

General information:

Music A Level is a multi-skilled, rigorous and academic course which sits well with other subjects as a route into university. Universities recognise both its creative and academic qualities, and there is no problem with it being regarded as a soft touch – those days are long behind us. Pupils will develop their skills and build their confidence in a number of areas: performing; composing; listening; essay writing; contextual understanding and using harmony effectively. We offer both AS and A-level music at Bishops. The AS can be chosen instead of Further Maths or the EPQ, and can also be turned into a full A-level if the pupil decides they have enjoyed the AS enough to continue in Year 13.

Course content:

There are three units:

1. Performing
 - a (AS) 6-8 minute recital, 30%;
 - b (A) either 6-8 minute recital, 25%- or 10-12-minute recital, 35%
 2. Composing
 - a (AS) Two compositions 4.5-7 minutes in total, 30%
 - b (A) either Two compositions 6-8 minutes in total, 25% or Three compositions 10-12 minutes in total, 35%
 3. Appraising – set works and listening skills; Musical understanding and essay writing, 40%
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How is the course taught and assessed?

There is an expectation that the students will focus on Unit 1 with their instrumental teachers but this can be addressed by each case if necessary. Units 2 and 3 are taught in class by both academic teachers in the department. There are eight periods taught at each school per week.

In Year 12, we cover preparatory work topics, including basic harmony techniques building slowly to Year 13. Any composition started in Year 12 may be continued in Year 13, or you may start a new piece. In Year 13, we build towards exam – style questions as we move towards the middle of the spring term. Performing is assessed by a recital at the end of the spring term of Year 13. It is externally assessed. The composition to a brief is sent off for assessment, together with the stylistic exercises, in May of Year 13. The Unit 3 examination takes place in the summer series of A Levels at the end of the course.

Entry requirements:

In addition to the general entry requirements for BWS, a grade 7 in GCSE Music and grade IV on the first study instrument. Grade V Theory is recommended.

Results information:

In 2025 100% of students achieved A* - C grades at A level.

Top destinations for students:

Students study at a range of universities and conservatoires, including Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol and Cardiff. Students also regularly win scholarships to top universities.

Beyond the curriculum:

There are plenty of opportunities to enjoy music beyond the curriculum. The school has a very good choir, consisting of nearly 70 members, and a separate chamber choir, the Bishop Singers. Ensembles include the schools Big Band, Wind Band and Orchestra are all advanced and sought-after groups. Sixth form musicians are actively encouraged to take rehearsals. There is also the option to form student chamber groups and staff coaching is available throughout the year. There are regular concerts at venues such as St Martin's and St Thomas' church, regular services in Salisbury Cathedral and trips to venues further afield. The choir and orchestra performed Mozart's Requiem in May, and we plan to have a major Oratorio on the calendar at least every two years going forward. There is a Music Tour to Prague in February, with the hope tours will run every two years. Bishops Singers has travelled to Cornwall, building links with local primary schools and this will be on our calendar again soon as well.