child thinks they might want to become a professional musician, they need to work towards achieving Grade 8 (Distinction), the highest level possible, in at least one instrument. That's because Grade 8 [Distinction] is the **benchmark for entry into all UK conservatoires**.



5 things you need to know about exams:

1. There are three main national exam boards – the ABRSM (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music), Trinity Guildhall and LCM (London College of Music) Examinations, and some local music services offer their own exams. Your child's teacher will be able to advise on which system is best for them.
2. For most instruments and voice, exams start with a preparatory test for beginners, then go from Grade 1 to 8 and on to Diploma level.
3. Exams are available in a variety of styles of playing. Your Music Service will be able to recommend an appropriate teacher.
4. You can take music exams in order, or skip several levels at a time according to how quickly you progress.
5. Not all instruments and styles are covered by examining systems. Ask your child's teacher whether grades are available for their chosen instrument and style of music.

What does an exam involve?

For each exam, your child will be asked to:

- **Perform** a few pieces from a suggested list. Your child and their teacher will decide together which pieces are best for them.
- **Sight-read** or **quick study** (perform music without prior rehearsal).
- Play **scales and arpeggios**.
- Perform **aural (listening) tests**.

More advanced exams involve more complicated music, sight-reading and scales – and that's where practice comes in!

WHAT ELSE MAKES A MUSICIAN?

Performing with an ensemble

Your child may start learning as part of a group or may join a group later, especially if their instrument is one that normally plays in ensembles. This can be an exciting and inspiring part of their music-making.

Why is it important?

- Part of the fun of playing music is that you can do it with other people.
- Playing as a group lets your child hear other instruments and meet other people their age who play.
- Playing with others helps to develop listening and attention skills, sensitivity and musicality.

How to get involved with an ensemble:

- Your child's school may run a group. Speak to the music teacher to find out.
- Your local Music Service will run many different ensembles. They will be able to tell you which is best for your child.

Theory – how music works

Some methods of teaching an instrument, like Suzuki, are based on listening to something and repeating it from memory.

However, most methods rely at least in part on being able to read music notation.



performing with an ensemble

Think of music as a language where music notation is the alphabet. In order to tell a story (play a tune) you first need to know how sentences are formed (using melody and rhythm). You can then use more complex ideas to help make your story more interesting (dynamics, harmony, orchestration).

5 things you need to know about music theory:

1. Studying it will help your child to understand how music is constructed.
2. Your child's school or Music Service might offer free music theory lessons, or you might have to pay for them.
3. Lessons normally happen outside of school hours, sometimes on Saturday mornings. You should ask your Music Service about this.
4. The music theory grading system works in much the same way as the performance grading system.
5. If your child wants to take exams in music at ABRSM Grade 6 or above, they must have passed the Grade 5 theory exam. Theory exams can also help with GCSE or A level studies.

Listening to music

It sounds obvious to say that listening to music is very important. You might think your child already does a lot of this, but it is very important for them to:

- listen to as many different types of music as possible
- try to include music that helps them learn about their instrument
- make some time each day to sit down and listen, for instance, by including listening time in their practice schedule

NEXT STEPS

Your interests

As your musical skills become more advanced and your tastes develop, be honest with yourself about

- what kinds of music interest you, and
- what you hope to achieve as a musician.

The answers will determine the options you have for further study, which could range from advanced lessons with a teacher based in your community to attending a specialist training institution. Ask your teacher for advice.

Things to consider:

- Some styles of music require rigorous individual training in a structured environment while others lend themselves more to experimentation and collaboration.
- To take any style of music to professional level requires tremendous personal dedication and hard work!
- It's a good idea to keep your options open if you're deciding between several styles.

Specialist music schools & Junior conservatoires

If music has become a big part of your life you may be able to pursue more specialised training with other young people who share the same interests at:

- **a specialist school.** These are like normal schools but devote much more time to music. Some are residential (boarding schools) and some run as day schools. There are a number of specialist music schools and cathedral or choir schools in England, with others in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- **a junior conservatoire.** Junior conservatoires work on Saturdays, so

you can stay at your normal school during the week. There are nine junior conservatoires in the UK, all attached to senior conservatoires (see page 10).

- **a centre for advanced training.** Centres for advanced training also work on weekends, allowing you to stay on at your normal school (check the DCSF website, below).

You will need to pay fees at all of these institutions, but there are several grant schemes available, including the DCSF Music & Dance Scheme (see www.dcsf.gov.uk/mds). They all expect a high level of commitment and dedication and all provide excellent preparation for entry into a UK conservatoire.

GCSE, AS & A2 Level Music

If you're interested in continuing your musical education at school and beyond, you should consider music at GCSE and A level. These qualifications (and their equivalents) provide excellent preparation for studying music to a professional level.

2 things you need to know about GCSE Music:

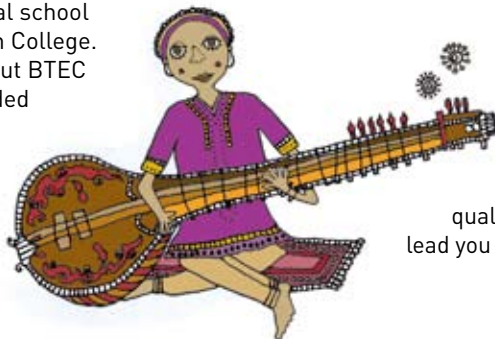
1. The three activities of the course are **Performing** (solo and ensemble), **Composing** (based on a brief) and **Listening & Appraising** (analysing and evaluating music using musical terminology)
2. Areas of study differ depending on the course you take, but may include
 - Film music
 - Dance music
 - Traditional or world music
 - Popular song

5 things you need to know about A level Music:

1. The main assessment areas are very similar to GCSE but with more emphasis on the quality of written work and the standards of performing and composing.
2. To study these courses, you should normally be at least Grade 6 standard on your instrument or voice, or advanced in composition.
3. The three main awarding bodies are Edexcel (www.edexcel.org.uk), AQA (www.aqa.org.uk) and OCR (www.ocr.org.uk). Check their websites for a breakdown of what each course contains
4. Different A level courses contain different subjects. Some subjects may suit you better than others, so ask your music teacher before deciding which course to follow and check the websites listed above for details of what each course contains.
5. AS and A2 level Music can sometimes be hard to find, so you might have to study this subject at another school.

Other courses

- **A level Music Technology** is an increasingly popular choice for young people interested in recording and sound engineering. Usually, at least one institution in your area will offer this course. To find out more about the curriculum, visit www.edexcel.org.uk/subjects/a-z/musictechnology
- **BTEC National Award in Music Practice and Music Technology** – usually available at your local school or Further Education College. To find out more about BTEC qualifications (awarded through Edexcel) visit www.edexcel.org.uk/nationals



Is a conservatoire right for you?

If you're interested in a career in music, you have a number of options.

If your goal is to write, create or perform music for a living, you should consider studying for an **undergraduate degree at a conservatoire** (specialist music college), where you'll be able to develop your musical and professional skills alongside other musicians in a highly creative environment.

If you're more interested in using music as part of another career, for instance, as a sound engineer, venue manager or promoter, you might find an **academic music degree** (usually from a university) to be just as helpful. There may even be a specialised HND (Higher National Diploma) or degree course in an area that interests you, such as Music Technology.

What's the difference?

The major difference between conservatoire and university degree courses in music is the balance between academic and practical work and the amount of one-to-one tuition. In general:

- Conservatoire courses include about 80% practical activities such as your individual lessons (at least 40 hours per year), playing in ensembles, performance classes and masterclasses.
- University courses are more academic, requiring a greater amount of written work and only a small amount of individual tuition.
- Of course, whether you go to a conservatoire or a university, a degree in music is a recognised and respected qualification that can lead you anywhere.

CONSERVATOIRES

Choosing a conservatoire

If you opt for a conservatoire education (and you want to stay in the UK) you will have nine institutions to choose from. There are a lot of factors that go into choosing a place to study, including:

- reputation
- quality of teaching
- professional training opportunities
- location and cost of living



One of the most important things to consider is the type of environment you need in order to thrive. This includes the style of teaching, classes available, atmosphere and even the other students alongside whom you'll be studying.

When deciding where to study:

1. You can **get a prospectus** for any UK conservatoire by calling or emailing them, or by visiting their website.
2. **Find out who will be teaching** your instrument, voice or composition, as you will be spending a lot of time with them. Most conservatoire prospectuses list the names of visiting teachers and musicians that have given masterclasses.
3. **Check the web.** Typing the names of teachers into an internet search engine will usually give you some links to find out more about them.
4. It's essential that you **visit any colleges you're interested in** to get a feel for their atmospheres – this will be a major factor in making your decision on where to study. All have Open Days.

UK Conservatoires

You can contact the conservatoires and their Junior departments here:

Birmingham Conservatoire & Junior Conservatoire

T: 0121 331 5901

E: conservatoire@bcu.ac.uk

Guildhall School of Music and Drama & Junior Guildhall

T: 020 7382 7144

E: music@gsm�.ac.uk

Leeds College of Music & Courses for Young Musicians

T: 0113 222 3400

E: enquiries@lcm.ac.uk

Royal Academy of Music & Junior Academy

T: 020 7873 7373

E: registry@ram.ac.uk

Royal College of Music & Junior Department

T: 020 7589 3643

E: info@rcm.ac.uk

Royal Northern College of Music & Centre for Young Musicians

T: 0161 907 5200

E: info@rnmc.ac.uk

Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama & Junior Academy of Music

T: 0141 332 411

E: musicadmissions@rsamd.ac.uk

Royal Welsh College of Music & Junior Music (JMAS)

T: 029 2039 1363

E: music.admissions@rwcmd.ac.uk

Trinity College of Music & Junior Trinity

T: 020 8305 4444

E: enquiries@tcm.ac.uk



FIND OUT MORE

Useful websites

Getting started

- www.federationmusic.org.uk - Federation of Music Services. Addresses and contact details for Local Education Authority Music Services. Checklist for schools and parents for finding a good teacher.
- www.ism.org - Incorporated Society of Musicians. Register of private teachers by instrument and region.
- www.epta-uk.org - European Piano Teachers Association. Information on finding a piano teacher in your area, local centres, courses etc.
- www.musiciansunion.org.uk - Musicians Union. Advice and guidance on legal issues concerning teachers, child protection, public liability insurance and more.

Music in your area & Getting involved

- www.youthmusic.org.uk - Youth Music. Information and contact details for music projects happening in your area.
- www.musicforyouth.org.uk - Music for Youth. Free nationwide educational and performance opportunities for all kinds of groups of young musicians.
- www.makingmusic.org.uk - Making Music. Amateur music opportunities near you.
- www.nyjc.org.uk - National Youth Jazz Collective. Regional opportunities for young jazz musicians.
- www.spnm.org.uk - Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM). Find composition courses, competitions to enter and other useful articles about composition projects in your area.



- www.jazzwise.com - Jazzwise magazine. Forthcoming gigs, workshops and courses.
- www.jazzservices.org.uk - Jazz Services Ltd. Online magazine for national and international jazz activities, including gigs and education events.

Fun & Activities

- www.bbc.co.uk/blast - BBC Blast Music. Information about getting involved with music and some fun programmes to play around with and make your own music.
- www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/makingtracks/ - BBC Making Tracks. Information on classical music, games, the opportunity to make a tune and other activities.
- www.soundjunction.org - Sound Junction. An award-winning site for exploring and creating music.
- www.thesoundstation.org.uk - The Sound Station. A website for young people produced by Youth Music.

Exams & Courses

- www.abrsm.org - Associated Board for the Royal Schools of Music. Exam board. Syllabuses for Grades 1-8 and Diplomas.
- www.trinitycollege.co.uk - Trinity Guildhall Exam Board.
- <http://mercury.tvu.ac.uk/lcmexams> - LCM Examinations Board.
- www.rco.org.uk - Royal College of Organists. Exams for organists.
- www.bbc.co.uk/schools/revision - BBC Online. Bitesize revision information for GCSE, AS and A2 Music.
- www.accessmusic.co.uk - Access to Music. The UK's largest provider of popular music courses.

Funding

Awards for Young Musicians runs its own annual funding programme for talented young musicians in need of financial help. Call us on 0117 904 9906 for further information. You can also visit our Links page (www.a-y-m.org.uk/links.htm) to find other funders who might be able to help you.

Illustrations: Ella Sparkes



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