

# CREATING OUTSTANDING COMPOSITIONS FOR GCSE AND A-LEVEL

CODE **8446**

## ABOUT THIS COURSE

Led by Alex Aitken, this course continues to be one of the most popular Music courses we run. Designed for all teachers of both GCSE and A-level Music, regardless of exam board and experience, the course has been described by delegates as 'game-changing', 'truly inspiring', 'hugely insightful' and 'fantastically informative'. The course is continually rewritten to reflect the latest developments in teaching composition, and is packed with information, tips, proven teaching strategies and expert guidance.

The day begins by examining common features amongst all assessment criteria across all exam boards, seeking to create an alternative system of board-wide criteria for outstanding compositions, through which compositions can be assessed and shaped during the compositional process, rather than through a specific board's mark scheme designed to assess a final product.

The rest of the day seeks to establish teaching strategies and philosophies that allow students of all abilities to score well for the composition component. This will be followed by a detailed examination of what students need to demonstrate to examiners at GCSE and A-level, including looking at the definitions of key assessment terms used in the highest criteria, and exactly why they are used.

A suggested model to use throughout the compositional process will be proposed that both encourages students at each stage, and provides valid and accurate data for tracking and assessment within the department. Various approaches to teaching composition will be looked at, critiqued and tweaked, with the aim of providing guidance on implementing a curriculum-wide approach that guarantees greater engagement, empowerment and curiosity from students at all age ranges, all aimed at helping students to excel with A-level composition.

Proven strategies for weaker or underconfident students will also be suggested, along with ways of developing compositional skills across KS3-5, with the aim of encouraging a love of composition, underpinned by an understanding of the creative process. Three outstanding composition examples will then be discussed.

## COURSE LEADER

**Alexander Aitken** is now one of the UK's leading educationalists for Music, and is the author of [www.masteringalevelmusic.co.uk](http://www.masteringalevelmusic.co.uk), which is used worldwide. An A-level examiner and former Head of Music, he also was part of Edexcel's GCSE Music textbook team, having written the analysis of *Defying Gravity*. He continues to maintain a slightly-too-busy schedule as a Musical Director, pianist and teacher, having most recently been the Children's Musical Director and Cover Conductor on Cameron Mackintosh's London production of *Mary Poppins*.



LOCATION/DATE

**London**

**Tuesday 19 March 2024**

**Thursday 13 June 2024**

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Head of Music
- Teachers of Music, both new and experience

## BENEFITS OF ATTENDING

- A thorough day of CPD on all things composition, discussing everything from specific mark schemes through to implementing a school-wide approach to composition.
- Expert guidance from one of the UK's leading educationalists, who is also an A-level examiner, former Head of Music, and the author of one of the top A-level resources in the UK: [www.masteringalevelmusic.co.uk](http://www.masteringalevelmusic.co.uk).
- Take away proven strategies, approaches and monitoring processes for composition at both GCSE and A-level.
- Gain a range of effective methods that encourage low, mid and high ability students.
- Raise academic standards in composition, and be challenged with new ideas and philosophies, regardless of your experience.
- Learn ways to mitigate the risk of subjectivity in compositions.
- Gain confidence in tackling the compositional process; particularly if you do not think of yourself as a composing musician.

**Actually Defining Outstanding**

10.00 – 11.30am

- Summarising the latest guidance from all exam boards; common patterns.
- Seeking a general consensus from the exam boards on what makes a composition outstanding.
- Integrating exam report feedback and common errors with exam criteria to find patterns.
- Hidden aspects to the Mark Schemes.
- Composition curriculum end points and key objectives.
- Ingredients of outstanding compositions.
- The issue of subjectivity.

Discussion: coffee break

11.30 – 11.45am

**Immediate Priorities and Teaching Strategies**

11.45 – 12.45pm

- Too little teaching time: immediate solutions to tackle inefficiency.
- The power of research; harnessing and capitalising upon student's tastes.
- Designing composition briefs – issues, parameters and requirements.
- The issue of pastiche.
- Using the latest research on the creative process to shape teaching strategies.
- 'I can't compose': boosting confidence and self-belief through a change of tack.
- Helping weaker or underconfident student to boost confidence and self-belief.
- How creative and how academic? Treading the fine line.
- Working smarter.

**Deepening Skills**

12.45 – 1.00pm

- Making your life easier – getting students thinking and the importance of environment.
- Overlaps with the other components of the specification; achieving greater efficiency.
- Teaching non-pianists to harmonise, and singers to think vertically.
- Graphical methods and alternative ideas for the planning stage; daring to be different.
- Writing up later: surprising benefits.

Lunch and informal discussion

1.00 – 1.30pm

**Keeping Track**

1.30 – 2.00pm

- Verbal feedback vs. written feedback – making SLT spreadsheet lovers happy.
- Efficient marking processes when they can select all and delete between sessions.
- Minimising time but maximising feedback value – making it a reality.
- Accuracy vs. validity – problems with using the mark schemes before students have finished.

**Adding Shine**

2.00 – 2.30pm

- Notation, typesetting, formatting and annotating – avoiding common errors.
- Making a composition shine.
- Final presentation of the score and alternative formats; communicating intentions to the examiner.
- Composition Recordings – alternative ideas to make a better impact.

**Discussion of Three Outstanding Composition Examples**

2.30 – 3.30pm