

Free online resources for music teachers: a guide

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by Jane Werry

INTRODUCTION

There's no teacher in the world who doesn't love a free resource. And the good news is that as time goes on, there are more and more of them available on the internet.

Whether you're looking for lesson ideas, resources to use with classes, tutorial videos, playalongs, arrangements, or free software to use for creating music, there's a real smorgasbord of things on offer that can be used straight away in your classroom at no cost whatsoever.

No guide to free resources can ever promise to be absolutely comprehensive, however. This resource is intended to highlight a large selection of useful online things that are tried and tested for use with KS3, 4 and 5.

KS3

Planning for KS3 music lessons is a fascinating but never-ending journey of exploration. Trying out new ideas, and finding out what really works with students, is most definitely part of what makes it fun. Fortunately, the range of resources available free online is growing all the time, as more and more teachers and organisations contribute quality materials.

Resources for the teacher: help with planning and explaining

Most music teachers like to pick and mix their resources, and use bits and pieces that they have collected from a variety of sources. YouTube now has some unmissable benefits for music teachers looking to enrich their teaching. Videos that explain musical concepts in a clear and entertaining way can be used not only in lessons, but also for homework, cover lessons and revision. Set some multiple-choice questions to go with a video, and you have a valuable flipped learning resource that can be used again and again.

Mr D Morley's YouTube channel has videos on song structure, notation, rock history, music keywords, blues and musical devices, all aimed at KS3 students. The song about pop song structure is a worthy successor to Dan Barrow's essential *C is to the Left of the Two Black Keys*. If I could only keep one video to use in my teaching, this would be it. This insanely catchy song ensures that nobody will ever have to write the note-names onto the keys of a keyboard ever again.

Another useful port of call is **Brian Gossard's YouTube channel**. This has a particularly good video explaining **ostinato** – again in the form of a song that will earworm its way into students' heads. Other highlights include the *Loud and Soft Song*, and explanations of rhythm, theme and variations, and rondo form.

Miss Ward Music is a beautifully presented website with a good range of resources, some of which are for practical tasks, but some of which are printables for listening tasks and reference. The literacy mats and knowledge organisers (covering KS3 and KS4) are particularly excellent. Elements of music, rhythm notation, pitch notation, ostinato (including a whole series of tutorial videos for playing Pachelbel's Canon), 12-bar blues, pop songs, film music and musical stories are all covered in depth, with listening activities and differentiated performing tasks.

For Facebook users, the **KS3 Music Hints and Tips group** is a source of hidden gems. The group has a large membership of 3,500, so there's a lot of traffic that will sometimes feel like it's filling up your news feed.

However, it's well worth keeping an eye on what's going on, as every so often someone makes a quality recommendation or posts an absolutely terrific resource. I have found ideas for choir repertoire, new YouTube videos, and quite a few of the sites mentioned in this resource via this group. Even if you turn off notifications for the group, visit the Files section every now and then to trawl through. Particular highlights include Stefan Richards' excellent feedback menus, and Helen Durham's Year 7 knowledge organisers.

Music Teacher's Resource Site has a range of free teaching resources for KS3 and KS4. These are now quite old, but cover a wide range of popular topics and are well worth a look, particularly the 12-bar blues project, which is something of a classic, with a full set of performance sheets for 'Jackass Blues'. There are whole schemes of work, including teacher notes, worksheets, and even some MIDI files. Topics include film music, world music, keyboard projects, elements of music and chords.

Resources for orchestral instruments and classical music

If you find that your KS3 students haven't already had a good introduction to the instruments of the orchestra at primary school, there are some excellent videos on YouTube that will fill in any gaps.

The videos of the **BBC National Orchestra of Wales** feature good five-minute introductions to each family of instruments. For more detailed information on individual instruments, the **Philharmonia Orchestra's instrument guides** are extremely comprehensive.

For everything else you might need for covering classical music at KS3, the **BBC Ten Pieces collection** is unmissable. It now runs to three sets of ten pieces, which themselves cover everything from mainstream choices such as the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Mussorgsky's *Night on a Bare Mountain*, to contemporary pieces by composers such as Gabriel Prokofiev and Anna Meredith.

For each piece, there is a short video that introduces it, usually presented by someone famous, and including just enough background and musical detail, together with excellent performance footage that gives a great view of what the musicians are actually doing. The films for the third collection (Ten Pieces III) are slightly more geared towards KS2, but would still be a useful starting point for KS3 students. All 30 films can be found here. There are also some videos on the science of sound, which are aimed at KS2 pupils, but could form the basis for useful homework or cover work for Year 7 or Year 8.

The films are supplemented by a huge collection of teaching resources. There are lesson plans that cover a wide variety of approaches to the pieces, and which include cross-curricular ideas. However, perhaps the most impressive and useful part of the whole site is the collection of arrangements. These arrangements are of all 30 pieces, and have three levels (beginner/grade 1, intermediate/grades 1-3, and grades 4-5) that can work together for multi-ability ensembles. They include parts for all usual orchestral and wind band instruments, as well as parts for guitar and ukulele, available as PDF files. While the guitar and ukulele parts include tab, my only criticism of the arrangements as a whole would be the lack of bass guitar tab, and chord parts for guitar/ukulele, as the inclusion of these would open up the possibilities for using the pieces even more flexibly in the classroom. Still, the arrangements are a phenomenal resource that have enormous potential for use with classes or extra-curricular groups.

Elsewhere, the **LSO's project pack on Stravinsky's Rite of Spring** is very comprehensive. A slightly more frivolous, but still useful, resource is the **LPO's Rite of Spring clap-along video**, which is a fun rhythm-reading exercise and a good introduction to Stravinsky's rebellion against 'the tyranny of the barline'.

The rest of the **LPO's playalong videos** are well worth exploring as well – these are mostly timpani parts, but because they generally only involve two pitches, would be easy for most classes to follow, with everyone looking out for 'their' pitch and playing it on whatever instrument is available. These videos would be useful as a starter or plenary, giving students a feeling of being involved in an orchestral performance, and reading staff notation in as non-threatening a set-up as possible.

There has been some confusion about what **Musical Futures** actually is. Originally a project investigating the ways in which the informal musical processes of pop and rock musicians can be applied in the music classroom, MF has come a very long way in the years since it started. It has become a way of working, one that puts practical music making at the heart of music teaching and learning: the 'teaching music musically' that Ofsted have frequently and favourably mentioned. It encompasses classical music and world music alongside rock and pop.

Musical Futures has recently branched out into premium resources – mostly playalong videos in their Just Play style – but there's still plenty of useful material on their website that is free. The website itself is a bit tricky to navigate, which can be a little frustrating, and it is necessary to create an account to access everything, but this is free. Here are some of the highlights of Musical Futures, with links to cut out some of the searching.

















A good place to start is the very comprehensive teacher resource pack, available as a free download as a PDF file. This gives you step-by-step instructions for the MF style of informal learning, songwriting, and classroom workshopping, with plenty of examples of how they can be applied to new and existing schemes of learning. The classroom workshopping schemes, in particular, are excellent and well worth investigating. This approach takes some practice, but can transform the way your classroom is run.

The MF Find Your Voice project has now become a classic, and it has been successfully adopted and adapted by thousands of schools. It involves investigating songs with the I-V-vi-IV progression, and building up a mash-up of these, which may be entirely vocal, or could involve instruments or technology. It has proved extremely effective in keeping singing alive in classrooms where it seemed to be almost extinct. Everything you will need for the project is on the site, from example schemes of learning to collections of vocal warm-ups and instructional videos on beatboxing.

Modelling Aural Learning has some excellent resources for getting students to play by ear, and includes popular classical pieces such as *Für Elise*. The resources include audio downloads of bite-sized chunks of the pieces involved. The Teacher Created section has free packs on specific songs, created in MF style by contributing teachers. These include 'Clocks', 'I Predict a Riot', 'Valerie' and 'I Need a Dollar'.

Little Kids Rock is an American organisation that has lots in common with Musical Futures. At its heart is the 'modern band programme', which teaches students guitar, ukulele, bass, drums, keys and vocals in the classroom, using a diet of contemporary and classic rock and pop. The scope of the materials on their website is mind-boggling, both in terms of its quality and its quantity. In the Teacher Zone you will find their complete handbook, which is downloadable as a PDF file. This is a weighty read, but has many tips for running a practical classroom, and is essentially a manual for teaching music musically. If you ever feel you need evidence to justify a practical approach in your classroom, this handbook contains plenty of it. Also downloadable are two sizeable PowerPoints, which are used in LKR's teacher training sessions. Again, there is plenty here to learn from, and also to use in your own classroom.

There are also instructional videos, practice drills and jam-alongs. These go hand-in-hand with the vast song collection. Here, there is a constantly updated collection of song charts, which can be searched by title or artist. Even better, you can also search by difficulty level, number of chords, inclusion of particular chords (ie G, D, C), or by progression (ie I-V-vi-IV or 12-bar blues). Some are also available in easier versions.

<p>In the style of</p> <h3>All Along the Watchtower</h3> <p>Bob Dylan</p>	<p>Level: Intermediate</p> <p>Chords: Ami, F, G</p>	 
<p>In the style of</p> <h3>All Of Me</h3> <p>John Legend</p>	<p>Level: Intermediate</p> <p>Chords: Ab, Bbm, Db, Eb, Fmi</p>	  
<p>In the style of</p> <h3>All Shook Up</h3> <p>Elvis Presley</p>	<p>Level: Beginner</p> <p>Chords: A7, D7, E7</p>	
<p>In the style of</p> <h3>All Star</h3> <p>Smash Mouth</p>	<p>Level: Intermediate</p> <p>Chords: B, C#, F#, G#mi</p>	    
<p>In the style of</p> <h3>All Star (Easy Version)</h3> <p>Smash Mouth</p>	<p>Level: Beginner</p> <p>Chords: Ami, C, D, G</p>	    

Each song is listed with its difficulty level, its chords, and the instruments for which charts are available. The charts themselves are of a high quality and give all the information that students will need to play the song. The whole-band charts are particularly good, and have all the band instruments (except, unfortunately, ukulele) on one sheet.

In the style of

Cheap Thrills (Easy Version)

by Sean Paul and Sia

GENRE: POP

IN THE STYLE OF... "CHEAP THRILLS (Easy Version)" by Sia ft. Sean Paul

KEY: G MAJOR TEMPO: 90 BPM

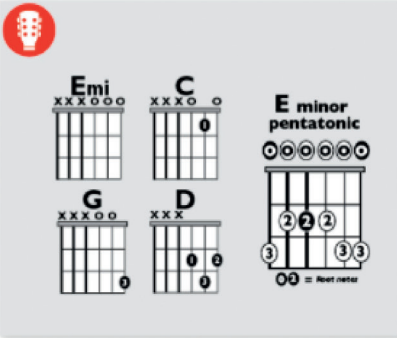
Chords	G	Ami	Bmi	C	D	Emi
	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi

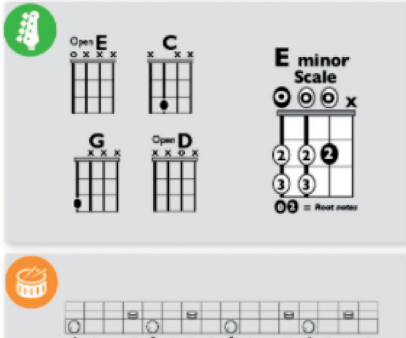
SONG FORM: Intro, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus, Outro

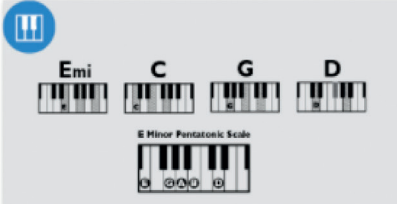
Verse 4X

Emi C G D


||: / / / / | / / / / :||







SOLO





There are also some great printable resources on the LKR website. My favourites are the chord diagrams, which I have on my classroom wall:



Another highlight is the Piano Jam Cards, which stand up behind your piano/keyboard keys and show which notes make up major and minor chords, blues and pentatonic scales, and standard chord progressions, including inversions. These work brilliantly with students who get confused about what notes to play, particularly with chord inversions. The only snag is that the PDF file is made for American standard-size paper, which is different from A4. However, it's worth doing a bit of playing around with this to make your own sets of cards. Printed out on card, or laminated, these will be a durable resource that will last for some time.

CHORDS: Major in 3 Ways JAM CARD™ #2a

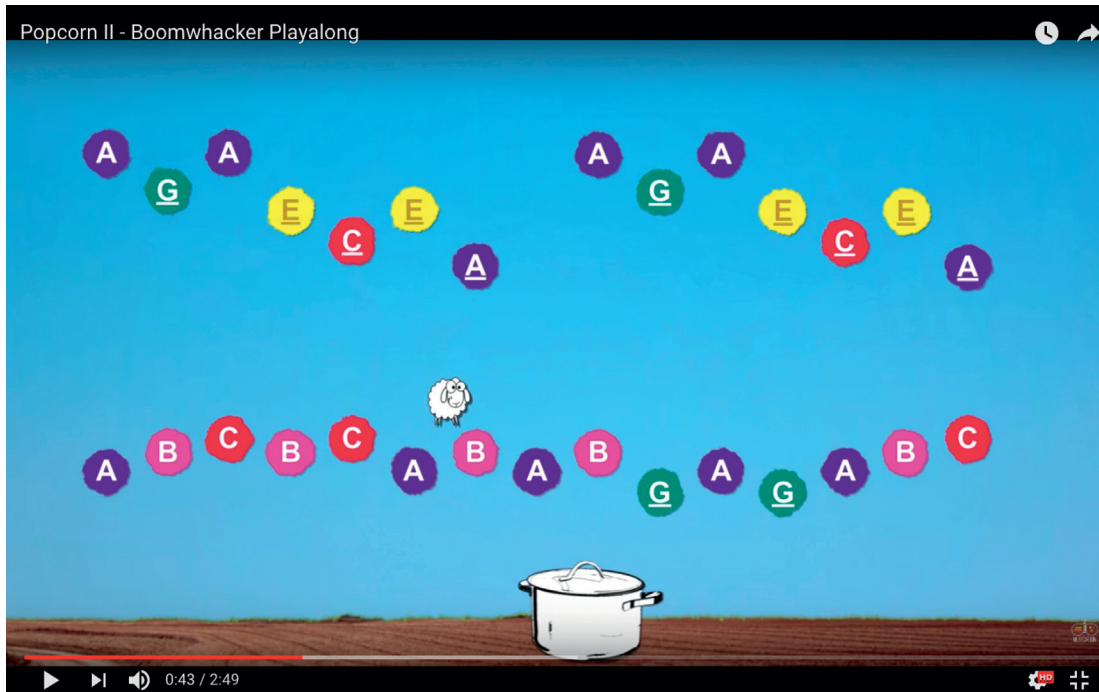
All major chords have three "patterns" and each major chord can be played three ways. Knowing the three "patterns" makes changing chords easier. The **ROOT** still gives the chord its name, no matter where it appears in the "pattern".

ROOT				1				3	SHAPE 3	5
			1					5	SHAPE 2	
1								ROOT		
			3							

Other resources for whole-class performing

If you have a class set of Boomwhackers, the **Musication YouTube channel** has a wide selection of Boomwhacker playalongs that are a perfect, easy way into watching for cues and playing at the right time. There are easy popular and classical tunes, such as 'Banana Boat Song', 'Rolling in the Deep' and 'In The Hall of the Mountain King'. Some have easier, slowed-down versions, in case your class needs them. The *Pirates of the Caribbean* video is a sure-fire hit, and all can be used as a great plenary. More able students can be given two or even three Boomwhackers to increase the difficulty of the task.



The Musication channel also has percussion playalongs that can be adapted for any instruments you have – or body percussion – simply by assigning whatever sounds you like to each symbol that comes up in the video. Here, again, the emphasis is on watching and playing at the correct time – a skill that is useful for all students to practise, even if it is just used as a focuser at the start of a lesson.

Taking percussion a little bit further, the **Beat Goes On website** features free resources that include rhythm grids in a number of styles, together with a junk percussion guide. One of the really great things about the rhythm grids is that they feature words that go with the rhythms, helping with memorisation and accurate performance. Ollie Tunmer from Beat Goes On also has a couple of great instructional videos on YouTube, where he teaches body percussion routines, and there are more on the Beat Goes On Instagram. For more body percussion ideas, see the **Body Percussion Classroom**.

Resources for whole-class ukulele are in much more plentiful supply than for whole-class guitar. **Dr Jill Reese's YouTube channel** features a huge range of ukulele playalongs, with some practice videos at slower tempos. All the videos have chord diagrams and lyrics, and it's easy to see what chord is coming up. Many of the videos use only three or four chords, and include some guidance for strumming patterns.

Ukulele Tenor's channel has similar playalongs and chord drills, and again a vast range of songs that are accessible to KS3 players. A one-off video along similar lines that's extremely good is this ukulele-and-xylophone playalong of 'Halo'. For all the playalongs, you can differentiate by asking more able students to play full strumming patterns or sing while they play. Less able students could just play on the first beat of each bar, or just play one or two chords at the right time. If you have students who cannot, for whatever reason, manage a ukulele, it might be possible for them to add in the root notes of the chords on chime bars, xylophone or keyboard.

Pluckin' Ukes is an extremely useful site if you want to create ukulele chord sheets or song sheets. All of the common chord boxes are on the site (with the usual variations, ie for the E chord), and you can select which ones you'd like to make into a chord reference sheet, or quickly and easily create song sheets where the chord symbols appear above the song lyrics.

Riff Station is an extraordinary website, with playalong options for thousands of current and classic pop and rock songs. Search for whatever song you have in mind, or have a look in 'Featured Songs' for the list of easy songs for beginners. You can generally choose whether to play along to the original video of a song, or a lyric video – the lyric version will make more sense if anyone is going to sing as well as play. You can then choose whether you want to play along on keyboard, guitar, bass, ukulele or mandolin: the disadvantage is that mixed groups are not catered for. The graphics are very clear, and show you exactly how to play each chord – the exception to this is the presentation of bass tab, which is quite confusing to follow except in the simplest songs. Overall this is a great resource, provided that you have your whole class on the same instrument. I would recommend that you test-run any video you want to use with a class, though – there are occasions where the chords are not entirely accurate, and some instances of niggles such as showing a chord of D major as D, G flat and A.

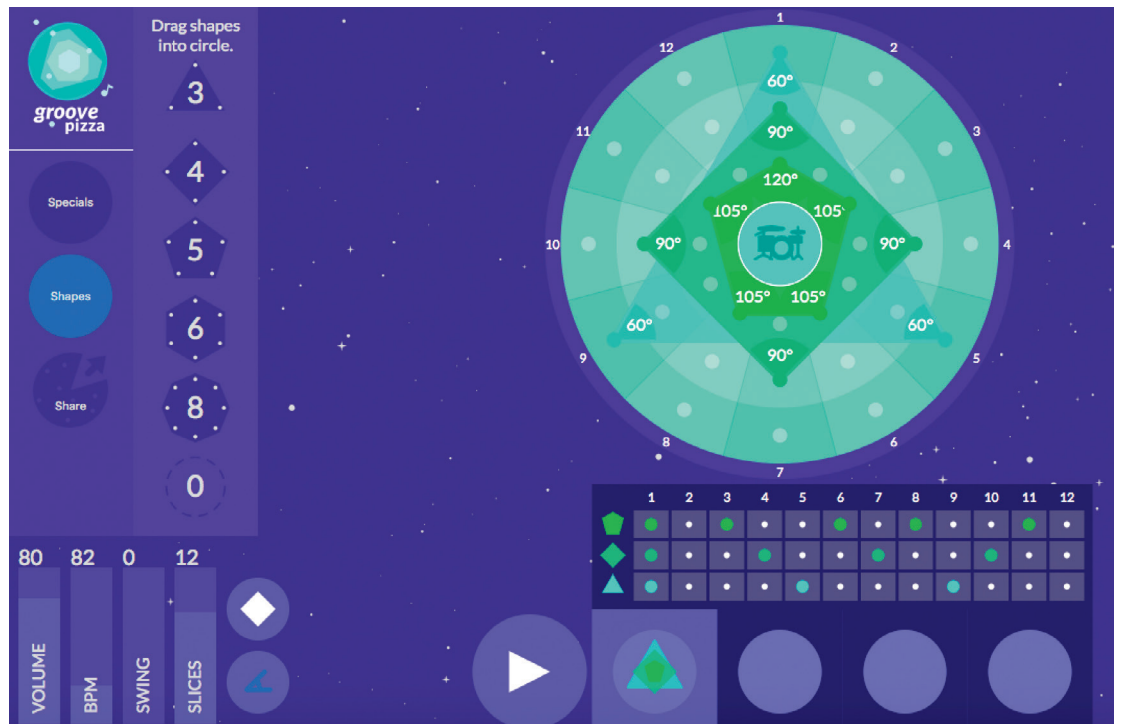
For your computers: resources for sequencing and composing

Soundtrap and **Soundation** are both online DAWs (digital audio workstations) that operate in a similar way to GarageBand and Logic. They work entirely through your browser, so there's no software to install, and can be used on pretty much any device. The only caveat to this is that Soundation runs using Flash, meaning it won't run on an iPad or iPhone.

Both feel and look much like any other sequencing program, and will not take long to work out. There are a range of sounds and loops in both, and there's plenty of possibility for doing great KS3 projects – although they're unlikely to go quite far enough for GCSE or A level work. For some great ideas about different ways to use Soundtrap in the classroom, see this excellent podcast from Midnight Music.

You may also want to investigate free software for producing scores. Here, the two main options are **Noteflight** and **Musescore**. Both work extremely well, but there are a few differences between them that are worth knowing about. Noteflight is entirely cloud-based, so there is no software to download, while MuseScore is a free software download. MuseScore ultimately has more complex functions and enables you to create bigger, more complicated pieces. However, Noteflight is very simple for beginners, and has great potential for using with KS3 classes. MuseScore would fulfil the notation-writing needs of most GCSE and A level students, and could be a great cost-saving tactic if Sibelius or Dorico are beyond your budget.

Groove Pizza is an extremely useful web-based resource that creates drum rhythms using a user-friendly graphic:



Students can build up four-bar patterns by experimenting with overlaying shapes on the circular grid. The visuals are logical and instantly appealing to students of all abilities. You can choose to reveal the internal angles of the shapes if you want to investigate the links between maths and music. There is a choice of kits (rock, techno, Afro-Latin, etc), and you can alter the volume, tempo, degree of swing, and how you would like to subdivide each bar. Once you've created something you like, it can be exported as audio or MIDI for use in another program, or there's a direct link to Soundtrap.

Incredibox is another web-based tool that's easy to use and extremely appealing to students. It runs using Flash, so you need a computer rather than an iOS device (although there is an iOS app for Incredibox, this is not free). Using Incredibox, you can explore layering and arranging by dragging outfits onto the 'guys', which triggers a loop for each one:



The beats, effects, melodies and voices fit together whichever way you do it, but there are discussions to be had about choosing effective combinations and varying textures. Once you've assigned sounds, you can mute or solo any of them: the trick here is to do this at the start of a bar to make clean changes. Any 'guy' can be deleted at any time, in which case a new one pops up ready to be assigned a loop.

Students can rehearse their mix, and then record it. Once recorded, this can be shared. As well as providing a great creative opportunity for students, it's also very useful for creating backing tracks for rhythm work and improvisation. For more ideas about ways to use Incredibox in the classroom, visit the Midnight Music website. This Australian site is full of useful ideas for using music technology, and is particularly well up on things that are free or make effective use of limited resources. There are some excellent downloads including a free e-book on using technology in lessons, chord boxes, and lists of shortcuts for common programs such as GarageBand and Sibelius.

ComposerHome, the website of composer James Humberstone, has an excellent resources section that features projects you can do on Sibelius or GarageBand. There are video guides to support remixing and composition tasks, as well as downloadable loops. This is a really thorough and well-thought-out set of resources, and highly recommended if you have a computer suite and are not quite sure what to do in it with your KS3 classes. The projects include (among many others) remixing projects using *Tubular Bells* and Prince's 'When Doves Cry', and composition projects that involve writing jingles and film trailers, or developing musical motifs.

Finally, **Audacity** is a free, downloadable program for audio recording, multi-tracking and editing. It would be perfectly possible to use it with students, but it's more likely that you would want to use it yourself. One of its most useful features is being able to change the key or tempo of a piece of audio – this is incredibly useful to make backing tracks for classroom performance. The great thing here is that changing the key does not change the tempo, and changing the tempo does not change the key. The process is very easy, and can take less than two minutes with a little practice.

KS4

Many of the resources already mentioned will also be of great use with older students, but here are some additional ideas that may well be useful for KS4.

The **Hack Music Theory YouTube channel** is a goldmine of material that can be used to support composition at KS4. There are step-by-step explanations of every stage of the songwriting process, with great tips on writing chord sequences, riffs, basslines and melodies. All are explained using key editor visuals (rather than notation) which are easily understood by students who may not be confident with notation. Some of the videos are lengthy, but there are also many shorter, five- to six-minute 'hack' videos that are extremely useful. If you can cope with Ray Harmony's rather exuberant presenting style, you can even collect these together to make a sequence of videos that students can work through as they do their compositions, or be directed to as part of your feedback.

There are also many videos on YouTube that are useful for preparation for the listening exam. My own department's YouTube channel, **HayesMusicDept**, has videos specific to the OCR GCSE on Areas of Study 2 and 3, and also more generic ones on Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods, and musical features such as texture, harmony and tonality.

For those ever-tricky questions on identifying instrumental sounds, you might want to revisit some of the videos mentioned in the KS3 section, before using some of the online quizzes that are available. **Music Assessment Videos** on YouTube have a collection of instrument identification tests, usually grouping hard-to-distinguish instruments in pairs, for example clarinet and oboe. There are enough of these to use them as starters over a whole sequence of lessons, for low-stakes testing and frequent reminders of the timbres of orchestral instruments.

Padlet is quite unlike anything else, and has a multitude of possible uses. You create a 'wall' which is an easy-to-use collaborative space to put text, documents, pictures and links. To enable your students to contribute, you simply give them a link or QR code to take them to a wall that you have created. They can then contribute and view using a computer or any device connected to the internet. This can be used for collaborative research, revision, asking and answering questions, or creating model answers to exam questions. For more ideas about ways to use Padlet in the music classroom, see this wall.

The melodic dictation question found in every GCSE paper often ends up consuming a lot of angst and lesson time. With the online exercises provided by **Teoria**, you can set practice for students to do in their own time. These start off very simply, with step-wise movement and straightforward rhythms, and become progressively more difficult, with the user always in control of the various parameters. For students lacking in confidence with notation, this could be a real help. The rest of the Teoria website may also prove extremely helpful for students who need help with any aspect of music theory.

KS5

Again, many of the resources previously mentioned may be useful at KS5, particularly websites such as **Teoria** and the similar **MusicTheory.net**. Both have theory lessons and interactive exercises. If you're covering serialism with your A level class, do explore MusicTheory.net's matrix generator which will provide you with a 12-note grid for any note row.

www.alevelmusic.com is actually the website of Tom Pankhurst, Director of Music at St Edward's College in Stourbridge. It's a treasure trove of A level-related material, much of which is relevant to every exam board. There is very thorough guidance for harmonising Bach chorales, strategies for approaching composition, and a short history of music broken down by period. As a reference resource, it's excellent – for example, there's guidance on every commonly used compositional technique in the Western classical tradition, such as melody writing, cadences, cycles of 5ths and modulation, together with instrumental ranges. Everything is linked to audio and notation: it's a truly impressive resource.

Hook Theory is another wonder of the internet, which might prove especially useful for BTEC and A level music technology students, but could also be used at KS4 and even KS3. There are harmonic analyses ('tabs') for nearly 18,000 songs, all represented in a colourful, visual way that can be of enormous help for students who find musical concepts difficult to understand.

The screenshot displays the Hook Theory interface for a 'Chorus' section. At the top, there are controls for 'Play (sb)', 'Loop', 'Key' (F Major), and 'Tempo' (87 BPM). Below these are icons for 'Inst.' (Piano) and 'Settings'. The main area features a guitar fretboard diagram with six strings (E, D, C, B \flat , A, G, F, E, D) and seven frets (7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1). Colored blocks on the fretboard represent notes for four chords: F (I), am (iii), dm (vi), and B \flat (IV). Below the fretboard, the chord symbols 'I', 'iii', 'vi', and 'IV' are displayed, with their corresponding letter names 'F', 'am', 'dm', and 'B \flat ' listed underneath.

When you hover your mouse over a chord symbol, the chord notes become highlighted above, enabling you to see easily how melodies are formed using chord notes and non-chord notes. Repeating patterns are instantly apparent, enabling easy analysis of chord structure and melody. Common chord progressions, broken down by complexity, are investigated separately, so students can explore the incredible diversity of responses to, say, the I-V-vi-IV progression.

The related **HookPad** enables the user (once a free account has been created) to use the HookTheory interface to create their own chord sequences and melodies, and is the perfect way for students to carry forward the knowledge they have gained from exploring HookTheory into their own music. Anything created on HookPad can be exported as MIDI, audio, or a score.