



Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School

Educating Women of the Future

Music Key Stage 3 Curriculum

	Topic/Big Question	Focus
Year 7	The Musical Elements: <i>How do composers manipulate sound to build atmosphere and tell stories?</i>	• Core Focus: Introducing the core elements of music via the acronym MADTSHIRTS (Melody, Articulation, Dynamics, Texture, Structure, Harmony, Instruments, Rhythm, Tempo, Sonority). • Performance & Practical Skills: Mastering physical body percussion ostinatos and performing call-and-response vocal melodies. • Composition & Creative Application: Collaborating in small groups to compose a multi-layered descriptive piece based on a visual brief, establishing a clear narrative using specific musical parameters. • Listening & Appraising: Analysing how film composers utilise dynamic contrasts and tempo shifts to elicit emotional responses.
	The History of Notation; Neumes: <i>How did the transition from oral tradition to written notation shape Western music?</i>	• Core Focus: Charting the evolution of notation from early Medieval Gregorian Chants and Neumes to the modern stave, while exploring the history of traditional Christmas Carols. • Performance & Practical Skills: Developing basic keyboard geography and the "Five-Finger Technique" to perform the traditional folk melody <i>Greensleeves</i>. Cultivating healthy vocal habits (posture, breath control, choral blend) to sing festive carols in harmony. • Composition & Creative Application: Translating graphic and neumatic symbols into live sound. • Listening & Appraising: Discerning the difference between modern stave notation and historical manuscripts.
	Samba: <i>How does a collective ensemble build community, energy, and musical structure?</i>	• Core Focus: The rich cultural, historical, and social roots of Samba in the Brazilian Favelas, and the West African origins of its rhythmic structures. • Performance & Practical Skills: Learning to play authentic Samba percussion (Surdo, Tamborim, Ganza). Developing the rhythmic independence required to execute complex, syncopated polyrhythms within a class-sized ensemble (<i>Bateria</i>). • Composition & Creative Application: Responding instantly to musical cues led by the <i>Apito</i> (whistle) and participating in spontaneous, call-and-response leadership roles. • Listening & Appraising: Identifying the syncopated divisions of the beat and mapping the instrumental hierarchy of a Samba ensemble.
	Chords and Accompanying: <i>How can a small set of chords unlock the structure of popular music?</i>	• Core Focus: Understanding primary chords (I, IV, V) and secondary chords (specifically chord vi). Learning how chord progressions form the backbone of modern pop songwriting. • Performance & Practical Skills: Moving smoothly between chord transitions on the keyboard. Reading chord sequences from a standard lead sheet to accompany class-wide performances of classic tracks like <i>Let It Be</i> by The Beatles. • Composition & Creative Application: Designing simple harmonic accompaniments to support a melody, focusing on

		balance, tone, and appropriate pacing. ● Listening & Appraising: Identifying chord changes by ear and analysing how a driver chord progression establishes the emotional tone of a song.
	Music for Video Games: <i>How do physics, computer science, and creative music intersect in digital spaces?</i>	● Core Focus: The technological constraints of early 8-bit game audio and sound synthesis (Square, Triangle, and Noise waves) alongside the art of chiptune composition. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Using Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) such as <i>BeepBox</i> to precisely input and layer digital musical tracks. ● Composition & Creative Application: Composing highly functional program music for a retro video game concept, designing loops, level themes, and sound effects. ● Listening & Appraising: Appreciating the development of digital synthesis and assessing how soundtrack loops keep players engaged without causing auditory fatigue.
	Gamelan: <i>How does cyclic structure reflect spiritual and communal values in Javanese and Balinese culture?</i>	● Core Focus: The cultural and spiritual significance of the Gamelan orchestra, exploring pentatonic (<i>slendro</i>) and heptatonic (<i>pelog</i>) tuning systems. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Rehearsing as a whole-class orchestra using classroom tuned percussion (Xylophones and Sarons) to perform a traditional piece (such as <i>Ladran Cernobo</i>). ● Composition & Creative Application: Composing original melodic phrases using restricted traditional scales, utilizing a cyclic structure governed by a central gong. ● Listening & Appraising: Identifying the distinct layers of a polyphonic, contrapuntal texture and distinguishing the unique timbres of metallophones, gongs, and drums.

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Year 8	The Blues; Performance: <i>How did suffering, resilience, and cultural fusion give birth to the most influential genre of the 20th century?</i>	● Core Focus: The African-American roots of the Blues, analysing work songs, spirituals, and their profound impact on modern popular music. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Mastering the 12-Bar Blues chord progression (I-IV-V in a 12-bar sequence) on the keyboard alongside a walking bassline. ● Listening & Appraising: Deconstructing the standard lyrical and harmonic structure of the Blues, identifying the characteristic "blue notes" and swung rhythms.
	The Blues; Composition: <i>How do musicians use a structured scale to speak freely in the moment?</i>	● Core Focus: Developing the confidence and technical capability to improvise. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Performing a cohesive group rendition of Elvis Presley's <i>Hound Dog</i>, featuring solo sections. ● Composition & Creative Application: Constructing and using the Blues Scale to perform live, spontaneous improvisations over a 12-bar chord backing. Exploring vocal improvisation through scat singing. ● Listening & Appraising: Critically analysing classic Blues performances to spot call-and-response dynamics between vocalists and lead instruments.
	Minimalism: <i>Can constraint lead to ultimate creativity?</i>	● Core Focus: The core concepts of Minimalist music: repetition, static harmony, hypnotic cells, and additive structures. Studying trailblazers like Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Mike Oldfield. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Performing rhythmically demanding pieces, including Steve Reich's <i>Clapping Music</i> and Mike Oldfield's <i>Tubular Bells</i>, focusing on rhythmic discipline and compound meters. ● Composition & Creative Application: Utilising advanced process-based composition techniques such as "phase-shifting" and rhythmic subtraction to build evolving musical layers. ● Listening & Appraising: Explaining how complex textures emerge from the interaction of simple, repeating patterns.
	Western Classical Music: <i>How did the orchestra grow from an intimate court ensemble into a massive vehicle for romantic expression?</i>	● Core Focus: A grand tour of the major eras of Western classical music: Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and the 20th Century. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Analysing score excerpts to understand how performance demands evolved over five centuries. ● Composition & Creative Application: Exploring how composers structure themes (such as Binary and Ternary forms). ● Listening & Appraising: Analysing works of three key composers per era, tracing the expansion of orchestral forces, the invention of new instruments, and shifting stylistic ideals.
	Magic Door; Composing in response to a visual brief: <i>How can abstract sound evoke physical space, texture, and light?</i>	● Core Focus: Understanding programmatic music (music that tells a story or depicts a scene) and exploring different ways to manipulate timbre and sonority. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Experimenting with non-traditional instrumental techniques to produce unique, atmospheric sounds. ● Composition & Creative Application: Working in groups to compose a descriptive piece responding to one of five diverse,

		evocative images. Creating a coherent structure that mirrors the visual narrative of their chosen scene. ● Listening & Appraising: Evaluating peers' work on its ability to successfully translate visual stimuli into appropriate auditory textures.
	Notating Music: <i>What is the best way to preserve and share a musical thought?</i>	● Core Focus: Comparative study of notation styles: Standard Western Notation, Graphic Scores, guitar/bass TAB, and MIDI sequencing. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Translating written instructions across different notation types into physical performance. ● Composition & Creative Application: Introducing digital sequencing on computers using <i>GarageBand</i>. Composing and capturing musical motifs using MIDI notation (piano roll editor) to understand how software organises pitch, duration, and velocity. ● Listening & Appraising: Critically assessing the advantages and limitations of traditional paper notation versus modern digital sequencing interfaces.

	Topic/Big Question	Focus
Year 9	Opera to Musical Theatre; The evolution of Music on Stage: <i>How does music drive dramatic storytelling, character development, and emotion on stage?</i>	• Core Focus: The evolution of dramatic vocal music from late Romantic Opera and Gilbert & Sullivan's operettas (<i>HMS Pinafore</i>) to the modern West End musical (such as Tim Minchin's <i>Matilda</i>). • Performance & Practical Skills: Developing advanced vocal ensemble techniques, learning to interpret and perform character-driven songs in groups. • Composition & Creative Application: Creating spoken and sung transitions that seamlessly bridge narrative dialogue and musical song. • Listening & Appraising: Comparing and contrasting classical operatic vocal techniques with contemporary musical theatre belting, and identifying structural features like recitative and aria.
	Music Theory Unwrapped: <i>How does understanding the structural blueprints of music empower performance and composition?</i>	• Core Focus: Consolidation of foundational music theory in preparation for GCSE or advanced music-making. • Performance & Practical Skills: Fluently reading and translating both treble and bass clefs in real-time practice. • Composition & Creative Application: Writing out major and minor scales, identifying scale degrees, and constructing correct key signatures up to three sharps and flats. • Listening & Appraising: Identifying complex time signatures ($3/4, 4/4, 6/8$), determining intervals, and mapping the structural relationship between major and relative minor keys.
	Singer Songwriters: <i>What makes a song timeless?</i>	• Core Focus: An exploration of seminal singer-songwriters from the 1970s to the modern era, studying the artistic relationship between lyric, melody, and harmony. • Performance & Practical Skills: Reinterpreting a classic singer-songwriter track, adding individual stylistic choices. • Composition & Creative Application: Writing original song lyrics and setting them to a functional chord progression, focusing on phrasing, verse-chorus structure, and hooks. • Listening & Appraising: Critically comparing and contrasting the vocal styles, themes, and production techniques of historic and contemporary singer-songwriters.
	Music for Film: <i>How does a composer manipulate the emotional state of an audience without them realising it?</i>	• Core Focus: The art of film scoring, focusing on leitmotifs, consonance, dissonance, pedal notes, and the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. • Performance & Practical Skills: Coordinating live performance to match precise visual timings on a screen. • Composition & Creative Application: Choosing one of three silent cinematic clips and composing a custom, synchronised soundtrack using software, employing chromatics, sudden dynamic shifts, and leitmotifs to build narrative tension. • Listening & Appraising: Analysing the iconic soundtracks of John Williams and Howard Shore, evaluating how they foreshadow

		action and embody characters.
	Composing to a brief: <i>How do you transform a blank canvas into a structured, professional composition?</i>	● Core Focus: Bridging the gap between KS3 and GCSE composition. Students are introduced to the structured, iterative workflow required to meet a formal creative brief. ● Performance & Practical Skills: Troubleshooting and refining digital input techniques to achieve high-quality mock-ups of original work. ● Composition & Creative Application: Working in pairs to plan, develop, and complete an original composition in response to a GCSE-style brief, justifying their structural and instrumental choices. ● Listening & Appraising: Self-assessing and peer-reviewing compositions against formal assessment rubrics, suggesting highly specific, actionable edits.
	Build-a-Band: <i>What does it take to operate as a self-sufficient, professional musical ensemble?</i>	● Core Focus: The structures and roles within different live instrumental ensembles (Jazz, Swing, Pop, Soft Rock, and Rock). ● Performance & Practical Skills: Working in independent, student-led groups to select, plan, rehearse, and perform a cover of a chosen song. Developing essential group dynamic skills, such as tempo coordination, instrumental balance, and stage presence. ● Composition & Creative Application: Arranging the chosen song to fit the specific instrumental and vocal strengths of the group members. ● Listening & Appraising: Sourcing, evaluating, and transcribing sheet music or chord sheets, and presenting a final polished performance to peers for formative appraisal.