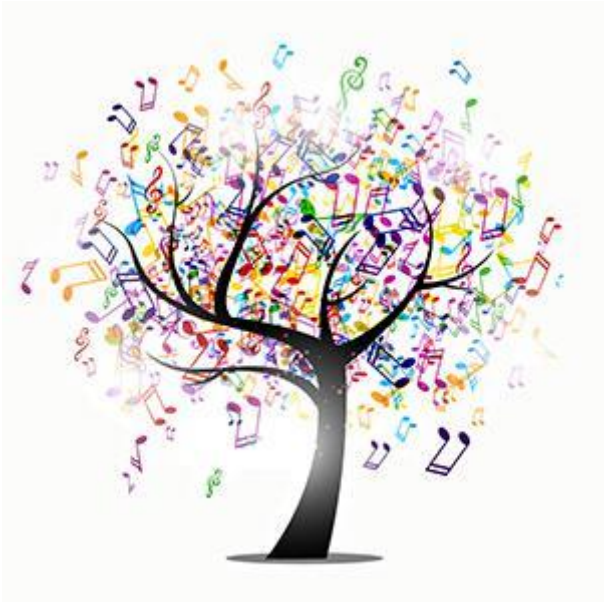Nonsuch High School for Girls

Sixth Form

September 2025

Year 12 Music Handbook



"Without music, life would be a mistake."
— Friedrich Nietzsche

Name_____

Welcome to *Music* A-Level

This course is intended to be stimulating and enriching for all students. You will experience the three main musical disciplines of:

- **Performing** – solo skills (Assessment Objective 1)
- **Composing** – composing music and learning about harmony (Assessment Objective 2)
- **Listening and understanding** – developing aural and analytical skills (Assessment Objective 3 & 4)

The full GCE course is excellent preparation for higher education courses in music but is equally valuable for non-specialists as an additional area of study.

It is a requirement to undertake peripatetic lessons outside of the school classroom in your first-study instrument.

Advanced learning in this subject:

Music at A-Level is much more geared towards independent learning. You will develop a greater knowledge of the Western musical canon through the study of set works, and your compositional, performance and analytical listening skills will be consolidated and developed.

How is Year 12 different from GCSE?

Similar to the GCSE Music Course there are three main modules: performing, composing and listening. The listening paper is based upon set works and involves a higher level of aural analysis. It also includes two essay questions and there is the addition of a chords and lines and harmony questions too. Performance can be solo and/or ensemble and is now 8 minutes in length.

In what different ways will you be expected to work*?*

You will be expected to take an active role in lessons, which are based largely on discussion and independent research. You must ensure you use time outside the classroom to consolidate new keywords and concepts.

What do successful learners in this subject do? What are their habits?

Successful learners are conscientious, well-organised and enthusiastic about Music. They arrive punctually for every lesson, complete all work on time and to the best of their ability, maintain a neat, organised folder, regularly practise their instrument and frequently listen to a wide range of music and experiment with compositional ideas in their own time. They learn and revise keywords regularly and are consistent in their learning of the set works. They seek to improve their work by speaking to the teachers outside of lesson time and read around the subject by consulting the recommended wider reading. They also participate in a range of extracurricular musical ensembles to help consolidate their musical understanding.

Overview of the 2 years:

Term	A Level Music
Half Term 1	The Musical Elements and Analysis Skill Set Set works and wider listening Compositional Techniques/ Bach Chorales

	Assessment: Grade 5 Theory examination (AO2&3), set work listening test and wider listening essay (AO3&4).
Half Term 2	Set works and wider listening Compositional Techniques/ Bach Chorales **Assessment**: set work listening test and wider listening essay (AO3&4). Bach Chorale/Compositional Task (A02)
Half Term 3	Set works and wider listening Compositional Techniques/ Bach Chorales **Assessment**: set work listening test and wider listening essay (AO3&4). Bach Chorale Exercises (AO2)
Half Term 4	Set works and wider listening Compositional Techniques/ Bach Chorales **Assessment**: set work listening test and wider listening essays (AO3&4). Chorale Cadence test (AO2&3).
Half Term 5	Revision & Study Leave for Examinations **Assessment**: End of Year 12 Exam (Ao1,2,3 & 4). Mock Performance Recording (AO1)
Half Term 6	Set works and wider listening: **Assessment**: set work listening test and wider listening essays (AO3&4). Composition (Ao2)
Summer Holiday	
Half Term 1	Set works and wider listening catch up Bach Chorale Harmony - opening of a chorale and modulations Composition Coursework (AO2) **Assessment**: Question 5 and 6 essays (AO3&4). Bach Chorale (AO2)
Half Term 2	Set works and wider listening revision Bach Chorale Harmony – Mid set phrase piece Composition Coursework (AO2) **Assessment**: Question 5 and 6 essays (AO3&4). Bach Chorale (AO2)
Half Term 3	Set works and wider listening revision Bach Chorale Harmony – suspensions & chromatic chords Composition Coursework (AO2) Performance Coursework (AO1) **Assessment**: Question 5 and 6 essays (AO3&4).
Half Term 4	Set works and wider listening revision Technical Studies Coursework – full chorale (AO2) Composition Coursework (AO2) Performance Coursework (AO1)
Half Term 5	Revision and final coursework submission (AO1,2,3&4)

Specification Summary

Candidates are required to develop and demonstrate their musicianship skills through performing, composing, appraising:

- To perform for a set amount of time.
- To compose either freely or to a set brief.
- To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of musical elements, musical contexts & musical language through study of Areas of Study.

PERFORMANCE (30%, coursework)

You will work independently, with support from your instrumental teacher and the Music department, to prepare a recital lasting a minimum of 8 minutes.
You will perform at various points throughout the course, though the final assessed public recitals must take place between March — May of Year 13.

As with GCSE, students should be prepared to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular music, as performing in groups during the course is an invaluable way to develop performance skills.
This unit is externally assessed (marked) by Edexcel.
Your recital… some more details:

- You can perform as a soloist or part of an ensemble; in any style or genre (including traditional performance, improvisation, performances by oral tradition, performance of your own composition), and on any instrument / voice. Ensembles are defined as 2 or more people playing undoubled, simultaneously sounding independent parts, with/without additional backing / accompaniment
- Total performance marked out of 60, 12 of which are available for difficulty of the pieces. The performance is assessed as a whole; it is not marked as individual pieces.
- Music written with an accompaniment must be performed with that accompaniment (can include backing tracks)

Note:
Edexcel expect the standard level of performance to be Grade 7 (by the end of Y13) for Music. Therefore, we advise that students who opt for Music A level should be playing at approx. Grade 5 standard on their instrument by the end of Year 11. Performances that do not meet these expectations can still be submitted but may be marked down.

COMPOSITION (30% coursework)

You will develop your composing skills in several styles, leading up to a submission of TWO pieces (with a combined time of 6 minutes in total).

Composition 1:

- Free composition
- Or choose a Brief linked to the Areas of Study (set by Edexcel Sept of Year 2)

Your composition must be at least 4 minutes in duration. It is marked out of 40 and must be completed in Year 13.

Composition 2:

The second composition must be from a list of briefs assessing technique, of at least one minute in duration. Marked out of 20, externally marked by the board. This part of the portfolio will be completed under controlled conditions in 6 hours. The four briefs will always include:

- Bach chorale,
- Two-part counterpoint,
- Arrangement
- Remix

This unit is externally assessed (marked) by Edexcel.

APPRAISING (40%, exam, taken at end of Year 13)

- Students will develop knowledge and understanding of:
- Musical elements - organisation of pitch, tonality, structure, sonority, texture, tempo, metre and rhythm and dynamics
- Musical contexts - the effect of purpose and intention and the effect of audience, time and place
- Musical language - major and minor chords, reading and writing of staff notation, using appropriate musical vocabulary

Students need to learn about the following to critically appraise pieces of music:

- Form and structure of the music
- How and which musical elements are used within the piece
- Appropriate musical vocabulary for each work
- Stylistic features of the music
- Conventions used in different times and places
- How music relates to the context in which it was created
- How to express and justify their opinions and preferences

Students need to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of musical elements, contexts and language in relation to music they have studied.

You will sit an exam in the June of Year 13 of 2 hours 10 minutes (worth 100 marks).

Area of study	Set works
Vocal Music	• J. S. Bach, Cantata, Ein feste Burg • Vaughan Williams, On Wenlock Edge
Instrumental Music	• Clara Wieck-Schumann, Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17: movement 1 • Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique
Music for Film	• Danny Elfman, Batman Returns • Bernard Herrmann, Psycho
Popular Music and Jazz	• Kate Bush, Hounds of Love • Beatles, Revolver • Courtney Pine, Back in the Day
Fusions	• Debussy, Estampes • Anoushka Shankar, Breathing Under Water
New Directions	• Kaija Saariaho, Petals for Violoncello and Live Electronics • Stravinsky, The Rite of Spring

APPRAISING Continued…

You will also do wider listening that relates to each of the Areas of Study to help you prepare for appraising unfamiliar music in the exam, and gain understanding of the wider context of the works.

This contextual and wider knowledge will be important; the questions in the exam will ask you to refer to other pieces you have heard which relate to your set work. You answer some listening questions on your set works, and some on unfamiliar music.

Your essays will be based around the areas of study but require you to reference your wider listening as well as the pieces you've studied.

- For the A Level Listening exam, you have complete control of the audio, unlike GCSE. Within the exam time you may stop and pause the audio tracks as you wish.

Assessment:

Assessment Objectives

Students must:		% in GCE A Level
AO1	Interpret musical ideas through performing, with technical and expressive control and an understanding of style and context	30
AO2	Create and develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control and coherence	30
AO3	Demonstrate and apply musical knowledge	10
AO4	Use analytical and appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music	30
	Total	**100%**

Expectations in *Music*

Performance

You will be expected to show commitment to a variety of musical ensembles including at least one within school. You will also be expected to participate in school concerts and events. Typically, students taking A-level music play regularly in several ensembles both in and out of school.

Equipment

You will be expected to keep a folder in which all the work for this course must be filed. These should be divided into sections for the different units of work. The folder should also contain a Glossary of musical terminology which *you* compile and add to over the course in a way that helps you. These folders should be kept neat and up to date and will be periodically checked.

Deadlines and homework

Final deadlines for all coursework are in the Spring term. Interim deadlines are set to enable assessment, target-setting and feedback. All homework deadlines must be met. If you have any difficulty with a piece of work, you must see your teacher at least 24 hours before the deadline.

If you miss a lesson for any reason you must catch up on any missed work and complete any missed homework.
Regular, careful practice on your instrument or voice is expected. It is also advisable to listen to a wide range of music outside lessons and to experiment with compositional ideas.

Independent Study

Students are expected to spend their own time researching the historical and cultural contexts of each set work. Similarly, they are also expected to spend time listening to a wide range of music with the aim of familiarising themselves with specific musical styles and genres.

The role of Learning Conversations

Students will be given regular and detailed feedback on their work and will be encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification on how to improve.

How we will support you

All teachers will give regular feedback and will offer the required support to ensure that each student achieves their personal target grade. This support may include individual help and lunchtime support sessions if appropriate.

TEAMS and Sharepoint

The SharePoint area is being updated at present, and your teachers will continue to add files and resources to help you with your learning.

Teachers and Classmates

Your teachers will be available to speak to you at a mutually convenient time. After school or at lunchtime is often a good time to arrange this. Your classmates will be an invaluable source of support throughout Year 12. They will be able to assist with work missed when absent from school, and much of the learning will be collaborative.

Support Sessions

These will be run throughout the year, by teachers, according to individual requirements

Recommended reading

The following books are included on the Edexcel 'Textbook and other resources' list. Whilst reading these books is not a requirement of the course, the following may be useful to refer to:

Listening and Theory
*Bowman D - *Aural Matters* (Schott, London, 1995)
Taylor E - *The AB Guide to Music Theory* (ABRSM, 1991)

Understanding
Edexcel - *The New Anthology of Music*
*Bennet R - *History of Music* (Cambridge Assignments, 1983)
*Bowman D - *Analysis Matters* (Schott, 1993)
*Boydon M - *The Rough Guide to Classical Music* (1999)
Cole W - *The Form of Music* (ABRSM, 1997)
Copland A - *What to Listen for in Music* (Penguin, 1988)
Donington R - *Baroque Music: Style and Performance* (Faber, 1982)
Donington R - *The Interpretation of Early Music* (Norton & Co, 1989)
*Goodall H – *The Story of Music* (Vintage, 2013)
Lebrecht N - *The Companion to 20th Century Music* (Simon and Schuster, 1992)
*Sadie S - *The Cambridge Music Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

*Wightman A - *Writing about Music* (Rhinegold, 2008)

Composing and Compositional Techniques
Aschmann L - *500 Songwriting Ideas* (Music Books Plus, 1997)
Baker D - *Arranging and Composing for the Small Ensemble: Jazz, R&B, Jazz Rock* (Alfred Publishing)
Benham H - A Student's Guide to Harmony and Counterpoint (Rhinegold, 2006)
Burns C - *Composing - A Student's Guide* (Nelson, 1996)
Citron S - *Songwriting: A Complete Guide to the Craft* (Amazon, 1990)
Cole B - *The Composer's Handbook* (Schott, 1998)
Newquist - *Music and Technology* (Billboard, 1989)
Paynter J - *Sound & Structure* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)
Piston W - *Harmony* (Norton & Co, 1988)
Piston W - *Orchestration* (Norton & Co, 1988)
Sturman P - *Harmony, Melody, Composition* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)
Taylor E - *The AB Guide to Music Theory* (ABRSM, 1991)

* Denotes particularly useful reads especially if thinking about studying Music at university.

Useful Websites

http://www.musictheory.net/ - a fantastic website for theory at all levels with lots of opportunities to test yourself

http://www.musictheoryblog.blogspot.co.uk/ - another good theory website laid out as a blog

Oxford Music Online | Library – Oxford Music Online is a huge repository of articles on music of all kinds. You will need to log in to access them, but you can do this with your local Library Barcode (on your library card).

http://www.soundjunction.org/default.aspa - a guide to all kinds of music with lots of examples

Need help with musical terms?
http://lilypond.org/doc/v2.11/Documentation/user/music-glossary-big-page

http://www.dolmetsch.com/musictheorydefs.htm - this is an enormous online music dictionary. The site also includes detailed lessons in lots of different areas. Other websites are regularly placed on the Homework forum.

Resources in the Department

Students are encouraged to use fully the resources available in the Music Department and the School Library. Of particular interest to Sixth Form students are the following:

- practice rooms
- pianos
- computers (including sequencing and notation software)
- portable recorder
- books

Leadership and Enrichment opportunities

Year 12 students will have the opportunity to:

- Become Music Department mentors to younger students.
- Become a Music Ambassador
- Lead extra-curricular clubs for KS3-5 students
- Undertake leadership roles in music concerts and events in school.
- Become an Arts Captain.

There are also multiple music groups available to develop your performance skills as well as concerts, performance opportunities, all of which are excellent things to put on your UCAS applications when applying for universities. A list of music events and the timetable for music clubs will be published in September.

Progression

Students who have studied *Music* in recent years have gone on to study Music at various universities and music colleges, including Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, RNCM and the Royal Academy of Music; others have gone on to read medicine and law, or for degrees in various subjects in both arts and science faculties.

Super Curricular Opportunities in Music

To support your learning, we recommend that you engage in activities from all the sections below to help widen your interest in the subject as well as begin to introduce you to the kind of independent learning activities we encourage you to engage with during A Level study.

We advise you to complete the following:

- Read one book from the suggested list (preferably an asterisked one!).
- Complete one online course.
- Listen to the Composer of the Week (BBC) podcasts on your set work composers and make notes accordingly.
- Listen to two episodes from two other different podcasts of your choice from the list provided

Online Courses

Harvard University are offering free online courses for many subjects. They vary in length and topic, for example 3 weeks long with 3-5 hours' time commitment per week. Harvard University also offer a verified certificate on completion of the course. The following will be particularly useful for the Edexcel A-Level Music course, giving you a broad understanding of the context surrounding the composer at that time as well as a better understanding of the musical style and genre.

First Nights: Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique and Program Music in the 19th Century
https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/first-nights-berlioz%E2%80%99s-symphonie-fantastique-and-program-music-19th-century?delta=2

Stravinsky's Rite of Spring: Modernism, Ballet, and Riots
https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/first-nights-igor-stravinsky%E2%80%99s-rite-spring-modernism-ballet-and-riots?delta=1

Beethoven's 9th Symphony and the 19th Century Orchestra
https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/first-nights-beethoven%E2%80%99s-9th-symphony-and-19th-century-orchestra?delta=1

Handel's Messiah and Baroque Oratorio
https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/first-nights-handel%E2%80%99s-messiah-and-baroque-oratorio?delta=1

There are many other online courses from different universities. Do some research and, if there are other suitable courses, you can of course complete these in addition to the above!

Podcasts

BBC Composer of the Week
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tnxf
Each week there is a series of five programmes dedicated to a particular composer or a group of related composers. It is available on the BBC Sounds App.

Discovering Music
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tn54/episodes/player
Listen to programmes about the lives and works of the greatest classical composers.

BBC Sounds Classical Music Digital Archives
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07pt73s/episodes/player
Great classical music performances from the BBC Orchestras and Choirs with some of the world's finest soloists.

BBC Young Musician 2024
BBC Four - BBC Young Musician -Young Musician Competition

Jazz Library
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006x41z/episodes/guide
Advice and guidance to those interested in building a library of jazz recordings.

Music Planet
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09ymx3v/episodes/player
The best roots-based music from across the world - with live sessions from the biggest international names and the freshest emerging talent, classic tracks and new releases.

The Early Music Show
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tn49/episodes/player

An exploration of early music, looking at early developments in musical performance and composition in Britain and abroad.

World Service Music
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02nrwqn/episodes/downloads
Music from around the world.

Other Opportunities

BBC Young Composer Competition 2025
BBC Radio 3 - BBC Proms - BBC Young Composer
This is an annual competition for 12- to 18-year-olds across the UK who create their own original music. Winners will participate in a tailored development programme working with a mentor composer on a project with the BBC Concert Orchestra culminating in a broadcast or performance opportunity.

There are many other opportunities and competitions out there – do some research and see what you can find!

Let your teachers know if there are any opportunities or competitions that can be shared with the other A-Level Musicians!