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online teaching
See page 26

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July/August 2020

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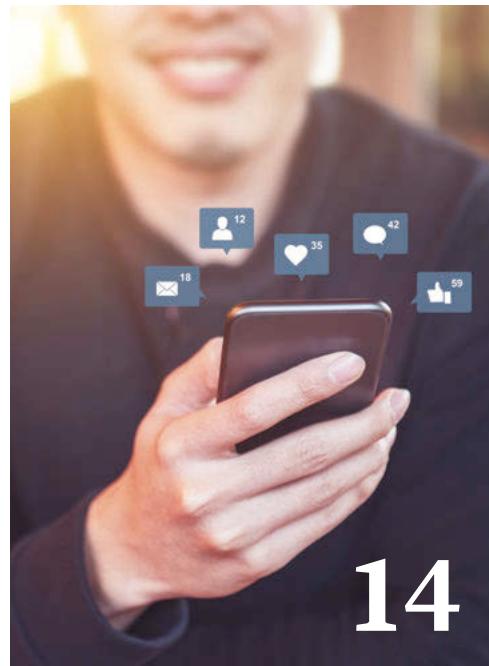
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Zooming along

Getting a handle on technology

Corresponding via videolink from the comfort of our own homes is not without its challenges. Once you've secured the perfect bookish backdrop (Ian Rankin for Nicola Sturgeon; brightly coloured Penguin clothbound classics for the Duchess of Cambridge), there's always the risk that a family member, room-mate or pet might stop by unannounced. We all live in fear of inadvertently recreating that moment when professor Robert Kelly was explaining Korean politics to the nation, only to be interrupted by a surprise visit from his young daughter. Less adorable was the recent broadcast from Trinny Woodall (of Trinny and Susannah fame), which went viral after her partner Charles Saatchi appeared in the background – naked.



As we move out of lockdown and into 'stay-alert' social-distancing territory, it's time to reflect on some lessons learned and move forward into the 'new normal'. This issue, we look at the impact of the crisis on the sector, examine the positive changes that new approaches may have had (see page 37) and highlight the support available (p. 14). We also round up the best kit out there to help music-making at home, ensuring minimum fallout with family members and neighbours (p. 18).

The mosaic video montage is becoming as ubiquitous as the carefully curated bookshelves. These patchwork pieces weave together separate contributions and when done well, they can be extremely effective. One superb example appeared in my inbox, created by flautist Chris Hill, who has arranged and recorded a new version of *Zycanthos* for flute choir – with him playing all the parts (<https://tinyurl.com/y7ar298y>).

This technique is useful for remote ensemble work, as seen during the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain's recent online campaign for performances of *Jupiter* from Holst's *The Planets*. Groups such as Lister Violins recorded their own individual parts that were then spliced into one film, so that it appeared as though the melodic line was 'passed' among the violinists. (You can post your own videos under #NYOMusicalPlanet.) If, like me, you're feeling a little underqualified when it comes to video editing, *MT*'s technology correspondent Tim Hallas has some tips on p. 42. Do share your efforts with us – contact details are on p. 6.

Claire Jackson, Interim editor

@musicteachermag fb.com/musicteachermag

Music Teacher is the UK's only magazine aimed at music educators from across the sector. It is a place where music is valued in and of itself, embracing all genres. We offer up new approaches to pedagogy through in-depth features, engaging opinions, lesson plans and schemes of work. We cast a critical eye over the latest research and products to help inform the conversations that shape musical teaching. This is a platform for raising awareness of the key issues affecting music teachers, and for championing existing efforts to ensure music education is accessible to all.

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New study into musical practice

Psychologists at Goldsmiths, University of London and at the University of Trier, Germany are working together on a new project to provide a clearer definition of 'Deliberate Practice'. The term was coined in the 1990s by psychologist Anders Ericsson, who wrote that the quality of practice is what really matters – at least 10,000 hours of laser-focused hard work in a practice room for wannabe professionals. Despite its popularity, Ericsson's work has been criticised by several studies that have picked up on the vagueness of the key definitions, its procedure of measuring expertise and its complete denial of the possible role of genes. This new study will define a specific set of factors and behaviours that can increase the effectiveness of musical practice, regardless of musical genre and instrument played, across all levels of expertise.



From interviews with the likes of members of the Teatro alla Scala, the London Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, we identified a set of 13 main factors that may enhance practice effectiveness. These serve as the basis of the second stage of the study, for which we need help from *MT* readers. There is an online questionnaire, accessible through the weblink and QR code provided below, which we hope will extend the data collection to a broader sample of musicians. (You must be over 18 to participate.) The third stage of this project will run in July: we will work with a limited number of musicians who will be asked to track their daily practice routines for a short period of time and monitor their musical progress. If you are interested in supporting this project, please directly contact the principal researcher, Edoardo Passarotto, by email: eppassoo2@gold.ac.uk.

The researchers

Project supervisor Daniel Müllensiefen is a professor of music psychology at Goldsmiths, where he is co-director of the MSc in Music, Mind, and Brain. He is also a research fellow with the University of Music, Drama, and Media in Hannover, Germany. Principal researcher Edoardo Passarotto is a Master candidate on the MSc programme in Music, Mind, and Brain at Goldsmiths, University of London and a concert pianist, who has performed and studied in Italy, Germany and the US.

https://goldpsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1QX9OfY588UjKEI



Screen time

Ahead of reopening my physical music tuition business, which hosts both one-to-one and ensemble groups, I was particularly mindful of my challenged immune system and that many of my students are in older or vulnerable categories. In search of a solution to permit good interaction while meeting current safety guidelines, robust screening seemed a great addition to the measures I have already used for decades to protect myself.

I researched personal protective screens, commonly seen in many shops, but found most were too short, the wrong shape, or fixed installations. Specialist music screens generally promoted excellent sound-proofing and were priced accordingly. With raw materials in short supply, bespoke options were also a considerable outlay with a long or unknown waiting time for delivery.

And so I've designed a concept screen specifically for music teachers, which also has many other applications, including live and studio work – and commissioned its build to a trusted sound engineer who specialises in custom projects.

The resulting free-standing screen is robust, lightweight and easy to move and store, is as transparent as glass but ten times as strong and delivers natural sound and great protection. Each unit is suitable for a seated adult and the stands can be linked to provide wider coverage.

My engineer is already producing these for several clients and is happy to look at custom projects (he has available stock), including a full-size version for standing performers. The cost of this version is £139.00 per screen, with five pounds of each sale helping to support the return of the live music scene via a charitable donation.

<http://www.gandamusic.co.uk/GandaMusic/screens.html>
Al Summers, *MT* contributer

THE PERIS

by Harry Venning

This is what happens when you try and social distance from a trombonist!....





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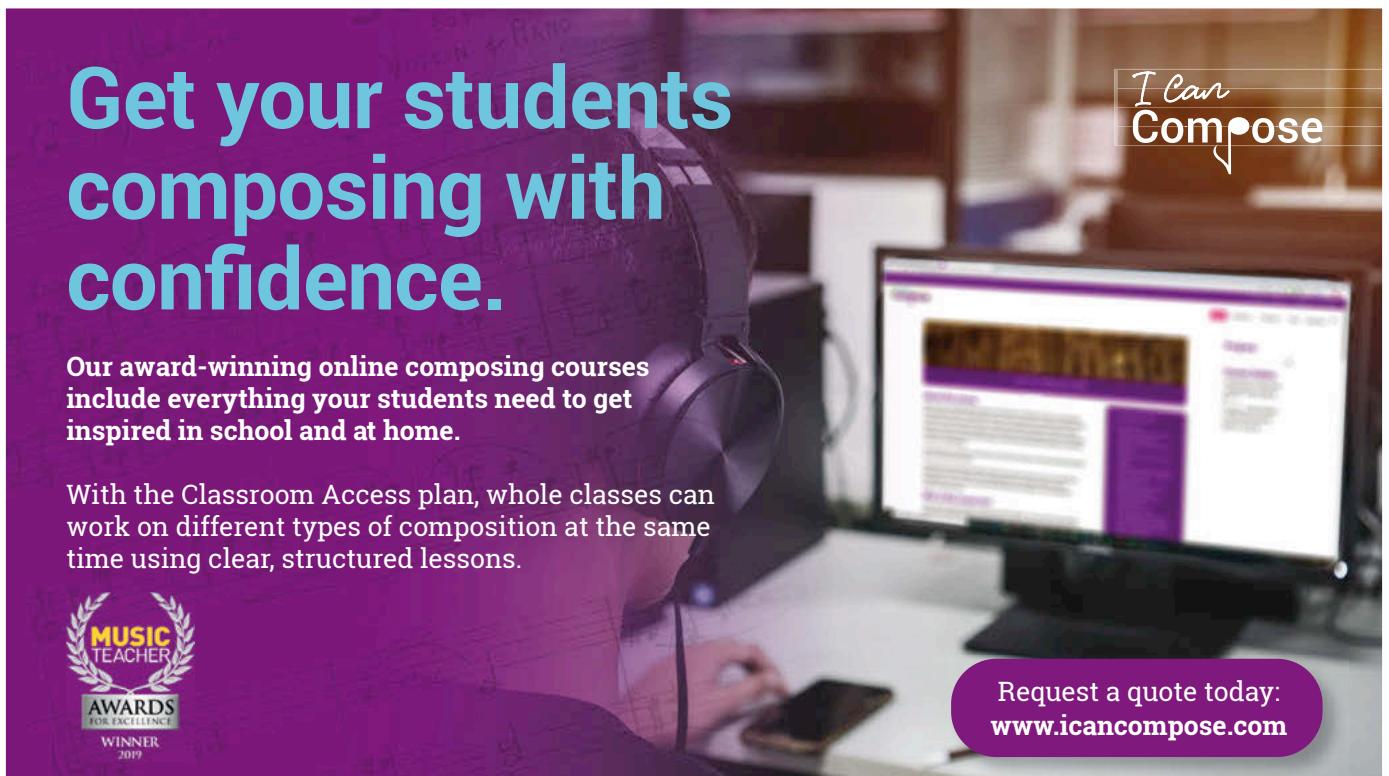
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Minster School York 'no longer sustainable'

The Minster School York (TMS York), the prep school that educates the trebles of York Minster Choir, will close this summer, due to a financial shortfall of more than £5m in the finances of York Minster Chapter. The Dean of York, the Right Revd Dr Jonathan Frost, has told reporters that the shortfall is due to the lack of tourist income during the coronavirus pandemic, and that the investment the Chapter was putting into TMS York was 'no longer sustainable'.

Headteacher Angela Mitchell said, in a statement, 'It is with a heavy heart we announce the imminent closure of The Minster School York, which has existed in various forms since 627AD and is steeped in the history of York Minster and the wider York

community ... We'd like to thank all pupils, parents, carers, and teachers who have made this school a truly special and unique place over many years. Indeed TMS York has existed on this site opposite York Minster since 1903.'

The 40 chorister pupils will be moved to St Peter's School in York. The fate of the other 140 or so other pupils is not clear, but the school has announced that it is 'currently working with parents and carers to offer help and advice with appropriate new school placements for all pupils as a matter of urgency'.

While it is widely known that private schools throughout the country are taking a financial hit as parents struggle to find fees in the midst of the pandemic, the closure of an institution deemed to be such an integral part of the fabric of the musical



▲ The Minster School York has been a major part of York Minster's choral activity

establishment has been a stark indication of the permanent effect the coronavirus is having on the music education community. Simon Toyne, president of the Music Teachers' Association, told *MT*, 'This has clearly been a difficult and painful

decision for all involved, but we are all heartened by York Minster developing a new partnership with St Peter's School, so that the choristers' education can not only continue, but be enhanced by its outstanding music department.'

<https://minsterschoolyork.co.uk>

Dawsons Music bought out of administration



Dawsons Music has been bought out of administration by Manchester-based Andrew Oliver and his wife Karen Oliver (*pictured*), in a deal that will save six stores and dozens of jobs across England and Northern Ireland.

The joint administrators of Dawsons Music, Neil Gostelow and Rick Harrison from KPMG's Restructuring practice, confirmed that they sold the

business and its assets to the new owners.

The business will continue to trade via a new company; Dawsons Music & Sound Ltd, which is owned and operated by the Olivers' existing company Arranged Musical Options Ltd.

The deal means that all 75 staff across the retail estate will keep their jobs. Andrew Oliver said: 'I'm excited to be taking on such a well-established brand with a strong heritage and huge potential. It would have been a huge loss for a business that is so well known and loved to close its doors for good. My wife and I are relishing the opportunity to lead such a strong team at Dawsons. Both businesses completely complement each other.' *MT* wishes the Olivers and Dawsons all the best for a bright future.

Cellist fatally shot in Philadelphia, US



A 18-year-old cellist has been shot amid Black Lives Matter protests in the US.

Mouhamed Cisse was killed in Philadelphia on 31 May as campaigners marched through the city following the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis.

Philadelphia Police said it is believed Cisse was walking with another teenager – separately from the protests – when shots were fired. Details of the shooting are under investigation;

it is not yet known why the attack took place.

Cisse played cello with the Musicopia String Orchestra from 2013 to 2019. He studied at the Philadelphia School District Instrumental Music Program and the Camp Encore/Coda summer program.

A Go Fund Me page (*pictured*) set up to pay for Cisse's funeral has so far raised more than \$55,000 (around £43,000). uk.gofundme.com/f/funeral-fund-for-mouhamed-cisse

Sector navigates new health and safety procedures



Given that the majority of musical instruments require breath or touch to create sound, music retailers face a raft of new challenges as shops begin to reopen. Music Industries Association (MIA), the trade body for the UK musical instrument industry, has drawn attention to the plight of stores that must navigate strict cleaning processes in order to sell products including woodwind and brass instruments, as well

as guitars. The requirements come amid concern that social distancing measures are pushing an already-stretched sector to breaking point. Manufacturers, retailers and players are keen to find solutions – MIA's website features tips from PRS Guitars, Denis Wick Products and Warwick Music Group, as well as a webinar that discusses practical and logistical planning.

The crisis is prompting several makers to instigate research of their own. Japanese recorder

manufacturer Aulos has been analysing what happens when a recorder is played, using specialist cameras that can identify the dispersal of water droplets. The droplet dispersal pattern was also contrasted with what is expelled from the mouth of a singer. (Videos can be viewed via <https://tinyurl.com/yambysea>) In all experiments, Aulos found that there were almost no water droplet splashes visible – unless there was a gap between the mouth and the recorder. The inference of these findings, says Aulos, is that there is

minimal direct risk of virus contamination when playing recorder. Even so, experiments such as these indicate that there are certain precautions that the industry can take, including encouraging students to take care not to swing wind and brass instruments around and clean up any 'leakages' quickly and efficiently. Brass Band England also encourages players to only handle their own music and stands, avoid sharing instruments, mutes or valve oil as well as cleaning mouthpieces more regularly ([more details](https://www.bbe.org.uk/news) <https://www.bbe.org.uk/news>).

Making Music launches virtual concert series

Making Music has launched a series of virtual concerts that will run fortnightly until September, featuring a selection of performances drawn from Making Music's membership – including choral societies, gospel choirs, community choirs, symphony orchestras, brass bands, ukulele groups and handbell ringers to name but a few.

With many leisure-time music groups unable to meet together or perform as usual during the Covid-19 pandemic, the concerts will showcase and celebrate virtual performances recorded by member groups in their homes across the UK.

Barbara Eifler, chief executive of Making Music, said: 'These



▲ Sticking together: North Tyneside Steelband participated in Making Music's online series

heartfelt videos will make you laugh and cry and raise goosebumps. We are so proud to be showcasing the wonderful energy and spirit

shown by thousands of hobby musicians in this difficult time and hope you will tune in for a dose of musical cheer every fortnight.'

The concerts are free for anyone to view, and will remain available to watch after each premiere at www.youtube.com/makingmusic

Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama appoints new head of woodwind performance

The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama (RCWMD) has appointed Robert Plane, principal clarinet of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, as its new head of woodwind performance.

Plane (*pictured*), who has been a clarinet tutor at the college for the last 20 years, will take up the position in September.

'It's an honour to be able to continue and build on the superb work undertaken by my distinguished predecessors and to become such an integral part of the College's dynamic leadership team,' he said.

The post will focus on nurturing RWCMD's presence on the international stage, in tandem with deepening the college's link with its local communities and roots within

Wales. 'Collaboration and innovation must be at the heart of everything we do,' he said. 'Covid-19 has highlighted just how creative, resourceful and adaptable the musicians of the future will need to be. Employability is everything, and I hope to instil a caring, supportive and demanding work ethic in the department. Every young musician who passes through the department should have the confidence to explore musical paths that may not have occurred to them before beginning their studies with us. We will strive for the very highest standards and to fulfil each student's potential across the whole spectrum of what it means to be a musician. There will be no limits to my ambitions for the department and all those in it.'

Kate Stokes Davies, current director of communications and stakeholder relations at education regulator Qualifications Wales, has also been named as the college's new director of external affairs.



BBC Young Jazz Musician competition returns



▲ Saxophonist Xhosa Cole won the 2018 instalment of BBC Young Jazz Musician

The BBC Young Jazz Musician competition is set to return this year, with the final due to take place as part of the EFG London Jazz Festival in November, broadcast on BBC Four.

Up to 25 semi-finalists will be selected, out of which five young performers will go on to appear at the final. The finalists will have the opportunity to play with the internationally acclaimed Nikki Yeoh's Infinitum,

led by British jazz composer and pianist Nikki Yeoh and featuring her rhythm section of siblings Michael Mondesir (bass) and Mark Mondesir (drums).

Jan Younghusband, head of BBC music TV commissioning,

said: 'We are so delighted that we can continue with BBC Young Jazz Musician this year, and give these incredibly talented musicians a platform to perform. Encouraging young talent at this time has never been more important and we are thrilled to partner again with the EFG London Jazz Festival to make this possible.'

Entries for the competition are now open and will close in mid-July.

Full details on how to apply can be found at: www.bbc.co.uk/bbc-young-jazz-musician-2020



Speak up, speak out

Music education needs to be more vocal on Black Lives Matter, writes **Matt Griffiths**, CEO at Youth Music

Since the end of May, in response to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and countless other black US citizens at the hands of police, the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) has gone from strength-to-strength, inspiring campaigners across the world, including here in the UK. It's prompted an outpouring of outrage, activism, self-reflection and actions in order to tackle racism, prejudice, exclusion and bias – including the unconscious bias that affects us all.

The music industry, which profits particularly from the work of globally successful black artists including the likes of Beyoncé, Rihanna, The Weeknd and Drake, has pledged to examine its practices and make real change.

On 2 June, the music industry led the #BlackoutTuesday social media campaign. People around the world posted black squares as a sign of their support. Instead of a black square, Youth Music posted a statement of solidarity, and used our communications channels to share resources and opportunities for young black creatives.

#BlackoutTuesday began with good intentions, but much more than a day of reflection is needed to remedy an ecosystem riven with socioeconomic inequalities. The music industry in its current form is largely disconnected from many of the communities it claims to serve.

It was a start though, albeit a small one. It was heartening to see organisations begin to hold up their hands and recognise what they'd got wrong, and to pledge

to take action. Unfortunately, the music education sector seems to have been much less vocal on this issue. Why?

Nervousness... or complacency?

Why have music education organisations been slow to speak out? Perhaps, as recipients of public funding they're cautious about being 'political' – however, there are no two sides when it comes to human rights issues. Arts Council England has been strong in its statements, emphasising the creative case for diversity and being open about its own failings.

Maybe it's because – as with many sectors – music education leadership is predominantly white, and there's a nervousness about 'getting it wrong'. We will get it wrong sometimes, and we will learn from it. But there's nothing more wrong than doing nothing.

Or perhaps it's a sense that, as music education organisations doing excellent work, we're doing enough already. Bringing music to all children. Offering inclusive activities, often free of charge. But complacency is dangerous. We can all do more, and do much better.

And there needs to be so much more than passive (and actually, patronising) 'listening and reflecting'. It's about a continuous cycle of learning, planning and acting on what we've learned. Otherwise, it's just warm words and yet another hashtag.

Music education is part of the music industry ecosystem

For too long, music education and the music industries have

Maybe it's because – as with many sectors – music education leadership is predominantly white, and there's a nervousness about 'getting it wrong'. We will get it wrong sometimes, and we will learn from it. But there's nothing more wrong than doing nothing

been disconnected. As CMU's 'Pathways into Music' report points out, 'formal music education in the school system has too often seen its funding, resources and place in the timetable reduced... Ironically, this trend has occurred during a time when other parts of government have become ever more enthusiastic about the British music industry.'

For meaningful change to happen, it is crucial that the drive for inclusivity and diversity begins at school – mirrored in the music curriculum. Our research shows 97 per cent of young people listen to music each week, and those from lower income backgrounds are more likely to see themselves as musical and are just as likely to sing and play an instrument. But their creative identities all too often go unrecognised in schools. This will have an impact on the diversity of the future music industry, unless radical change happens now.

As we showed with our Exchanging Notes research, the canon of music studied in schools needs broadening and reimagining. Musician, author and speaker Nate Holder explains why, at this time in particular, it's not enough to learn about 'protest songs' – but instead to study Black Lives

Matter protest music: 'It shows that you are aware of what's happening, and you're not prepared to gloss over it.'

Moreover, we must open up education to teachers and community practitioners with different backgrounds and experiences, to give young people access to representative role models. And across the board, organisations must put in place comprehensive evidence-led diversity and inclusion policies. This is just the start.

Youth Music will continue fighting for change on behalf of and alongside young people. Campaigning for inclusion, diversity and representation is at the heart of our work every day. But we know that we too have more to do – 52 per cent of the organisations receiving our Fund A grants identify as 'diverse-led', yet only 9.5 per cent of Fund A grants went to BAME-led organisations. It's a complex problem, and we ourselves do not have all the answers. But as ever, we welcome feedback so that we can improve our practices. I'm hopeful that this is the moment for a collective commitment from us all to do better, backed up with actions, and that we can count on our peers across the industry and education sectors to make change happen – now and in the future.

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Association of Teachers of Singing Autumn (AOTOS) Conference

1 November, 10.00-16.45

- ▶ St Paul's Girls' School, Brook Green, Hammersmith, London, W6 7BS
- ▶ Cost TBC

The subject for the AOTOS Autumn Conference will be 'The Confident Performer'. It will look at aspects of performance anxiety and showcase techniques to overcome this in students. Key speakers include Leontine Hass, an internationally renowned vocal coach and principal of the Associated Studios London Performing Arts Academy, and Linda Hirst – head of vocal studies at Trinity Laban for 20 years and now on the academic staff – who will give masterclasses in musical theatre and classical singing. AOTOS is planning for online streaming if necessary and moving to an online event should social distancing restrictions still be in place. More details from <https://aotos.org.uk/events/diary/event/autumn-2020/>



Brass Band England's Brass Band Conference 2020

19 September

- ▶ Online
- ▶ Free

This year's Brass Band England (BBE) conference will explore resilience and sustainability, highlighting proven practice that will help bands and banding communities to survive and thrive in the post-pandemic world. Darren Henley, chief executive of Arts Council England (ACE), is the keynote speaker, while Fred Harrison, chair of the successful Amersham Band, has

been invited to share his experiences. There will be a panel discussion on the subject of 'The Challenges of Building a Sustainable Youth Band', which will be opened up to BBE's online forum. Panel members will be confirmed in the coming weeks. A session on Band Resilience will be led by BBE's Alex Parker and ACE Tech Champions will help delegates improve their digital marketing and social media presence. This conference is aimed at anybody with any involvement in banding at any level. Registration is via the BBE website (see below).
www.bbe.org.uk/events

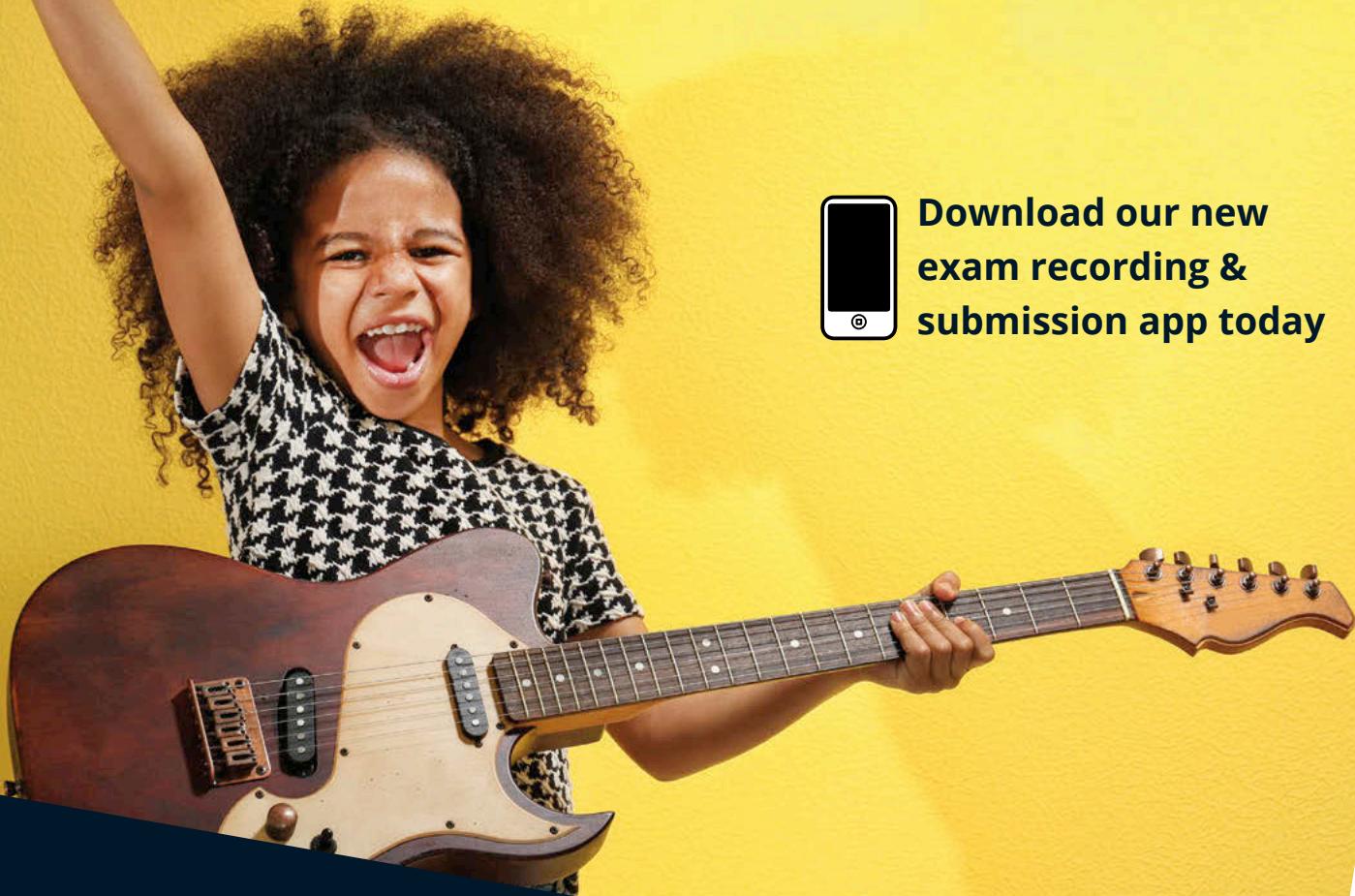
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- **Optional Accompaniments:** We have made accompaniments optional over this period.

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Reaching out

Illness, lockdown and social distancing measures have had an unsettling impact on many music teachers, but strength can be found through collaboration, finds **Clarissa Payne**. Additional words by **Thomas Lydon**

In March, my wife and I sat down to write a budget – with me earning nothing.

Bristol-based saxophonist and teacher Craig Crofton is looking back to when the UK went into coronavirus lockdown. ‘We were hoping for the best but planning for the worst’, he tells me over Zoom.

He was, of course, far from alone – every music teacher in the country faced an unprecedented new reality. ‘It was all very overwhelming and stressful. I remember I was just doing loads of crying and trying to cover it up in front of the kids’, says Rachel Llewellyn-Jones, also a saxophone player and teacher.

‘It was all very overwhelming and stressful. I remember I was just doing loads of crying’

As Crofton researched his next moves, he realised his friends and colleagues needed a place to share information and help each other out. He set up a page on Facebook and within a week the Bristol Musicians Support Group had over a thousand members, with over half the posts relating to online teaching.

‘I’ve never done anything like that before’, he says. ‘It helped me hugely. I was doing it for everyone, but also it helped me personally – I had access to lots of information’.

Llewellyn-Jones was one of the first members. ‘Teaching is probably the most talked-about topic – people who’ve never taught before are suddenly deciding to try it, while all of us who do teach are dealing with doing it online’.

As well as advice on online teaching techniques and marketing, the group members share their expertise on what equipment is necessary, and post for sale and wanted adverts for spare gear.

The group also hosts resources and discussion on the emergency hardship funds available to musicians, such as those set up by PRS and the Musicians' Union (see *MT's* directory, opposite), and how to apply for them.

Members have also been sharing their experiences of claiming Universal Credit and sick pay, and posting non-musical employment opportunities. Some musicians and teachers are taking jobs delivery driving and stacking shelves, and Llewellyn-Jones says the support group is helping those who are missing their old life.

'There's quite a lot about mental health, people struggling and talking to each other', she said. Some problems are more immediately solvable than others, she adds, laughing. 'such as ****ing Sibelius, I'm gonna throw it out of the window, help, what do I do!?"

Crofton's sister has lived in Italy for many years and has an Italian partner. 'We were getting reports early on from Italy', he says. 'My wife and I both started to take the threat of a pandemic much more seriously. I was aware that something was coming and that I needed to prepare for it – we were actively preparing several weeks before everything locked down here'.

He began researching online teaching at the end of February, and, during the first weekend of lockdown, he set up the musicians' support group. 'I had quite a bit of information already that I'd garnered through my own research, and I knew this would be something that we could all help each other with'.

Llewellyn-Jones lives with health conditions for which she has to take a variety of medications.

'I have rheumatoid arthritis so I am on immunosuppressants. I have to keep taking those or it's even more dangerous', she told me. 'I also have emphysema and COPD and I've had pneumonia every winter for three or four years, ending up in hospital twice. So those things together... Basically your number's up. I've had not one but three letters from the government!'

She and her family took the decision to stay at home on 13 March, ten days before the rest of the country. Online teaching with young children at home has presented her with different challenges. 'When they're at school I have time when I can do other stuff; practise, lesson planning, transcriptions – that's what I've lost'.

Both saxophonists have seen their pupil numbers hold up well, and they've even taken on brand new ones over the past few weeks. For now, the worst hasn't happened.

'Most of my students or students' parents have kept their jobs – if in six month's time the economy tanks, then as people lose their jobs they're not going to be able to pay for the lessons', says Crofton.

There are some silver linings to be found among the uncertainty. Crofton has learned new skills – audio editing and syncing video to audio – that he's excited to develop. He's also going to keep using some of the techniques he adopted for online teaching when he's back in the studio with his students. But there's more to the support group than advice on teaching, Llewellyn-Jones told me. 'For the most part it's just solidarity. That's what people need – the understanding that everyone's in the same boat'. **MT**

MT's Covid-19 directory

The first place to look is Coronamusicians.info, which has a comprehensive set of links for all kinds of musician (see below under 'General'). We've included the Musicians' Union here, but all unions will have their own bank of resources – get in touch with yours if you haven't already.

Professional Associations

Musicians' Union (MU)

The MU offers legal advice and assistance to its members, and, in response to Covid-19, has also offered small grants to its members through its Coronavirus Hardship Fund. Even if you are not a member, there is a lot of helpful information on the website. If you scroll down the homepage, there is a drop-down menu leading to advice on many different issues raised by Covid-19 (categories include: 'Future Live Performances', 'Insurance', and 'Domestic Abuse'). The news section of its website is a good source of useful links for musicians in navigating the changing situation, and there is a specific page for coronavirus advice: musiciansunion.org.uk/coronavirus.

musiciansunion.org.uk

020 7840 5504 (London office; see website for regional contacts)

Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM)

The ISM's members have access to its in-house legal service, including a 24-hour legal helpline, and to its dedicated support and advice services. Further benefits for members through the ISM Members Fund include counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy. There is a great deal of free advice on its website. As well as a dedicated page (ism.org/advice-centre/coronavirus-listing), the homepage breaks down advice topics under the headings 'Performing', 'Composing' and 'Teaching', including lists of opportunities and advice on topics such as livestreaming and self-employment.

ism.org

020 7221 3499

Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD)

ABCD has just published a research paper on the impact of coronavirus on choral activity, written by Martin Ashley, one of its trustees. The site also has useful lists of online resources for choir leaders in lockdown.

abcd.org.uk

01935 389482

Hardship and Funding

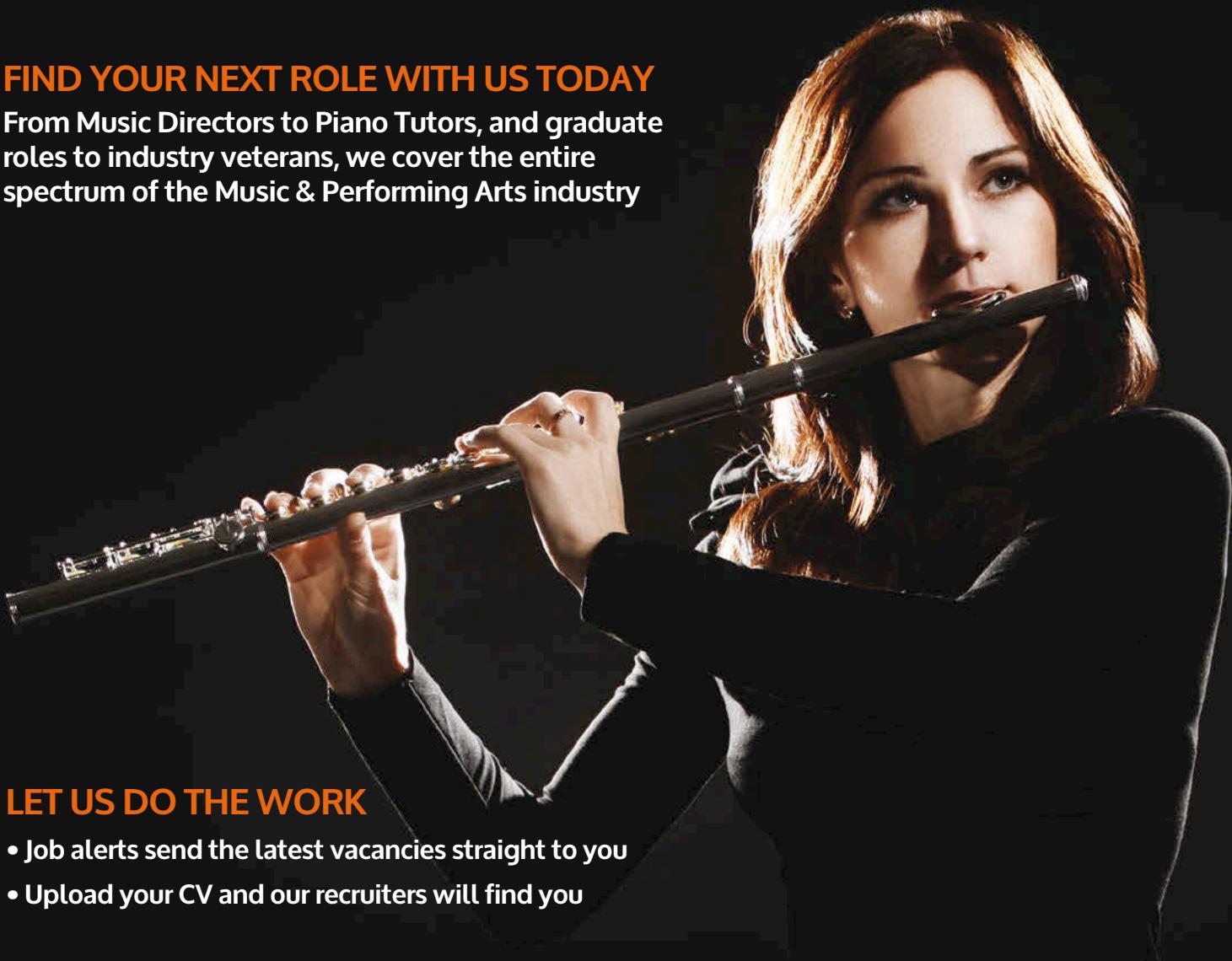
The PRS Emergency Relief Fund and the Arts Council England emergency funding package scheme have now closed to applications, but the Help Musicians Hardship fund (see below) is still operating. The Musicians' Union (see above) also has a hardship fund. If, alongside your teaching, you also work in the recording, publishing or live music parts of the UK music industry, see the entry on 'UK Music' below for further avenues of funding.

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Help Musicians (Musicians Benevolent Fund)

Applications for the second phase of support from the Help Musicians financial hardship fund are now open. Help Musicians strongly urges musicians to apply for Universal Credit if this is a viable option, as it may provide vital funds and will speed up assessment for the hardship fund as well.

Help Musicians has a number that you can ring during office hours if you need help. You can leave a message and someone will get back to you. If you visit the coronavirus page on the website, you can find links to the latest advice, apply for hardship funding, and, if your needs go beyond financial hardship, ask to speak directly with a caseworker.

helpmusicians.org.uk

020 7239 9100 (England); 028 9023 3162 (Northern Ireland); 0141 303 9502 (Scotland)

Health and Wellbeing

We would always recommend an appointment with your GP as the first port of call. Here are some further options:

NHS

The NHS website has specific pages on coronavirus (search for 'Coronavirus' from the homepage) and mental wellbeing (search 'Mental wellbeing').

nhs.uk

NHS 111 Online

If you need medical help, you can fill in an online questionnaire to find out when and where to get help and to be contacted by a nurse, if needed.

111.nhs.uk

111

Mind

Mind provides urgent advice and support for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. The charity recognises the coronavirus as a mental health emergency and has provided a large bank of resources on its website to support wellbeing. There is also a specific 'Coronavirus and your wellbeing' page.

Mind.org.uk

020 8215 2243

italk.org.uk

Italk is a psychological therapy service that provides free support and treatment for people suffering from common mental health problems. You can self-refer online or by phone without needing to see your GP.

Italk.org.uk

023 8038 3920

Music Support

This charity is for people working in any area of the UK Music Industry who are suffering from mental, emotional or behavioural health disorders, including alcohol and drug addiction. It offers a non-judgemental and confidential helpline as well as a free NHS-approved wellbeing app and an online support group meeting for musicians in 12-step recovery. It has an excellent page of coronavirus relevant resources and also lists vetted and qualified therapists, with

links to funders who could potentially finance your treatment.

musicsupport.org

Helpline: 0800 030 6789

General

CoronaMusicians.Info

A central hub of links for musicians, with information on government advice, personal finances, legal/business advice, health issues, creative development, and working online.

Coronamusicians.info

Government advice

For up-to-date guidance and support on all aspects of government policy around coronavirus.

www.gov.uk/coronavirus

UK Music

UK Music, the industry body representing the interests of the recording, publishing and live music elements of the UK music industry, has an extensive list of resources, including, for those teachers whose work might overlap into these areas, an industry-centric list of places you can apply for funding. These include the Association of Independent Music, the Music Managers Forum and the Music Venue Trust. Go to the homepage and search for 'emergency funding'.

ukmusic.org

British Phonographic Industry (BPI)

The BPI's 'Information Hub', which links from its homepage, has lots of helpful information. In particular; the Individual Support tab, which links to useful tools from Money Saving Expert; a guide to managing stress while working at home; and the Mental Health tab.

bpi.co.uk

020 7803 1300

Social Media

Facebook

Musicians' Virus Forum (UK)

Covid-19 Information Centre

World Health Organization

UK Live Event Freelancer Forum

Twitter

@MusicCovid

@MusicEdUk

@NHSUk (NHS)

@PHE_UK (Public Health England)





House music

With music teaching and practising at home set to be the ‘new normal’, for a while at least, *MT*'s experts explore the latest solutions to contain and limit sound – keeping room mates, family members and even the grumpiest neighbours happy

Drums

Lockdown brought violinists on balconies, Zoom choirs and live-streamed guitar gigs – but what about us drummers, for whom practising at home is fraught with practical issues? Obviously, in an ideal world, we'd all have expensive electronic kit and a sound-proof home studio. However, this is unrealistic for the majority of musicians and so tweaks to existing gear are far more viable.

Give it some stick

There are some low-fi methods that will reduce sound – such as using up-turned old drum heads on top of your drums – but there are more sophisticated solutions available, too. Vic Firth Rutes (RRP £29.99) are dowel-based sticks that are an essential part of any stick bag for the different sound they offer. If you're looking for a slightly softer timbre, useful for newer players with a heavier touch, they're perfect – but they don't quite offer enough of a reduction in volume for lockdown purposes.

The same could also be said of bass drum beater options. I looked at the Vic Firth fleece (RRP £37.79) and cajon bass drum beaters (RRP £23.99); both offered a slightly different sound which I really liked (think of the muffled sound associated with vintage jazz) but neither made a significant difference to the overall volume.

‘Muffliato!'

Vic Firth Drum Mutes (available in packs to cover the whole kit; RRP £89.99) are not unique but the package offered provides as good a result as I've seen from a pad set up. The pack (available in both rock and fusion sizes) provides rubber pads to sit on top of both the drums and cymbals, which mute the sound effectively. They are incredibly easy to install (and remove) and they provide excellent dampening on the drums. I found that the cymbals were still a little louder than I would have liked, particularly with open hi hats. I found that the stick response was significantly different to a drum head (though much better than most



electronic kits) which may cause technique issues with newer players. However, a very simple and practical solution.

Pearl muffle heads comprise a mesh drum head that is used in place of conventional drum heads. While not as simple to fit and remove as the Vic Firth Drum Mutes, the feel is much closer to that of a normal drum head and the ability to change the tension of different heads is a real bonus. The volume is near silent and, although they work out a little pricier than pads (starting at around £9 each), I would argue they are a much better purchase.

Knicker elastic

My first drum teacher advised using what he described as a ring of 'granny's knicker elastic' to dampen the sound of cymbals. Cymbomutes takes this idea further: a ring of elastic with an embedded ring of silicon is stretched around your existing cymbals. I was genuinely impressed with the results – this was the quietest I've heard my cymbals. Playing with the tip of the stick on the bow of the ride cymbal produces a high-pitched 'tick' sound, but the crash and hats are near silent. They were initially rather fiddly to fit but, once on, remained solid and provided all the response I would usually get from my cymbals. They're also a relatively cheap solution. The pack I used, which covered my 14" hi hats, 16" crash and 20" ride, costs £30.57.

Alternative kit

If you're looking to add extra equipment rather than adapt existing gear there are further options. I tried the Pearl

Compact Traveller Kit, a fantastic little kit capable of a quieter overall sound. Coupled with a minute footprint it's ideal for small practice setups and I could even see it working well for an acoustic gig. However, the overall volume was still reasonably loud. The Compact Traveller I played is available from around £475 (without stands) though the kit is available with just kick and snare from £215, which makes it a tempting option for those looking to add an extra practice/small gig kit to their collection.

The Sabian Quiet Tone cymbals were revelatory. Cymbals such as these (with a great deal of holes drilled through them to reduce volume) have been on the market for a number of years but this was the first time I'd had the opportunity to try them out and I was amazed by the drop in volume and their playability. I only heard a light high-pitched sustain, even when playing heavily, and they were incredibly satisfying to use. The price (the set I played consisting of 14" hi hats, 16" crash and 20" ride is available from around £256) puts them out of reach of many musicians looking for a short-term solution, but they make a great addition to any full-time practice kit.

As with most things, the best options are often the most expensive. The setup which worked best for me was the Pearl Compact Traveller with the addition of the Muffle Heads and Sabian Quiet Tone cymbals as the combination of a significant reduction in volume without a difference in feel was a real bonus. However, as a short-term solution, the Vic Firth Drum Mutes are excellent.

GUY SWINTON

▲ Clockwise:
Pearl Muffle Heads; Vic Firth Cajon Bass Drum Beater; Pearl Rhythm Traveller; Vic Firth Fleece Bass Drum Beater; Cymbomutes; Vic Firth Drum Mutes; Sabian Quiet Tone Cymbals and Vic Firth Rute



▲ *Silent night:*
Yamaha's Silent
Brass System

Brass

Practice mutes are available for all brass instruments, and it is a rich and diverse field. Prices range from £15 for a simple cornet practice mute to around £500 for a Yamaha tuba Silent Brass System (*pictured*). A good starting point is JohnPacker.co.uk, where you can conduct a search with filters for instrument, mute type, brand and price. If you're looking for a mute as a gift, you want a model that will remain in tune over the whole register and that doesn't need any extra puff (the 'resistance').

Brass mutes are very effective – they reduce the volume drastically, and you won't disturb anyone in the next room. But they are mainly intended for note bashing and keeping your chops in shape. For work on tone you really need to hear your instrument out loud in all its glory.

Yamaha's 'Silent Brass' systems are quite something. They comprise a 'pickup mute', stereo headphones and a digital processor module. The big advantage of the Silent Brass system is in the module element, which is a small battery-powered device the size of a phone (batteries not included by the way, so if you're ordering while isolating you need to plan for that). It connects the mute to headphones, and allows you to add reverb. You can record yourself, and play along with external audio through the headphones using the 'Aux in' jack. If you just want a practice mute, it is possible to buy that element of the Silent Brass system separately, but it is arguably not worth paying hundreds of pounds for – there are cheaper standalone practice mutes that will do the same job.

One thing to look for when buying a brass practice mute is its size and where it sits in the instrument. A model that fits in the bell entirely will be much easier to transport, as you don't need more room in your case.

Strings and guitar

It is possible to buy practice mutes for all orchestral stringed instruments – what is more, they aren't all that expensive. (Between £5 to £30) Well-known



► *String things:*
Artino's mutes
are ideal for
young beginners

and reliable brands include Ultra and Artino. Practice mutes for violins and violas are reasonably effective, and many players report that with a heavy rubber or metal model they can't be heard through walls when using them.

Cello practice mutes are anecdotally reported to cut the sound down by around half, which may or may not keep everyone happy, depending on the thickness of your walls. The 'Ultra' heavy rubber double bass mute claims to cut a standard 62–86.4 db unmuted volume range to a 50.8–76.4 db range and costs in the range of £9 to £16, depending on the vendor. For cellos and double basses, a rubber tip on the endpin will help to stop vibrations passing through the floor to rooms below, and a pillow under the tailpiece of a bass will also help to dampen its massive top plate.

If you want to buy a present for a beginner, you could take a look at Artino's range of children's practice mutes for violin and small viola (*pictured*). They cost £7.20 for a plain model or £8.40 for an animal model (including 'Blue Bird', and 'Red Rabbit') from thestringzone.co.uk.

As with brass mutes, stringed instrument mutes are primarily for note bashing. They cut out overtones in your sound, which successfully reduces the volume but also means that you can't work seriously on sound quality.

For acoustic guitars, the cheapest and most widely used method for muting the sound is simply to stick a pad of material between the wood and the strings up by the bridge. As well as being cheap,

it's fun to play with the varying sonorities that different materials/objects will give you. There are also specialist practice mutes available, including a D'Addario model that fills the sound hole and various rubber models that sit under the strings.

Vocal

Much to the dismay of choir directors through the ages, there are no mutes for singers. Unless you have the budget for a studio-style installation, the closest thing to a mute is a portable sound booth of some sort. These are pricey, usually several hundred pounds, and range in size from a changing-room affair with foam or fabric walls to what is essentially a box on a stand into which you can put your head. Many of these products are aimed at getting a clean audio environment for singers wanting to record themselves, and not at reducing the volume of a trained voice, but there are some that market themselves on decibel reduction. Vocalboothtogo.co.uk does just this, and it has many different products to choose from.

If you decide to practice in your car, be sure to open the windows as often as possible. There's a genuine possibility of damaging your ears if you let loose in a reflective small space such as a car for long periods every day.

If your most realistic option is the DIY route, thick rugs, soundproofing curtains, and tacked-up foam, vinyl or acoustic insulation will all help. It might be best to go for a booth-style set up, so you aren't ruining your entire décor.

THOMAS LYDON

Woodwind

Woodwind instruments are among the hardest to keep quiet. This is due to physics. Rather than the sound coming from a single opening – the bell of a brass instrument, for example – on woodwind instruments it emanates from all the uncovered finger holes as well as the open end. Shove a sock up an oboe and you won't notice much difference, apart from a muffling effect at the bottom end.

With woodwind, then, you have to think laterally to minimise noise. First, dampen the acoustics of your practice space by pinning up duvets, blankets, egg boxes or foam blocks. If possible, practise in a room far removed from sensitive ears.

Avoid playing quietly, which doesn't have much to recommend it as a noise-reducing technique. You are likely to create bad habits if you permanently deny yourself the louder end of the range, and people who are inclined to get annoyed by musical instruments won't appreciate the effort you are making anyway.

Press mute

The saxophone has the most options for muting, perhaps because it is the woodwind family's loudest member. The MMD Saxmute (for soprano, alto, tenor or baritone – it can also be used on the clarinet) costs approximately £35. It works by inserting foam noise reducers at different points inside the saxophone. This creates a somewhat uneven reduction of

Much to the dismay of choir directors through the ages, there are no mutes for singers

sound, and there are other penalties in terms of a stuffy playing experience, which could affect a developing player's technique. But it does at least have some muting effect, unlike the various cheap sax mutes available on Amazon, which are unlikely to work at all. In the same price range, you could also try the JazzLab Silencer (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone or clarinet), which fits onto the base of the mouthpiece for some mouthpiece-only silent practice – not much good for playing a tune, but potentially worthwhile as embouchure training.

Another category of sax mute is the sound-limiting case that closes around the instrument with holes for the mouthpiece and your hands. These devices look rather absurd but are a genuine attempt to mute the sound of the sax based on its particular sonic properties. Two are available: the Saxmute ONE and the E-sax Whisper (*pictured*). The Saxmute ONE costs about £300; it is for alto sax and fits to a Hercules stand to bear the weight. The E-sax Whisper is £460 for alto and £560 for tenor. It doesn't fit a stand but can run a cable in and out – so you can attach a mic and listen to your muted sax via headphones as you play! These products really work – as a sax.co.uk demo video on YouTube shows – but they can be cumbersome and the cost will rule them out for many. That said, according to Jamie Straker, director of sax.co.uk, 'Over the lockdown period, the Saxmute ONE became so popular that we had to disable ordering online in order to catch up with the demand.' But fear not: Straker has placed a large order and expects the product to be available again soon.

▼ Sweet nothings:
the E-sax Whisper





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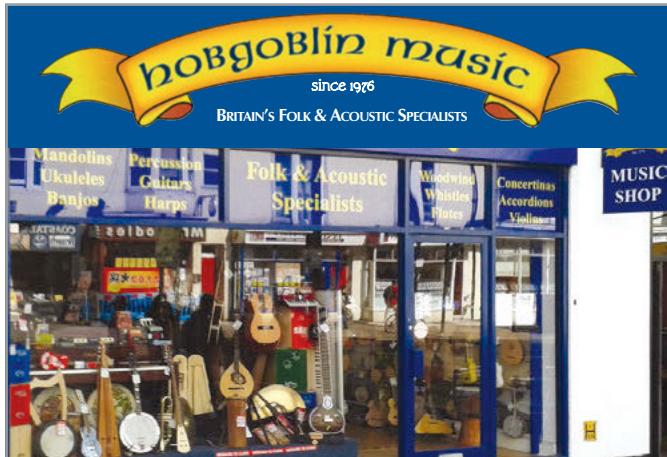
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Some exceptions

No muting products for oboe and bassoon are currently available. Check with friends and colleagues for any homemade tips, but don't hold your breath. The clarinet can use some of the sax products already mentioned, but no case-style mute for it been developed so far; perhaps one is in the works.

The flute, to the best of my knowledge, is un-mutable. Thinking laterally again, consider the alto flute if you can access one, as this is altogether a more mellow instrument – or work on your recorder doubling (the larger recorders are softer).

On the subject of alternative instruments, there's always the Akai EWI (electronic wind instrument) or equivalents like Roland's Aerophone. These digital instruments are exciting to play, and while they won't help your technique on your main instrument, they could help you explore new areas of your musicality – and they can be played silently with headphones.

CHRIS WALTERS

Pianos

It is important to remember that we can do so much without going near a keyboard. Internalising your music and learning to practice at a desk is an invaluable technique, one which Walter Gieseking apparently religiously adhered to, refusing to even go near his piano until he had internally memorised every note of a new piece. Begin with simple phrases and move upwards, singing and conducting your repertoire for added involvement and focus.

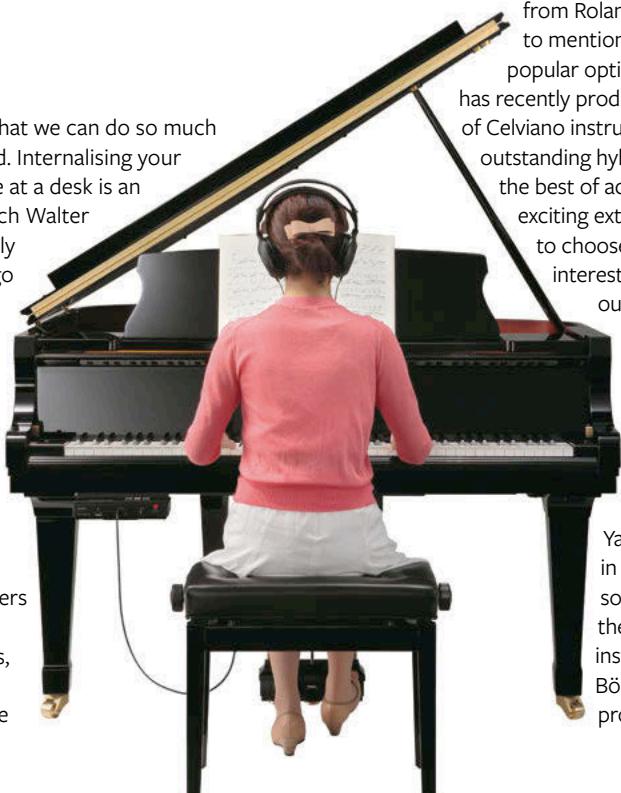
Dummy keyboards

But how can we keep our fingers in shape without making lots of noise? Are scales, arpeggios, and Hanon exercises simply out of the question if you have

intolerant housemates or neighbours? The answer is to buy a dummy practice keyboard. These have been around for well over a century, but today they often include adjustable devices (key touch weights) that alter the heaviness of the action instantly, as well as magnets that are adjustable as necessary to change the depression of each key (Pinkham Pianos stock specialist dummy keyboards).

Digital pianos

Of course, many upright pianos come with a mute pedal, in which case you will already have your own pre-installed version of the 'dummy keyboard'. But this can only take you so far. For the long haul you will need to get an instrument that can take headphones. Depending on your budget, you can opt for an inexpensive keyboard, or an instrument from Roland, Casio, Kawai or Yamaha to mention but a few of the more popular options on the market. Casio has recently produced a wonderful range of Celviano instruments. Kawai has some outstanding hybrid pianos, combining the best of acoustic action with lots of exciting extras. There is a huge range to choose from, but do if you are interested in uprights, do check out the Kawai ATX3 Anytime silent piano. Of course Yamaha Hybrid Silent pianos, the Yamaha Avant Grand, and its various formats have been around for some time, and at the very top of the range Yamaha has been pioneering in emulating the very best sound from Bösendorfer and the Yamaha CFX top concert instruments. Steinway and Bösendorfer have also been proactive in embracing silent



▲ Peace at last: Kawai and Yamaha offer a wide range of silent pianos



'I would make clavichord practice compulsory for all pianists' - András Schiff

devices that are installed as alternative features to their instruments. It is worth looking at silent devices that can be retrofitted – check out adsilent (www.adsilent.eu) as well as the PianoDisc QuietTime products. (NB Yamaha is currently offering an extended 5 year guarantee on its Silent Series pianos when customers register their new instrument online.)

A word in your ear

Arguably a good, comfortable set of headphones is just as important as a sympathetic instrument. Depending on your budget, you can opt for a top-of-the-range affair from the likes of Bose (which could set you back £900) or work your way down to sets that may be less than £20 second hand, but which fail to block out extraneous noise. Over ear phones tend to be more effective for disturbance-free practising, and it is worth investing in a good pair from the likes of Sony (MDR-7506), Philips (Fidelio M2BT), Yamaha (HPH-50B), Sennheiser (HD598), Beyerdynamic (DT880), or Tascam (TH-02) to name just some. Personally, I get uncomfortable with headphones on after a few hours of practice, so I invested in a pair of bone-conducted headphones, which provide sound through vibrations through the skull – leaving ears free and more comfortable (check out Aftershokz Trekz wireless Bluetooth bone conduction headphones, retailing about £100, which come with a complimentary pair of ear plugs to block out environmental noise).

A design classic

Finally, it is worth remembering the quietest keyboard instrument of them all, the clavichord. Bach recommended that all keyboard players master touch and control on this modest, but remarkably expressive and tender instrument, and in recent years Boris Berman, the head of keyboard at Yale, has encouraged virtuoso piano students towards more mindful touch control and digital awareness by introducing them to the delights of this much neglected, but extremely sensitive instrument. András Schiff once commented that 'the clavichord is my best teacher because it makes me listen very carefully. The sound is so delicate and the touch so sensitive, it shows all my shortcomings immediately. I would make clavichord practice compulsory for all pianists'.

MURRAY MCLACHLAN

Final thoughts

If your neighbours can hear you, the polite thing to do is to send a note around saying that your instrument and/or voice is your job and that you will practice only at a particular time each day, inviting feedback as to what time would be best.

Most local authorities in the UK allow instruments to be practised at reasonable hours if you own your home, and many tenancy or leasehold agreements rely similarly on what is 'reasonable'. Where disputes have got as far as court, judges often find in favour of musicians. Inflicting a bit of practice on your neighbour isn't the worst thing you can do, especially if you are willing to be flexible about when you do it.

Instead of practising quietly, try alternating normal playing with silent practice – studying a score or reflecting on interpretation. For earlier-stage learners this might involve a spot of theory work or some musical research set by a teacher. **MT**

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Screen savers

While distance learning remains something of a novelty for most of us, Your Space Music Lessons has specialised in online tuition since 2013. Co-founder **Abigail Steele** shares her top ten tips for successful computer-based classes

Internet speed

Happily, internet speeds have drastically improved in recent years. You can check yours at speedtest.net. If you are struggling to reach an upload/download speed of 2Mbps then online tuition is unlikely to work out – this is the minimum required to operate Skype and Zoom.

Kit

A laptop with at least four processors (Quad Core) and 4Gb RAM is advisable. Your internal microphone or webcam is usually good enough, although a USB microphone and HD webcam with at least 1080p and 30fps for high-quality smooth video is ideal. You may need headphones to hear your students clearly.

Software

We recommend having a couple of different video conferencing solutions at your disposal simply because some work better than others at different internet speeds and areas. Most of our teaching is done via Zoom, which in our opinion has the best quality audio and visual properties – even at lower bandwidths – but we do use Skype occasionally. Google Hangouts or Facetime may also be suitable. Zoom has various packages from free which is fine for one-to-one sessions but has a limit of 40 minutes on group calls. The pro version at £11.99 per month makes it possible for longer group sessions.

Environment

Choosing the right environment to teach your students is really important to show professionalism; select a living area as opposed to a suggestive sleeping area and try to avoid kitchen and utility areas where cooking noises, washing machines and dishwashers can be heard in the background. Think about a plain colour background, and avoid ‘virtual backgrounds’ – they can be extremely distracting.

Testing

Before you contact your very first online pupil, be sure to test your equipment with a friend or a colleague. Check they can hear you, and practice sending and receiving links a few times or calling and answering sessions so you get familiar with the process and can help with any troubleshooting. It is a good idea to offer a pre-lesson test with your pupils to ensure lessons will run smoothly, as in our experience the first time you try to connect is not always an instant success.

Communication

Remember to take into account the time delay with Internet latency, speak slowly and concisely, and get used to waiting until the other person has stopped talking. It is also important to regularly ask if your pupil has understood your point with verbal confirmation or asking



them to play back the corrected version. Demonstrating will also become more important than ever before, and you will soon get into the swing of playing one after another.

Using the camera

Choosing a close-up or sideways view for hand positions on woodwind and brass instruments are useful guides for beginners. You may also like to consider a second camera for keyboard instruments for occasional alternative views to help communicate a technique, fingering or hand position. The camera switch can be operated within the video call software program. Using the camera in fun ways can increase engagement with pupils, for example passing a virtual star through the camera for the pupil to reach out and grab!

Working around the delay

Latency can vary but is usually a split second and is obviously noticeable when playing music together. Asking the student to count in and play is a great way of making it work; as is playing one after the other when demonstrating a phrase or rhythm.

Additional tools and advantages

Teaching online eliminates travel time, which is great for fitting in more students, as well as being environmentally

friendly. Students (and their families) should be taught to tune and set up their own instruments prior to the lesson to save time during the lesson; there are many tuning apps available for download. The share screen facility can be helpful to show places in the music with the mouse pointer and there are many apps like flat.io where you can actually collaborate on music together remotely.

Organisation and safeguarding

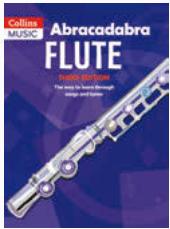
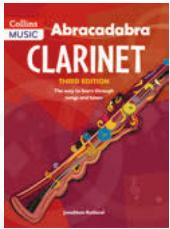
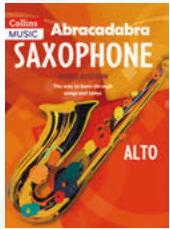
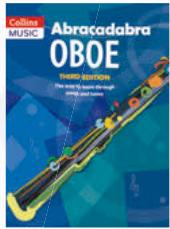
Being prepared with contact details for your pupils, including a phone number, is very important if there are issues connecting, and of course you will need to send homework and lesson notes via email or chat facilities to keep a regular communication going. See the ISM's guidance regarding online safety and recording lessons over on p32. **MT**

Your Space Music Lessons is accepting some new teachers with pre-existing pupil portfolios to add to its online music teaching network, and can provide full training and ongoing pupil and teacher support for online music tuition. Contact **abigail@yourspacemusiclessons.com** for details.

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Keep calm and play on

As social distancing measures continue to bring new challenges, summer courses are set to be a little bit different this year, but, as Chris Walters discovers, there's plenty to explore – virtually



Most musicians of a certain age can recall a formative musical experience on a summer course – or they can hope to look forward to one, since summer music courses are also offered for adult amateurs. Sadly, such experiences are unlikely to be face to face this year, but some course providers are determined to keep the music going by offering online alternatives.

Courses for adults

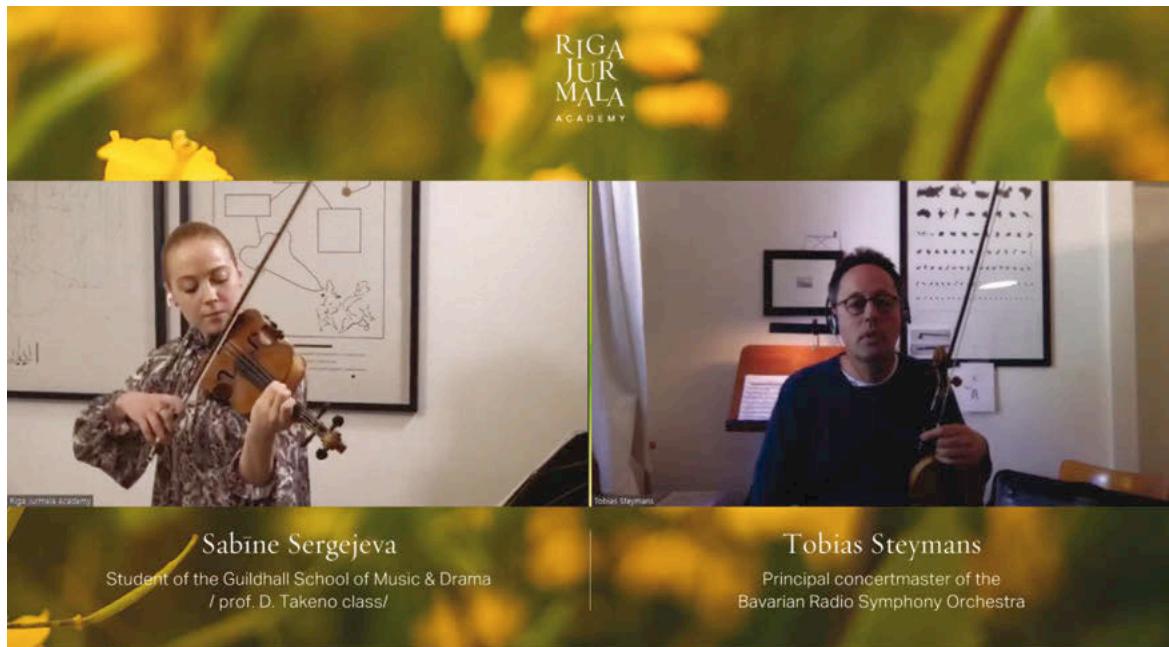
Music courses for adults were among the first to go online. Morley College in London (www.morleycollege.ac.uk) is running online courses this summer that include piano workshops, jazz composition and aural skills. Appropriately, it is also offering a range of online music technology courses, from music production and mastering to sound

art and Logic Pro. For all courses, learners must have a basic home tech set-up (reliable internet connection, computing device, microphone, speakers or headphones and ideally a webcam).

City Lit (www.citylit.ac.uk), the capital's other major centre for adult education, is also providing online courses. Like Morley, it is offering various music technology options, as well as more traditional musical appreciation and performance choices. Its website allows you to browse courses by popularity, which reveals that the highest demand is for mixing, production and GarageBand – perhaps reflecting the importance of digital music-making right now.

Benslow Music in Hitchin, Hertfordshire (<https://benslowmusic.org>) offers courses for adults that are usually residential and focus only on music. Anyone who has

► Riga Jurmala Music Festival will hold sessions via Facebook



attended this kind of course will know that the social aspect is just as important as the learning side, and Benslow's tutors have addressed this by including a 'virtual bar' in the evenings via video conferencing. Participants' special requests, which might include more tech guidance than on a regular course, have also been sought. Online courses this summer include Summer Saxes (see box), Sing Brahms' Requiem, Late Starter Violins and many others.

Younger students

Most youth summer music courses this year have unfortunately been cancelled or postponed. However, digital projects – which at least offer some alternative – are being widely undertaken by groups ranging from the National Youth Orchestra to local music service ensembles. Such projects typically involve the young musicians recording individual parts at home to be assembled into a virtual performance later. Even though this type of activity cannot replicate being part of a real ensemble, it can generate great excitement among young learners who get to see and hear themselves on screen in a permanent recording – as in this rendition of 'Grand March' from Verdi's *Aida* by Wandsworth Youth Philharmonic (tinyurl.com/yd4zur9r). Ask your local music service or hub about similar opportunities.

There may be a lack of structured online music courses for young people this year, but many worthwhile resources are still available to teachers who might feel inclined to create their own courses. A great place to start would be ABRSM's Play On initiative (<https://gb.abrsm.org/en/inspire>), which offers plenty of free materials that have been made available to support young people's musical learning during the current challenging period.

Learning opportunities for all ages

A number of international music festivals are offering digital content of varying kinds in lieu of a face-to-face

event this year. The Riga Jurmala Music Festival and Academy is a classical music festival in the Baltic States, presenting a combination of concerts and masterclasses by prominent artists and orchestras. It is hosting a series of masterclasses on its Facebook page (www.facebook.com/rigajurmalaacademy) that would be of interest to aspiring classical musicians of any age. Similarly, the 2020 Heifetz Institute, which usually takes place in Virginia, US, will now happen on a website called The Violin Channel (<https://theviolinchannel.com>) with over 40 concerts scheduled to be streamed live. Paying participants will also get two private lessons and one group class per week.

The American violinist Anthea Kreston and her colleagues are offering an innovative online 'Coronavirus Bootcamp' as part of Inside Music Academy (www.insidemusicacademy.com). With daily sessions running from 10am to 3pm (with slight variations – bear in mind that this is central US time!) there are separate classes for early years, young artists, pre-college, college and adults, across several instrumental disciplines. Each day contains warm-ups, buddy practice sessions, 'nano-concerts' and musical games, representing an interesting model for what is possible online. Prices and full details are on the website.

Finally, individual resources of relevance to all musicians are widely available across the internet, which may help keep the creativity flowing this summer in place of an intensive course. The BBC's Get Creative at Home series features a beautiful video of the pianist Jools Holland demonstrating a breadth of non-classical styles that could form the basis of a whole summer's study in itself (tinyurl.com/ya62l3tp). For additional inspiration, visit Get Creative 2020 (<https://getcreativeuk.com>), a website supported by Arts Council England and other public funders. Use its search function to browse dozens of free and affordable online musical activities that you can join in with at home, from virtual choirs to drumming workshops and much more besides. **MT**



Summer Saxes online

This year, saxophonists Alastair Penman and Gerard McChrystal are running an online version of their regular Summer Saxes course at Benslow Music. Penman spoke to *MT* about how the new course came together

How did you get the idea?

It started back in April. Gerard and I run courses together three times a year at Benslow, and the March one was cancelled. The June one also looked unlikely, so we suggested to Benslow that we run the course online instead. They were already planning other online courses and were happy to proceed.

Why did you limit the course to 12 places?

We were quite keen to do things we would usually be unable to do. One of these things was to give individual lessons to all course participants, which limited us to a certain number. Another limiting factor was putting together a virtual concert. More than 12 participants makes things a bit complicated, and 12 is also a good number for a saxophone ensemble.

How quickly did it sell, and to whom?

Incredibly quickly. There was always going to be a physical course in June, which usually sells out. Those participants were all refunded, but a lot of them rebooked for the online course. If the course goes well, we have the possibility of doing another one in August. We've had more international sign-ups than usual, in Europe and further afield. One guy in Saudi Arabia thinks it's great – he normally attends the physical course and now doesn't need to fly in!

Have the finances worked out OK?

As tutors we are being paid the same fee as normal. Benslow has made the figures work even though the cost to students is lower than the physical course, but that's because there is no boarding.

We will host an 'online happy hour' every evening so that participants can socialise as they would normally

How will you provide camaraderie on an online course?

One of the things with Benslow is that everyone is in the bar every night talking about the saxophone! To replace that we are going to host an 'online happy hour' every evening, so that participants can socialise as they would normally. Smaller break-away groups will be allowed too!

How have you planned the course content?

We're keen to make a good impression with this course, so we have been working out the technology and checking to see that it all works. We've also been finding out our learners' expectations and what they want. Common requests are for us to cover elements of home recording as well as the usual saxophone technique, and to make recordings of everyone playing together. They also want a magic way to play together in real time over the internet! In fact, this technology is now emerging – for example, using Soundjack [www.soundjack.eu], a free piece of software, Gerard and I have been able to play duets via the internet with a latency of only 20 milliseconds.

Has working with this kind of technology been a learning curve?

I do a lot with technology anyway. When the lockdown started, I got a few requests to teach students about home recording, and I've now delivered sessions on this at a few different music colleges. We're more concerned that the students can access the technology, so we have asked them to tell us what their tech experience is and what equipment they've got. Thankfully most seem to have MacBooks, just like us!

Safeguarding online lessons

John Robinson, head of compliance & legal at the ISM (Incorporated Society of Musicians), offers some guidance to protect both pupils and teachers during video-based tuition

Safeguarding remains as important in an online environment as anywhere else, and music teachers must take this into consideration. If you are an ISM member, you should familiarise yourself with our Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy, Code of Practice and Procedures and the ISM Members Code of Conduct. Here are some safeguarding issues you ought to consider when working with video-conferencing software:

Before and during lessons

- ▶ Ideally, set up a separate video-conferencing account for your online teaching. Keep it separate from your personal online profiles. Make sure you use an appropriate image for your profile picture, and do not share any personal information about yourself, such as a personal telephone number, email account(s), Facebook details and other social media links. Consider the security settings of your video-conferencing software. Make sure you are using the latest version as security features are updated constantly. If you're using Zoom, use the 'Waiting Room' option, take control over screen sharing, use random meeting IDs and set meeting passwords.
- ▶ Discuss the offer to teach online with the parents or guardians of pupils under the age of 18. You should also discuss this with your adult clients as online lessons may represent a change to your face-to-face contractual provisions. Use the parent's or guardian's own account to deliver lessons if possible, rather than the child's. Alternatively, ask them to set one up in their name and under their control.
- ▶ Set out a clear policy in writing. Tell people that your video-conferencing account will be used exclusively for the purpose of lessons and only during music lessons. Get the agreement of the parents or guardians for teaching online in writing. Consider obtaining a DBS Enhanced Disclosure Certificate (formerly CRB check).
- ▶ Test your set-up before you go live. Are the camera and microphone working properly? Is the camera in the correct



If you're using Zoom, use the 'Waiting Room' option, take control over screen sharing, use random meeting IDs and set meeting passwords

position for optimum teaching? Make sure you are working against a neutral background. Be business-like when giving lessons. Always present yourself as professionally as you would if you were giving a face-to-face lesson, in dress and in manner: remember that while video calls can encourage informality, you need to observe your usual high professional standards at times.

- ▶ The pupil must take lessons in a room with an open door and parents/guardians must ensure that one of them or a trusted adult

is in the same premises as the pupil while the lesson takes place. Set standards for your pupils and their parents or guardians. Pupils are expected to dress and behave appropriately. If there is inappropriate attire, you should explain that you are going to terminate the lesson and give the reason for doing so. The lesson can resume when the pupil is suitably attired. You should also explain that you will suspend a lesson if any of the provisions of your policy are not complied with. You should also state that pupils should not

send any material to you by whatever platform. Only parents of the children you teach are permitted to send anything to you, and it must strictly related or connected to the provision of music lessons.

Recording lessons

Many members have asked us about the safeguarding implications of using Skype, Zoom and other software to record lessons. This is a sensitive area and we advise caution. Always discuss this with your pupils or parents. If you are in any doubt as to the intentions of your pupils or the parents/guardians of your pupils, do not record lessons. You must never record a lesson without the knowledge and written consent of your pupil, or the pupil's parents/guardians.

If you do decide to record lessons:

- ▶ Ask for consent in writing before you make any recording
- ▶ Have a written policy available to your clients that says: what you will do with the recordings and that you will only ever

use them for the purpose of tuition for the individual pupils; how long you will keep them and why; that you guarantee you will only ever share the recording with the pupil (if an adult) or the parents/guardians; how you will dispose securely of the recordings at the end of your retention period and that you will securely delete and dispose of recordings as quickly as possible if your pupils or their parents withdraw consent. Update your GDPR Data Protection Privacy Statement and record of processing to reflect this.

As an alternative to making recordings yourself

Ask parents if they wish to make the recording themselves. This way they can control what happens to the recording. You should also seek their agreement that they will not share, or post to social media any recordings, and that they will securely delete and dispose of any of recordings of your teaching as soon as possible on your request. **MT**



If you have any safeguarding concerns about your pupil

ISM members should follow the instructions in the ISM's Safeguarding and Child Protection document. If you are working within an organisation, contact their safeguarding lead in the first instance. If you are working outside an organisation, you can call the NSPCC helpline 0808 800 5000, your local authority children's social care department, or email the ISM's Designated Safeguarding Person at cp@ism.org

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Digital delivery

Jonathan Vaughan, vice-principal and director of music at Guildhall School of Music & Drama ponders how higher-education teaching – and the arts more broadly – might change after lockdown



▲ *Staying connected: preparations for Guildhall School's digital operas*

In the frantic weeks following lockdown, the staff at Guildhall School worked long, fifteen-hour days, without a break, through the Easter vacation, in order to deliver a full online provision for all 1,100 of our Music, Drama and Production Arts students across Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral programmes. I stand in awe, gratitude and praise for my fellow team members who pulled together with such creative imagination and fortitude to deliver fully integrated online teaching and assessment provision. It was a huge undertaking as we all, in our various ways, came kicking and screaming into the online world. We learned the lessons that every school and university in the country has learned about Zoom and Teams, Moodle and Athens, and fair remote assessment – but there is more that we will take away from this crisis.

There is no doubt in my mind that all of our futures will be different, post lockdown, and that we need to design entirely new business models to deliver the changes we are facing. We learned that the received mantra of face to face equals good, online equals bad, was far from true or even a simple binary choice. There has been an astonishing array of positive feedback from

both staff and students – some of it genuinely surprising, particularly given the wider sector discussion on value for money. Staff also report that students' learning focus has improved dramatically. Not having to commute or deal with the humdrum of life has given them more quality time to focus on their work. Their outputs have therefore improved – in both the depth of their reflections, as well as the quality of their work.

Of course, there are aspects of our very practical training that simply cannot be delivered online. But we learned that the online world has forced students to record their own performances to a far greater extent. While this was something that we had always encouraged, most students rarely did it, as, like most of us, they hated the sound of their own playing. It turns out that students recording themselves, in preparation for online lessons, has given them an enormous insight into intonation, rhythm and the whole architecture of a musical work. They have become much more attuned to their own qualities and shortcomings. Consequently, for some of them, their technical prowess and, more importantly, their artistic voices have matured in quite astonishing ways.

As I write, our Opera Department is working closely with Production Arts and BILD studios on an online double bill of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and Respighi's *La bella dormente nel bosco*. This will combine orchestra, continuo and singers all recorded in remote isolation from each other and lovingly stitched together, with highly innovative graphic artwork from our Production Arts Department. It has been a hugely challenging project that has strained every creative sinew, and required mind-expanding invention from its director, Olivia Fuchs and our own head of opera, Dominic Wheeler, in order to overcome some of the challenges involved.

So, these are some of the real benefits that we need to capture and take forwards when we return to some semblance of normality. However, there are also bigger artistic questions about productions and presentation of concerts to consider. What will the world of work look like when our students return?

I have a naïve optimism that some of the best of humanity that we have seen displayed during the lockdown will be preserved. The sense of generosity of spirit, where individuals step up, unselfishly, to help others with an awakening sense that we can all help heal our deep social rifts, through positive action, has never been more palpable. Artists and musicians all have a part to play. In the absence of live performance, many of my friends and colleagues have been asking the deep, existential, questions about what artists are for and where their place in society might lie. The loss of live performance, with its glorious sense of human empathy, is sorely felt.

The Ancient Greeks did not think of music as a product-centred art form in the way that we view Western classical masterworks today; they saw it as a spontaneously creative



We learned that the received mantra of face to face equals good, online equals bad, was far from true

process deeply rooted within civilisation. They believed it possessed a powerful moral, social and political essence, which was deeply expressive of humanity – an early form of artistic citizenship, if you like. We lost a great deal of that sense of civic responsibility under the influence of the aesthetic movement of the 18th and 19th century, but there has never been a better moment to reconsider its virtues. Our next generation of artists is ready to take up the call of artistic citizenship, to engender their own values and ideologies within their music and to reconnect with communities and the brave new world we all now have before us. **MT**

▲▼ Singing in the rain: scenes from Guildhall School's digital opera double bill



Changing times

The Coronavirus crisis has brought unprecedented change to the teaching profession. **Kostis Tsioulakis** reflects on the positive impact brought about by some new ways of working

Music health

It is essential for us to understand the role of music in the everyday psychology of our pupils. In my teaching experience, I have often had adult students who have described their piano lessons as a mindfulness exercise rather than ‘just’ learning an instrument. Equally, I have often suspected this for several younger students who demonstrate an almost overwhelming keenness in their lesson – engaged by musical games, creating simple and unusual sounds and discussing music as a whole.

As a teacher, I must admit, this realisation has helped me make a ‘U-turn’ in my teaching technique, which until then was purely and strictly classical. Of course, that does not mean I do not want my students displaying a nice posture or having round hands when playing scales – and neither that I do not have academic expectations of them. However, it has changed the way that I am projecting these expectations, while trying to accept each student’s individuality and personality. With the current crisis, everyone’s everydayness has become radically different. And if we, as teachers, do not take this into account, who will?

Broken routine? That's great!

Everyone’s routine has dramatically changed. While some people enjoy and embrace change immediately, most don’t. Especially children. My first thought, when lockdown was on the horizon, was that somehow we must continue living ‘as normal’. I found all students and parents enthusiastically agreeing with me. Of course, that would not mean that we should act as if nothing has changed. Everything had changed and our teaching must change too, to fit the new circumstances. Luckily, as it happens, change is good for learning. As Olson explains in *The Invisible Classroom*, ‘One kind of experience that grabs the bottom-up attentional circuits of the brain is novelty, and this can prove a significant challenge and powerful ally in class’ (Olson, 2014). And while a sudden change can be distracting and frustrating for pupils, if the struggle is profoundly understood by the teacher, it can be turned around and used for the benefit of the student and the learning procedure itself. It could almost feel like a new learning ‘chapter’, which is potentially more engaging and exciting than the preceding ones.

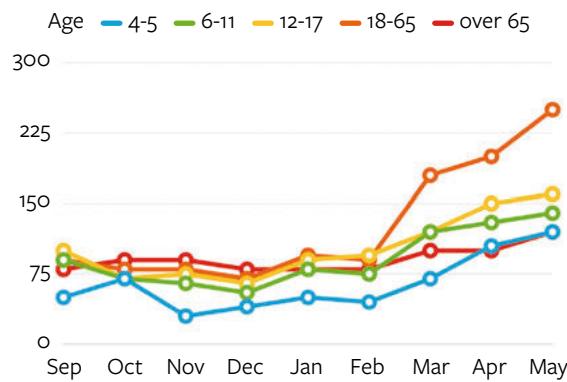
First week of online teaching

When a crisis first hits, our automatic concern is usually: ‘I have to provide for my family’. Many things come after this; ‘we have to continue our normality’ – whatever this means to each one of us – or the more optimistic ‘let’s think what use we can make of this’. Personally, my first week of online teaching was quite stressful. I did not know how many of my students will drop the lessons, or how many would have the necessary equipment to continue. It was a completely uncharted territory. What can I do as an online teacher that I did not do before? And, equally, how can the students learn and enjoy more?



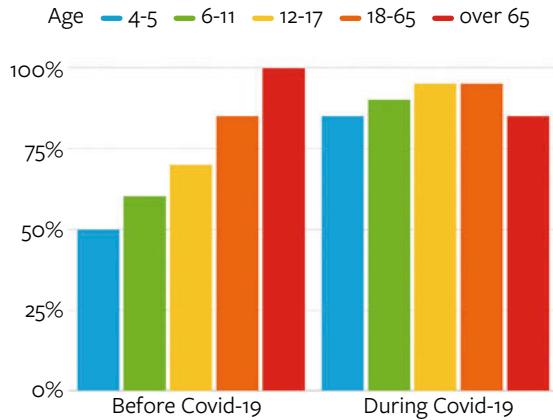
Increasing enthusiasm in numbers

As the second week of quarantine passed by, I started noticing a pattern: students were happier than usual to have a lesson, looking forward to this time of the week (even logging in earlier to make sure they will not miss it!) and more parents mentioned casually that the 'music lesson is now the highlight of the week!' Of course, this was mainly due to schools being closed, lack of usual homework and so on. Be that as it may, it seemed to me the change was too big to ignore. The following graph shows the average of piano practice weekly (in minutes) per month in five different age groups of my 46 students:



This may look like a reasonable increase, if you consider how much more free time the students had in the new situation. However, I have never thought that the main reason for not practising was lack of time, but rather motivation.

The following graph supports this thought, too. It shows the average of actual playing time within the lessons, excluding chitchat and other forms of student procrastination:



With the exception of the over-65 age group that actually chatted more than normal, all other age groups seemed way more eager to get playing rather than wasting time. They showed deeper focus and understanding of the new elements of each lesson. In the next few paragraphs we explore why.

Don't get too comfortable

A huge benefit of the online lessons is having two pianos at our disposal. This not only means that we have more

If change is profoundly understood by the teacher it can be turned around and used for the benefit of the student and the learning procedure itself

pianos than normal but also that the students are playing and learning on their own pianos. As much as I want to convince my students to get used to playing on different instruments, I can hardly hide how much I love to play on my own piano. In fact there are studies that prove that 'people remember more of what they studied when they return to that same study environment' (Carey, 2015). The psychologists DR Godden and AD Baddeley led an experiment where they asked eight scuba divers to 'study a list of thirty-six words while submerged twenty feet underwater.' (Carey, 2015). An hour later, the researchers divided the divers in two groups that took a test on the words they had studied, in two different environments. The first group completed the test on land, while the second group had to dive back down and take the test underwater. The results were stunning: the second group did 30 per cent better. The psychologists concluded that 'recall is better if the environment of the original learning is reinstated' (Carey, 2015) even when the environment is not too comfortable. Additionally, the same researchers have argued that we learn much better – and often stay more focused – in seemingly less comfortable environments. So maybe this brilliant idea that we all had while driving in the traffic, or this amazing discussion we enjoyed while being in a noisy bar now start to make more sense. This is why I am insisting that we should not focus on how many cameras we have, or if the sound or image quality is perfectly crisp. Prioritising comfort is not always helpful.

Time for a complete makeover – and how to achieve it

In order to maintain and utilise (or even amplify!) this circumstantial new wave of enthusiasm, we need to be inventive, inspiring and use novelty. Each student is different and therefore it is not realistic to have one checklist for all the different student groups. However, this is a tips list, which so far has worked with the vast majority of my students, regardless of age, ability and targets.

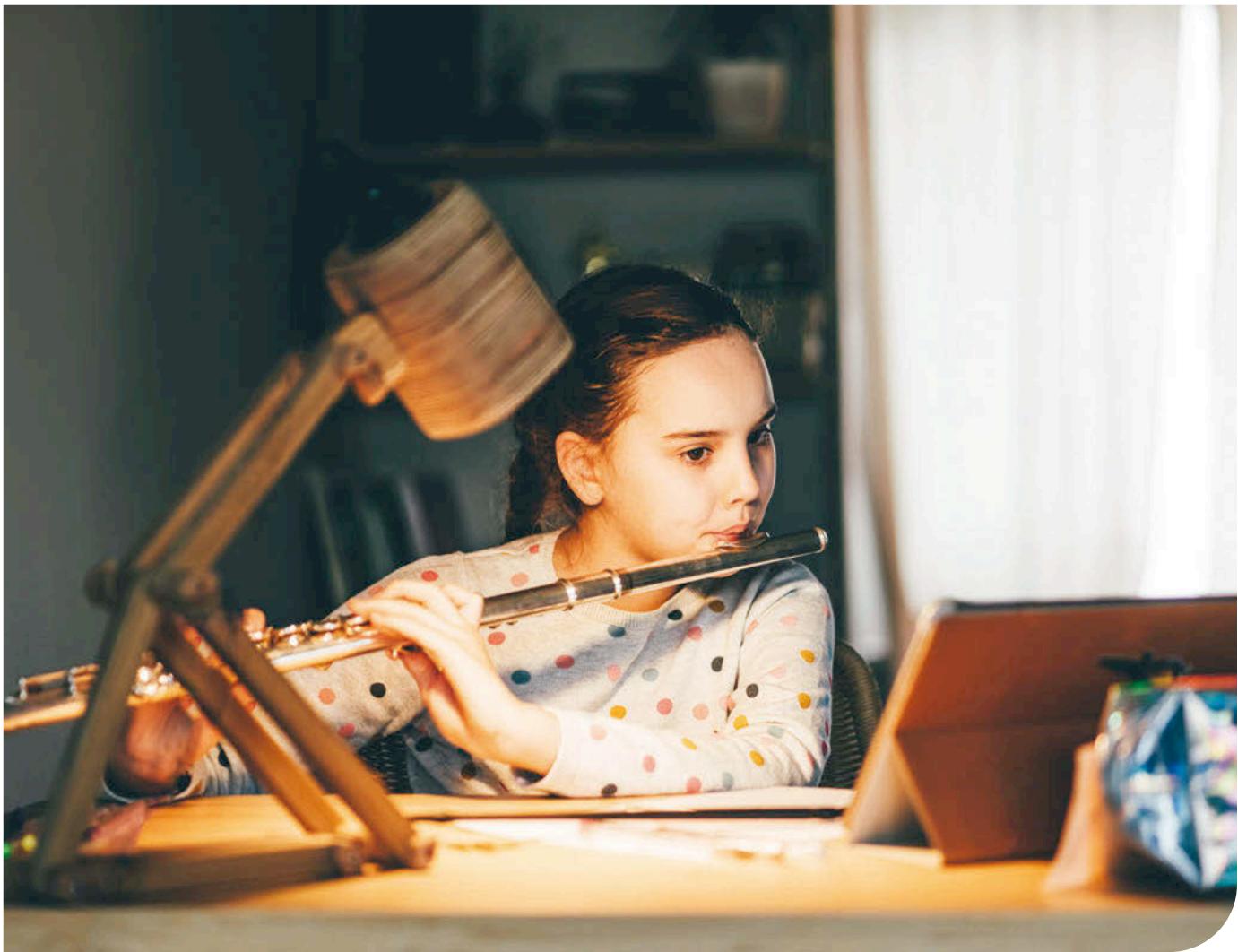
A practical guide

Initial set up

Firstly, we have to set up our new 'classroom'. This has been discussed at length in recent issues of *MT* and needs no further repetition; see May and June, plus p26 and p32 in this edition.

Screen-sharing

Sight-reading can be tricky, as we cannot expect our students to have the music libraries we do. However, books all teachers have in their computers become instantly available via screen sharing, as well as online resources like Scribd, Amazon Kindle and many others. Whether your students are using tablets, personal computers, laptops



or even phones for their online lessons, I guarantee that sight-reading a few bars per time is more than possible.

Play-along tracks

One of the big challenges of online lessons, however, is playing a duet with your student. Sadly this is not truly possible yet, due to Internet latency and sound quality. Here is an idea: record play-along tracks for your student. It could be something as simple as a recording of you playing your duet part on your phone, or even a fancy arrangement in GarageBand (or other arranging software).

It would motivate students to practice more, and the same tracks can be used with multiple students who are playing the same pieces.

Other software

In this following example, which I sketched while giving an online lesson, I explained to my Grade 5 student the difference between two trills (see excerpt below).

Music notation software is quite easy to master and can be extremely useful. If you are teaching music theory, set up a ready-to-go project to use for the lesson and

The musical score consists of three staves. The first staff is in D minor (G clef, one sharp). The second staff is in F minor (F clef, three flats). The third staff is in B-flat major (F clef, one flat). Each staff has a key signature change indicated by a sharp sign with a circled '6' above it. Below each staff, the original key signature is labeled '(Germ.)' and the new key signature is labeled 'NEW KEY: _____'. Roman numerals V⁷ and I are also present under the staff labels.

homework too. The example above shows my ‘working desktop’ for a composition lesson, where we are currently covering augmented 6th chords in modulations.

Notation examples take minutes to make and can be easily transformed in order to make a nice homework exercise that can be emailed to the student after the end of the lesson. (See p32 for advice on corresponding with students during remote tuition.)

Missing resources

Every generation is different, and if we do not accept this, as teachers, we have failed. As Alison Daubney explains in her book *Teaching Primary Music*, it is of great importance to relate to today’s music everydayness. In the chapter ‘Music in a fast-changing world’, Daubney describes how differently the new generation is accessing music: instantly, on demand, so much more broadly than we did at their age. It truly reminds me how many times I have become frustrated with a student who, despite not having practiced at all what they were supposed to, has spent hours and hours on the internet learning a particular piece from a poorly made YouTube tutorial. And then I realise: it is because this is in ‘their language’. It is more accessible and easier to understand (even when it is kind-of amateur). And there is nothing wrong with it. ‘Music has universally existed across time and place. {...} The informal environment where children function musically outside of formal learning environments in and out of school, is where much musical learning and engagement take place’ (Daubney, 2017). Do the online lessons approach this kind of ‘informal’ place? Would this benefit learning in a different way? If used sensibly, I think yes. Absolutely.

Encourage student-led learning

Learning new pieces is harder, as this is when students need us more. Be that as it may, one of the things that struck me from the first day of online teaching was how easily some students started correcting their own mistakes and taking notes whereas, before Covid-19, when I was next to them, they would hardly pick up the pencil or even try to actually read the notes unless I read them for them. In other words, they started acting more like teachers. Most of my students’ sight-reading ability improved dramatically as they felt the need to ‘survive’ by themselves, so to speak. This is more profound in younger students who are usually being ‘spoon-fed’ more often than adults. Milner and Bateman argue that ‘viewing children as preparing for adulthood rather than viewing them as people in their own

right {...} means that their capacities for understanding and reasoning can be underestimated, and they can be deemed incompetent to make decisions.’ (Milner and Bateman, 2011). This is a very important point, and it will definitely change the way I teach, even when we go back to face to face lessons. Sometimes we need to get these ‘bike stabilisers’ off and have more trust, both as teachers and as students.

Build a community

If there is a period that we need our community to be strong, it is now more than ever. Therefore why not build an online community with your students? Maybe host short online concerts? Also it is worth trying group lessons with same level students, discussing tricky passages in exam pieces, scales, and broken chords. Another idea could be publishing a newsletter among your students, to keep them updated regarding music news, online events or even news about the exams. This also applies to building a community among teachers, too – see p14

Epilogue

The main purpose of this article is to encourage a period of consolidation; to ensure that we continue to use the skills developed during this time, in order to become better teachers. Hopefully, by the time you read this, we will be near the end of the quarantine and getting ‘back to normal’. But maybe instead of ‘back’, we can go ‘forward’. Within this challenging situation, let us learn, change, improve and do better. It was frankly quite unfair that we had to develop this new toolbox of skills overnight. It felt like we were given an amazing modern ship but we had to test-drive it in a storm. The question now is, when the storm is over, will we have learned how to calmly sail?

It is our duty, as educators, to use every tool we have available in order to provide the best teaching possible. It is within our skill-set to ‘read’ each situation differently and always keep our teaching up to date. We can all find a way to thrive within – or despite – a ‘new normal’. **MT**

Further reading

- Olson, K., 2014. *The Invisible Classroom*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Daubney, A., 2017. *Teaching Primary Music*.
- Milner, J. and Bateman, J., 2011. *Working With Children And Teenagers Using Solution Focused Approaches*. London: J. Kingsley Publishers.
- Carey, B., 2015. *How We Learn*. Pan Macmillan.

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Teaching the classics



CORE CLASSICS: ESSENTIAL REPERTOIRE FOR PIANO

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Like many piano teachers I was very excited at the thought of seven new books of graded classical music. How marvellous to have 130 pieces spanning four centuries at my fingertips. Recent series from ABRSM ('Encore' and 'Piano Mix') have been tremendously useful – surely the latest range was going to make my life even easier?

Core Classics Grades 1-2, £6.95; Core Classics Grades 2-3, £7.25

The books are beautifully presented, with attractive covers, nicely laid-out pieces, practical fingering and a list of sources at the back of each book. However, when you turn to the contents page for book 1, where I (and I am sure most other experienced piano teachers) expect to see the names of Bartók, Anna Magdalena, Kabalevsky and Walter Carroll et al, there is Köhler, Steibelt, Fuchs and Greaves. The first piece is an arrangement of the theme from Haydn's Surprise Symphony. Yes, this is a classic of most tutor books but hardly the 'backbone' of any pianist's repertoire.

Looking through the contents of Book 2 – Grades 2-3 – I realised that I had only

played four of the pieces: *The Bear*, Rebikov; *Hornpipe*, Purcell; *Moderato*, Beethoven; *Innocence*, Burgmüller. Also that the Haydn Minuet and Trio and the Sarabande by Thomas Roseingrave (a rather obscure English-born Irish composer of the 18th century), seem to be at the very outer edges of the technical demands for Grade 3. The names of Haydn, Beethoven and Dussek do appear, but not their 'best bits'. At the back of all the books there is a most welcome list of sources from which the very occasional snippet of teaching/playing advice can be drawn. The 'Encore' books had useful footnotes with background information, key skills and ideas for activities to explore the music. Regrettably, this practical and sensible addition seems to have been dropped.

Core Classics Grades 3-4, £7.50; Core Classics Grades 4-5, £7.50

I was delighted to see that Mozart, Diabelli, Beethoven, JS Bach and Grieg have made it on to the contents page of the Grades 3-4 book, but wondered about the inclusion of *Sunset over Stac Pollaidh*, Bedford (none of my pupils chose it when it was on an exam

'Core' and 'Classic' appear to be misnomers

syllabus) and an arrangement of *The Policeman's Song*, Sullivan – surely this is for the 'Piano Mix' series? I just wonder what the criteria for choosing these pieces was, as 'Core' and 'Classic' appear to be misnomers.

In the Grade 4-5 book, I would definitely expect to see some Clementi sonatinas, and some Schumann. JS Bach's Prelude in C minor BWV 999, Beethoven's wonderful Bagatelle in G minor, and Tchaikovsky's *Chanson Triste*, are here, alongside 1 Burgmüller's *La Chevaleresque*. Sadly, I have not previously heard of *Tunch*, Fitkin; *Scherzetto*, Samuel; *Philomela*, Pilling; or *In a Gondola*, Schutt. They are perfectly pleasant pieces – but hardly 'core'.

Core Classics Grades 5-6, £7.95; Core Classics Grades 6-7, £7.95

At last the contents list is approaching what I would expect from 'A rich selection of engaging pieces... much-loved repertoire'. For your £7.95 you get 20 pieces: a Mozart Andante, a Chopin Prelude, 2 Beethoven sonata movements, a JS Bach Invention, a Granados *Val Poetico*, a Lyric

Piece from Grieg, a Neapolitan Song from Tchaikovsky, and a Tango from Albeniz.

The Grade 6-7 book includes Fauré (*Romance Sans Paroles*) but no Debussy (poor Debussy doesn't make any of the books) also Ilyinsky (*Berceuse*) but no Rachmaninov, Shostakovich or Ravel in either of these final two books. I am delighted to see Bodorova's fabulous *Carousel* but puzzled that there's no Prokofiev, and how Alwyn's *Ride by Night* made it in ahead of any Poulenç is a mystery.

The final book contains 14 pieces, eight of which I would say definitely match the title, and two I have never heard of. I am always delighted to discover new gems but would have thought there were others that are ahead of them in the 'rich selection' stakes.

So, would I buy any books from this series? I might be tempted to purchase the last two, but otherwise I would suggest that piano teachers put their money towards ABRSM's 'Encore' or 'Piano Mix' books, which are far more useful. **MT**

FIONA LAU

Play and display

The virtual performance has become a lockdown emblem, uniting ensembles during isolation. **Tim Hallas** gives it a go

As I write, many of us are entering our third month of remote teaching. The virtual choir and instrumental ensemble has become a lockdown phenomenon. I say this because, like many other schools, my college has launched one, too. This month, I explain the initial set up and some of the challenges that we have overcome.

Music selection

The lag over video conferencing software makes live rehearsals difficult (not impossible – but difficult). I picked music I knew that the students would be able to access relatively easily and provided lyrics, chords, a lead sheet and a simple vocal arrangement for those who wanted to add harmonies. The hardest element is ensuring that everyone is in time with one another. The first thing you need is a guide track with some method of ensuring everybody starts at the same time.

Getting started

The method I used was to have a count-in at the start – everybody clapped on camera at that point so I could synchronise the performances afterwards. I then sent this guide track to everybody who wanted to record a part. They all then listened to the guide track on headphones and recorded themselves on another device and sent me the resulting video. The advantage of this was that I only had their performance on the recording and no bleed from the guide track.

Once the students had recorded their performances, they then uploaded them to a shared folder that allowed me to download them and load them into my editing software for mixing and visual layout. The quality of the audio and video varied enormously, but every performance was useable and of a high enough video/audio quality for the software.

The cutting room

I loaded the 25 performances into my DAW for audio mixing, using the same project that I used for the guide track and lined up all the claps at the beginning of the recording. Everything was immediately in-sync and, even before any mixing, it already sounded good (phew!).



▲ Students from Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge – the author's own school – participate in a virtual performance

After I'd mixed the audio, I imported everything into my video editing software – including the mixed audio. Again, I lined up the performers' clapping with the synchronisation sound and everybody was once again in sync. I then laid the performers out on the screen to make everything fit and have some vague sense of 'look' for each group of performers. I used Adobe Premiere Pro having spent some time in Final Cut Pro X. They both do the same thing, but I found the workflow in Adobe Premiere easier – but this is a personal thing.

Easier options

Obviously, the method I have used is quite complex and requires a level of technical skill (I had no video editing skills before lockdown – I've been learning this in the evenings!) but there are easier methods. If you happen to have a device that runs iOS there are apps that can help you. For instance, Acapella allows users to do this within an app. Performers can either record all of the parts themselves or record one and share it with collaborators to add parts – no extra equipment is needed.

Summary

The idea of a virtual ensemble has many benefits: it helps students who might be

feeling isolated from their musical peers collaborate again. It's unlikely that extracurricular music is going to be at the top of priority lists when schools are fully back, sadly, so it's even more important that we continue to make music together in whatever way we can. **MT**



▲ Acapella allows you to create multitrack videos on a device

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Leading the way

As entry numbers for GCSE and A Level music continue to decline, there are some assessments that are gaining popularity. **Patrick Healy** from RSL Awards puts forward the case for vocational qualifications

The ISM's recent report 'Music education: state of the nation' lays out the erosion of GCSE and A Level entry numbers for music year on year – the Department for Education's (DfE) data shows a fall of over 20 per cent in GCSE music entries since 2014/2015, while secondary school music teacher numbers have fallen by over 1,000 in the same period; at a time when EBacc subjects are seeing teacher numbers rising. It is not unreasonable to assume that following the partial reopening of schools this summer, music may fall even further down the agenda as schools focus efforts on a skeleton timetable.

Amid the doom and gloom around GCSE and A Level entries, certain vocational qualifications (VQs) have seen a

rise in popularity, including RSL Awards's (formerly known as Rock School) range. RSL's VQs are practical in focus, built around industry relevant disciplines that learners can gain tangible experience of through completing units in Performing, Composition, Business, Production and Live Events. Many music teachers report that in their schools there may be 30 or 40 learners who would like to opt for music but only 10 or 15 who can realistically access the GCSE option. Many of these learners can play and perform effectively or produce music at home but are either disengaged by the GCSE curriculum or deemed not to be of the correct graded level to be a viable entry for the traditional qualification.

RSL now works with over 450 schools and colleges. Our qualifications contribute to DfE performance measures at Levels 1, 2 and 3 (L1-3) and we see countless schools where results improve vastly due to the fact learners are fully engaged in what they are doing.

'Clifton Community School serves an incredibly diverse community with pupils from all kinds of backgrounds and ethnicities, many of whom are amazing musicians. The challenge we had was that the more traditional curriculum

Many music teachers report that in their schools there may be 30 or 40 learners who would like to opt for music but only 10 or 15 who can realistically access the GCSE option



offered by GCSE Music was not accessible or relevant to the majority of our pupils. We were letting them down,' says Claire Maud, head of performing arts at Clifton Community School in Rotherham. 'In 2014 I discovered the RSL Certificate in Performance for Music Practitioners and it totally transformed the department. Pupils now think like musicians and actively engage in their musical development. They can see a clear purpose, as everything we do prepares them for that final performance for the controlled assessment in Year 11 – we run this as a series of real concerts and invite friends and family to watch. Pupils are more resilient and confident in their abilities, and the number of pupils progressing to study music at college has increased.

'In terms of data, Pupil Progress has improved dramatically and department residuals have been in the top 3 in school for the last 4 years. RSL assessment focuses on what the pupils can do, rather than penalising them for what they can't. We now offer L1 and L2 Music Performance, L2 Technology and Composition and L2 Creative and Performing Arts – Acting. Staff and pupils really enjoy the RSL VQs and they have allowed us to tailor our curriculum provision so that it is relevant, accessible and purposeful to all our pupils, enabling them to be the best they can be.'

There is a similar tale of increasing uptake and improved results at Monks Walk School in Hertfordshire, according to head of music Jennifer Rotchell: 'We have been running the RSL Music Practitioner Certificates at Monk's Walk School for five years. Teachers find the External Quality Assurance process positive and supportive and students really enjoy the course. Uptake of music at KS4 has doubled since the introduction of the course. In year 11 this represented over one third of the cohort taking a music option. Students who opt for the course are able to take either the performance or composition and technology

pathways. We are able to teach both pathways in the same class as a result of the cross-over units. The external assessments are appropriate and provide students with an enjoyable and bona fide outcome at the end of the course that they are always proud of.'

These larger cohorts may encompass learners from a range of musical backgrounds, and contrary to some understandings of VQ, classical and other genres of music are not inappropriate for use in conjunction with RSL's specifications. No units within any of our qualifications are genre or instrument specific, and all are open to participation from musicians and producers of all types. **MT**

▲▼ Actively engaged: Clifton Community School's musicians



If you would like to find out more about RSL's portfolio of Vocational Qualifications visit rslawards.com/vocational or contact RSL at vocational@rslawards.com

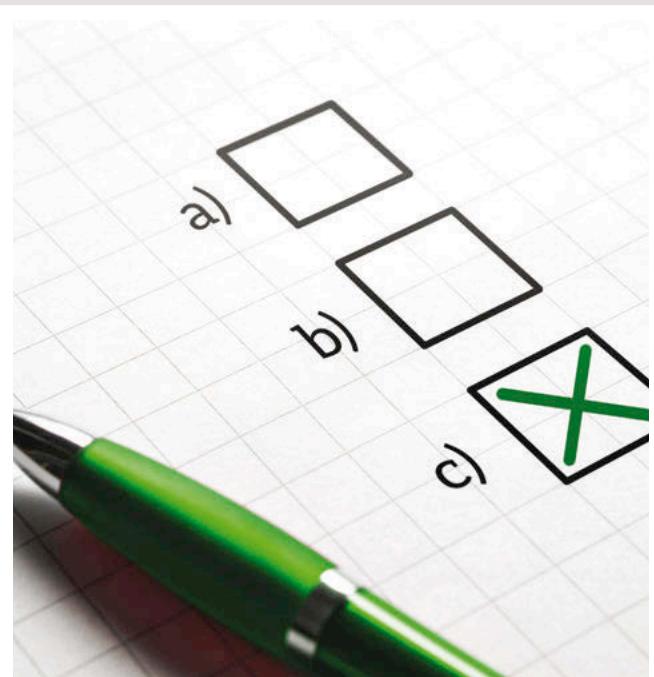
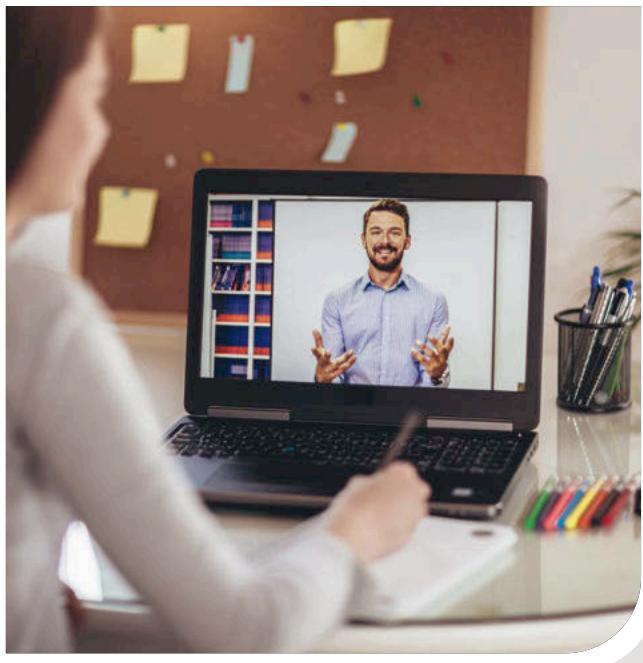
Online teaching materials

Each issue, *Music Teacher* publishes substantial schemes of work written by experienced teachers, examiners and experts. They cover Key Stages 3-5, as well as peripatetic teaching, across a variety of exam boards and specifications, providing indispensable content for your practice

Coronavirus pandemic: teaching resources

The challenges for both classroom music teachers and visiting instrumental teachers caused by the coronavirus pandemic are continuing into the summer, and there's continuing uncertainty, too, as schools begin to consider ways of returning to more conventional ways of teaching. As we did in the last two issues, *Music Teacher* continues to address these new and unfamiliar issues in its online teaching materials. This month, we provide some easy-to-use multiple-choice quizzes for KS4 students; we offer a bundle of KS5 activities based around wider listening; and we have a range of easy-to-play tunes in flexible instrumentation suitable for trying out at home, either to complement instrumental learning or as a holiday activity. The last two months' resources – including advice on giving online instrumental and classroom lessons, round-ups of online resources for classroom and instrumental teachers, and more ready-to-use quizzes and activities – are still available on the *Music Teacher* website. And as schools take their first steps to adjusting to new restrictions as students return in person, we'll provide continuing support in coming months.

David Kettle, Resources Editor



Distance-learning quizzes

Jane Werry ▶ KS4

As we adapt to teaching and learning at a distance, we're finding the most efficient ways of communicating content to students, then scaffolding the consolidation of their learning and giving feedback.

Following on from the resource bringing together quizzes and activities for KS3 students (*Music Teacher*, May 2020), this resource contains a variety of multiple-choice quizzes on GCSE topics, which are based around content covered by YouTube videos. There are also links to Quizlet (<https://quizlet.com>) sets that students can use after having watched the videos and made notes, and before they attempt the quiz. I have found Quizlet to be a very popular tool with my students, as it gives them a choice of formats for their revision, and enables them to identify their areas of weakness. They can use it on a computer or on the Quizlet phone app.

Jane Werry is a Specialist Leader in Education, and Director of Music at Hayes School in Bromley. She is a Musical Futures Champion Teacher, and co-author of the award-winning *Being a Head of Music: A Survival Guide*.

Online wider listening activities

Simon Rushby ▶ KS5

Last month we provided five listening activities for Key Stages 3 and 4 students to do at home to widen their listening experience (*Music Teacher*, June 2020). Here are four more listening activities, intended for students who will be in Years 12 or 13 in September this year. The activities have been written to help them improve and build upon their wider listening, which becomes an ever more significant part of the A level course.

As before, the hope is that these activities can support teachers as off-the-shelf resources that can be sent straight out to students in whichever order works best. Each activity comes with a set of listening questions (deliberately not in the style of any particular board's exam paper), some context and plenty of ideas for further listening or composing activities. 'Mark it yourself' answers are provided at the end of the resource.

Simon Rushby is a freelance musician, writer and education consultant, and was a director of music and senior leader in secondary schools for more than 25 years. He is the author of a number of music education books and resources, an ABRSM examiner, and a songwriter, composer and performer.



The Family Band

Edward Maxwell ▶ VMT

As a child, I was a very reluctant musician. My mum had a terrible battle trying to get me to practise, and she still delights in telling people how I used to hide under the bed rather than play my trumpet. The one thing I did enjoy, however, was making music with other people, and if I had not had opportunities to do that, there's no doubt that I wouldn't have ended up enjoying a career as a professional musician.

I'm passionate about enabling pupils of any standard (and age) to play music with other people. At the time of writing, all school and music service ensembles are suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. But there's still an opportunity to make music in a family setting – and obviously those opportunities will only continue and expand as the current restrictions are relaxed. And there's no reason why music making in small groups should be restricted to times of lockdown, of course: it's a valuable, enjoyable activity for school holidays, or even evenings and weekends during term time.

Edward Maxwell is a trumpet player and teacher who has taught in primary, secondary and higher education. His current teaching includes Cranleigh School, Reigate Grammar School and Hurstpierpoint College. His educational music books have been published by Boosey and Hawkes, Spartan Press, Music Sales and Warwick Music.

Log in to access this issue's resources

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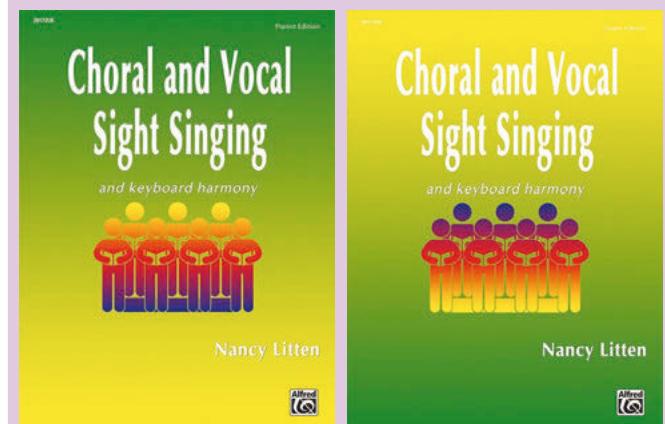
'Suitable for a children's, youth or community choir'

Nancy Litten's name will be familiar to readers of *Music Teacher*: in this incredibly useful resource she draws together her many years of varied experience – as an accompanist to choirs, a choral conductor, and a teacher of piano and electronic keyboard – to suggest ways in which individuals and groups can develop some of the skills amateur (and even some professional) musicians and teachers are often lacking.

The book is presented as a simple sequence of short sight-reading exercises, divided into seven stages of progressive difficulty. Most are original melodies and (optional) words, but a few familiar songs are included to illustrate particular concepts: *Ode to Joy* for stepwise movement, *Jerusalem* for an unusual time signature, Schubert's *An die musik* to demonstrate major and minor sixths. These pieces can function as warm-up exercises and are designed to be practised, not just sight-read.

Litten's intention is that the book can be used by conductors of school or amateur choirs, by classroom music teachers with their groups, or by solo singers of any age and their teachers. It could also be used by an adult amateur working on their own to improve their skills. Technical terms are introduced gradually, and the exercises are interspersed with occasional helpful, easy-to-understand tips. The reader is not overburdened with explanations. My only reservation about the singers' edition is that it does not introduce novice tenors and basses to the concept of singing from the bass clef.

Particularly endearing is the wide appeal of the words, some of which are nursery rhyme-like in their subject matter, while others are much more up-to-date, dealing with lost glasses, contracts arriving by email, or the sound of pneumatic drills outside the house that will result in the installation of cable TV! Allotments, toolboxes, jet-skiing and ballet classes also feature.



CHORAL AND VOCAL SIGHT SINGING AND KEYBOARD HARMONY

Nancy Litten
Alfred Music UK Ltd

Pianist Edition 2017 2UK £12.95
Singer Edition 2017 3UK £9.95

Some piano accompaniments together with chord symbols for each piece are provided, but they are not considered to be essential; however, the pianist's book also serves as a tutor book for less experienced keyboard players, encouraging them to explore

different realisations of the chords – there is a complete compendium at the back.

Litten states in her introduction that members of a choir pick up sight singing skills by osmosis, the stronger ones enabling the weaker ones. In my experience of choral singing that process can be very slow, even for singers who have already learned to read music through playing an instrument. The aim of this workbook is to prepare choir members for the type of challenges they are likely to encounter in choral repertoire; it would be particularly suitable for teaching the rudiments of sight-reading to a children's, youth or community choir, but would also be a very useful primer for more experienced singers. I certainly won't be giving away my review copy! MT

CLARE STEVENS



'A lifetime's experience of piano playing'

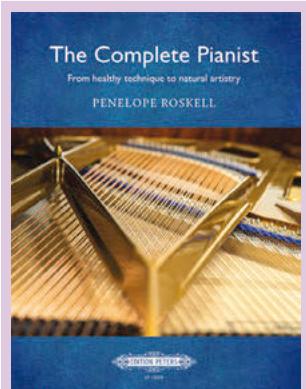
In *The Complete Pianist*, Penelope Roskell distills a lifetime's experience of piano performance, research and teaching. Roskell is professor of piano and piano pedagogy at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. As a soloist, she has played in major concert halls around the world. She is also the leading specialist in healthy piano playing, and is an advisor to the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM). She has studied with pupils of Schnabel, Neuhaus, Cortot, Arrau, Busoni and Fischer, and has also worked closely with a cranial osteopath and yoga teacher. (Her 'Yoga for

Musicians' DVD is an outstanding contribution to the understanding of how yoga principles can be applied to instrumental playing to encourage a healthy and stress-free technique.)

There are many other books on developing piano technique; from Matthay to Kendall Taylor, as well as the numerous books of studies and exercises written for our improvement by Brahms, Czerny, Hanon, et al. However, none of them have dared to put the word 'Complete' in their titles. *The Complete Pianist* follows a natural progression from the fundamentals of piano playing to later chapters on the whole-body approach and performance. It includes

more than 500 pages of text explaining and guiding pianists through technical challenges; a photocopyable checklist and a practice chart; 250 newly devised exercises ranging from basic to advanced techniques; and more than 300 free online video demonstrations for each exercise accessed via a QR code (use a smart-phone or tablet with the appropriate app – mine is free and is called simply QR Scanner), or online via editionpeters.com/completepianist.

The Complete Pianist is not cheap compared to a slim volume of exercises, nor is it light – weighing in at nearly 2kgs – but I suggest that it is extremely good value for money. The book



**THE COMPLETE
PIANIST: FROM
HEALTHY TECHNIQUE
TO NATURAL ARTISTRY**

Penelope Roskell

Edition Peters

£44.95



▲ Holistic approach: Penelope Roskell

begins with an introduction explaining why it was written, how to use it, and how it applies to and supports piano teachers. This is followed by three main chapters, which each cover topics in detail using material ranging from beginner to advanced. ('A Healthy Technique', 'Natural Artistry', 'Healthy and Inspired Performance')

The healthy technique chapter explains the whole-body approach, finger touch and tone production, scales and arpeggios, playing cantabile, detached playing, fundamentals of chord playing, rotation, lateral movements, and the all-round pianist. The chapter on artistry explains melody, harmony and structure; tone and texture; rhythm; pedalling; playing with other musicians; and learning, memorising and sight-reading. The chapter concerned

with healthy and inspired performance discusses and details preventing injury; pianists with small hands; releasing forearm tension, developing strength naturally; strengthening the hand; strengthening the fingers and thumb; hypermobility; recovering from a playing-related injury; accuracy and the myth of perfection; confidence, and many other topics.

Nothing is left unexplained; everything that has ever concerned a pianist is dealt with, and done so in clear language with excellent supporting online demos, written-out examples from the core piano repertoire, and original effective exercises. For example, in the 'Natural Artistry' chapter there is a section on interpreting slurs in classical music, explaining that most slur markings in

The Complete Pianist will become a standard text for years to come

this period are based on the bowing of string instruments. The printed example is of a section of the first movement to Mozart's Sonata in F major K332. The online demo enlightens us further showing an overhead camera view of Roskell playing this with a fluid wrist and effective phrasing. Thus, with every technique detailed throughout the book we can read, see the music, and then hear and watch. Fortunately, there are also appendices with diagrams and explanations of the anatomical parts referred to in the book, and a glossary of the technical terms and language Roskell uses throughout the text.

So who needs this book and how should they use it? Roskell succeeds in making each chapter relevant to piano students at all levels as well as their teachers. It can be used by self-taught pianists, but will be of more benefit if used alongside regular lessons. Teachers can either read it from beginning to end or dip into relevant chapters and sections as needs arise. I found that as I read through it, various sections leaped out at me for different students and their challenges. I think *The Complete Pianist* will become a standard text for pianists and teachers for years to come. **MT**

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Music technology latest

Tim Hallas outlines this summer's new music tech

Supermassive

Price: FREE!

Valhalla's previous plugins have been covered here before – and its Shimmer reverb is my go-to reverb plugin for sound design purposes with post-16 students. Its latest (and free) time-based product is, as the name suggests, designed to create other-worldly textures. It uses a combination of reverbs and delays that interact with each other to create lush textures and soundscapes.

The delay time can be stretched to a massive two



seconds, and the sound can be 'warped' to add some modulation and movement within the sound. The sounds it creates are almost complex enough to be instruments in their own right. The simple interface hides a lot of power. Oh... and did I mention that it's free?

► www.valhalladsp.com

Logic Pro X 10.5

Price: Free for existing users or £199 (1-19 copies); £99 (20+ copies)

Logic Pro X is one of the biggest names in DAWs and, although version 10 (X) has been around since 2013, Apple has been doing 'point' upgrades since then that are featured as 'major' upgrades from other DAWs. Apple quietly launched version 10.5 recently and it's clear that it has one target audience in mind. The majority of the latest updates are aimed at musicians who prefer the clip-based design of Ableton and Bitwig.

Users can access this and load sounds and samples and trigger them in a non-linear fashion



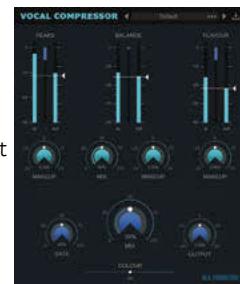
to allow for music creation. This is a major departure for Logic and opens the software to a wider market. In addition, the samplers have had a major overhaul and the ancient EXS24 has finally been replaced with a sleek new model. At the time of writing, 10.5 was still a bit buggy – hopefully 10.5.1 will remedy some of the glitches.

► <https://www.apple.com>

Vocal Compressor

Price: €39

As the name suggests, this product is aimed at vocal production. What it doesn't tell you, is that it is in fact three compressors that can be run in series to create a better vocal sound. The first of these is called 'Peaks', which handles all the spikes in the vocal performance to create a smoother signal. The next in the chain is 'Balance'; a parallel



compressor that maintains the original attack of the sound while bringing up the quieter decay. The final plugin is called 'Flavour', and this applies some tape saturation colour to the signal to create a nice, warm vocal sound.

Although this sounds complex, in operation it's actually quite easy. So if you are looking for some additional compressors to complement your school or college studios – at €39 (c. £34.80) you can't go wrong with these.

► www.waproduction.com

BBC Symphony Orchestra: Discover

Price: £49 (or FREE!)

When Spitfire Audio announced that it was creating a sample library of the BBC Symphony Orchestra I thought 'great... but I'll never be able to afford it'. But there was a small caveat in the original press release, in which Spitfire Audio stated that this was 'just the beginning'. It has now become clear what it meant. It started with the pro version, but has now launched two lighter versions.

The Discover version is a much smaller library, only around 300MB, but it still



features a range of great orchestral sounds and could be perfect for increasing the quality of student coursework submissions over the stock sounds in some other software. And, if you're prepared to fill in a survey and wait two weeks – it's totally free!

► www.spitfireaudio.com

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Sontronics Podcast Pro

It's always a joy when equipment turns up for review, because it means that I actually have the opportunity to make some music or do some recording. So, I was very pleased when the latest mic from British manufacturer Sontronics arrived on my doorstep.

The Podcast Pro makes its target audience clear – this mic is designed for the booming podcasting market. Everybody seems to be making a podcast these days (making my former commute more bearable) and having appropriate equipment with which to capture the audio is a good idea. Having a separate high-quality mic offers a big improvement over built-in microphones in phones and laptops, and is also useful for remote teaching. And, although this mic is aimed for podcasting – and therefore predominantly

speech – it is suitable for some musical use, too.

When you open the box the first thing you are greeted with is a lovely note from the manufacturer congratulating you on your purchase – it's a simple thing – but it's a nice touch. The microphone is surrounded on all sides by foam and packaged in a cardboard box and sleeve. The mic itself is a reasonably substantial cylinder with a mounting bracket and two large thumb screws for adjusting the angle. Its shape is less reminiscent of an ice cream, as most vocal dynamic mics are, and looks a bit more like a can of drink. There is an XLR socket on the back of the mic for connection to a mixer or interface, but the mic can also connect to a range of devices via USB with the relevant adaptor cable. This last feature

makes it a suitable choice for online gaming chat and can connect straight to your games console. I don't have a games console, so I mounted it on a stand, connected it to my interface and I was ready to go.

Putting it to use

I am lucky to be married to a singer, and the first thing I actually used this mic for was a YouTube recording of some songs. For these performances, I was singing some backing vocals using the traditional Shure SM58 – the live mic of choice for many vocalists. The first thing I noticed when I came to mix the tracks was how much 'fuller' my wife's vocals sounded than mine. Admittedly she's a better singer than me, but I have produced both of our voices enough to know how we sound.

I then did a small mic shoot out between the Podcast Pro and a couple of other mics that I had available at home. I did this to hear the characteristics of the different mics (the Podcast Pro, a Shure SM58 and an AKG C414) to see what each one was bringing to the sound. In this case, I got my wife to sing the same line of music and then recite the same piece of text in all of the mics – I then listened back to the results. The Podcast Pro sounded warm and rich and had a nice emphasis in the low-mid frequency range, which are the frequencies that can make a spoken voice sound full. The SM58 was thinner in both speech and music. The AKG C414 is about six times the price of the Podcast Pro, so in some ways this was an unfair comparison, but I wanted to see



▲ The Podcast Pro works well for both speech and music



▲ The Podcast Pro is a super-cardioid dynamic mic

how it would compare to a very commonly used condenser mic. The C414 had a flatter response but still sounded full in the mid frequencies. Interestingly, it was nowhere near six times better than the Podcast Pro – as the price indicated it should be.

The Technical Stuff

The Podcast Pro's specific voicing is a real advantage for vocal recording. Whether you're recording speech or singing, that emphasis in the low-mids adds depth to a voice that is sometimes lacking from other mics. It sat in a mix very easily – just by adding a bit of compression and some reverb, I had a really decent vocal sound.

The Podcast Pro is a super-cardioid microphone. This means that the pickup response is narrower than the usual heart shape polar pattern of a cardioid microphone. This slight narrowing of the pickup response means that the vocal mic is more directional and picks up less ambient noise. I didn't use any reflection filters or record in an acoustically treated space when doing the mic shoot out, and it had the least ambient noise by far. The Podcast Pro also features a built-in pop shield which means that plosive sounds – Ps, Bs and so on – are less distinct. When compared to the other two mics it fared very well, with the SM58 being significantly worse and the C414 being comparable.



Now we must come to the all-important question: price. The current retail price of the Podcast Pro is £99 – at this price it is a worthy addition to

any music department. It would also make an excellent upgrade for teachers who are thinking of expanding their online work – or perhaps launching their

own podcast series. I promise that the difference you'll hear between this and the built-in mic on your device will be staggering!

For musicians involved in online teaching this could be the perfect product

Summary

This mic is brilliant – it sounds great, is built well and is easy to use. I got amazing results on both speech and singing and at this price I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone looking for a new vocal mic. Although it's marketed to podcasters – it's much more than that. For musicians involved in online teaching it could be the perfect product. **MT**

Sontronics's Podcast Pro costs £99. To find out more, visit www.sontronics.com

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Peter Futcher

What is Duet Group and tell us about your role there?

The Duet Group provides musical instruments to schools, academies, music hubs and universities, as well as other institutions and individuals. As director of education and commercial services, I work with our clients to create the best possible solution for owning, leasing, renting and maintaining music instruments and equipment as well as providing consultancy. We have no fixed way of doing things and like to think that our relationships with those we work with are genuine 'duets'. In recent months, much of our work has involved facilitating performance and teaching remotely.

We have no fixed way of doing things and like to think that our relationships with those we work with are genuine 'duets'

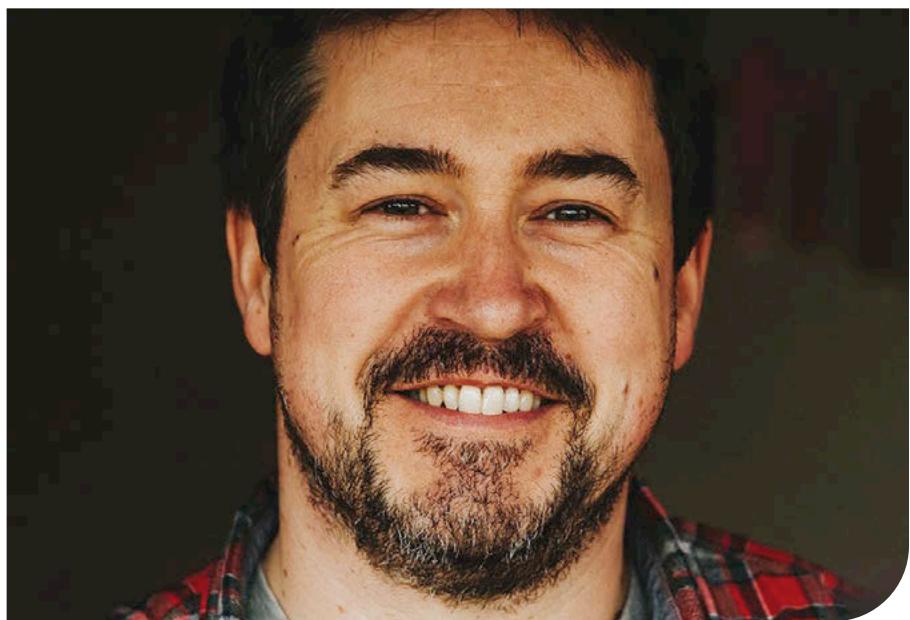
Why is it important for Duet Group to have an education division?

Education is at the heart of everything we do. Jonathan Thorne, our founder and chief executive, is absolutely dedicated to the arts and arts education. With the Duet Foundation we are able to support music beyond our commercial side, such as sponsoring a Ycat (Young Classical Artists Trust) artist and running the Duet Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. Jonathan facilitates an opportunity for young musicians to take part in large-scale orchestral repertoire – 150+ players on the stage of the Royal Festival Hall performing at the highest level.

You have a background in classroom teaching – what was your favourite topic to teach?

At university my main interests were choral music, composition and conducting, and I was director of music in various schools for over 16 years. Performance and composition in the classroom were my main favourites and I am lucky that my role with Duet allows me to access these worlds as a facilitator and supporter. My background – and the fact I have five musical children of my own! – means I am ideally placed to see the

Duet Group's director of education and commercial services Peter Futcher tells **Derren Hayes** how the Kent-based company has been supporting music making during the pandemic



challenges faced by music education today. I want to do all I can to ensure it thrives.

What sort of music making do you enjoy outside of the office?

My main musical passion is sacred choral music and I am very lucky to be able to sing as layclerk at Canterbury Cathedral. The Cathedral Choir not only sing the daily services but also tour frequently and make recordings and broadcasts. I also freelance as a conductor, singer and accompanist and run education workshops for choral groups young and old. Community music making is a wonderful thing and Benjamin Britten is a personal hero on all sorts of levels.

How has lockdown affected Duet Group?

Although our working methods have changed and we have all been based at home during the lockdown we have been able to continue to function. Demand for instruments at home has been huge – people are looking to take up instruments and also reconnecting with old skills. Lots of students left their instruments at school or university before lockdown and it has been a particular delight to be able to

help support musicians by ensuring continuity in their playing. Our media arm, led by Paul Barton Hodges, has been particularly busy during this period. Live broadcast, streaming, editing recording solutions and even hosting a virtual conference for the Music Teachers' Association have been some of the many projects we have got our teeth into to keep the music education agenda high. We have also been working with the Music Education Council to create MusIQ (www.musiq.education) – the ultimate online guide to free music resources on the web including a huge collection of core skills materials for all ages.

What was the inspiration behind the playlists published on your website?

The wellbeing playlists idea came from Jonathan, our chief executive. I sat with Jonathan on FaceTime and he rattled off the initial selection of musical excerpts he had already selected in his head – chosen to encourage mindfulness and to ease the social isolation at these unusual times. These have been popular with our clients and with people across the world – they have educated as well as entertained. **MT**



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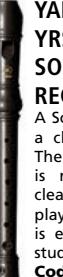
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