



# ST EDMUND'S SCHOOL CANTERBURY

## PREPARING FOR A-LEVEL

### MUSIC

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Like GCSE, A-level Music is divided into three components: performing; composing and appraising. It is a significant 'step-up', however, and time spent consolidating skills – both practical and theoretical – will really help prepare you to fully immerse yourself in the subject in the Sixth Form.

#### Performing

Throughout the course, you will be preparing to perform a recital (either 10-12 minutes or 6-8 minutes, depending on the path you choose) in front of a visiting examiner. Recitals should not be approached in the same way as a Grade exam where you may well be perfecting a piece right up until the last minute. In a recital, you should play repertoire that you know really well and that you enjoy playing. As you only have one chance to perform, the standard set by Eduqas is Grade 6, although additional marks are awarded for difficulty if you can confidently play at Grade 7 or above.

As well as pushing yourself to learn new repertoire, revisit previous pieces you have played and put together a short programme (6-8 minutes) that you can perfect by the end of the Summer holidays. Be prepared to perform this to the class in September.

#### Composition Task

At GCSE, the second unit concentrates primarily on composition tasks; one free and one from a selection of set briefs. To prepare for A-level Music, try your hand at a composition or arrangement task, maybe taking a well-known theme and creating some variations on it. This may also involve some arranging if you wish to compose for a small ensemble like a wind trio or quartet for example.

Here is an idea. **Variations** have been around as long as music itself and there have been some fabulous examples over the centuries. Do listen to and study some of the works below. Music can be found online from imslp or other sources so you can listen and follow the scores:

1. Schubert, Trout Quintet 4<sup>th</sup> movement (Theme & Variations) D. 667  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwbWvGtaZGo>
2. Beethoven, Seven Variations on God Save the King  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOds7jLxNl>
3. Brahms, Variations on a Theme by Paganini  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJVjoRhkbbo>

4. Rachmaninoff, Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koqOEd10Gdl>
5. Lloyd Webber, Variations on a Theme by Paganini  
<https://www.andrewlloydwebber.com/show/variations/>

## TASK

Take either the Paganini main theme or God save the King (Queen), annotate *either* melody yourself. Firstly, arrange the harmonies for the ensemble of your choice. For example, it could be piano and oboe or any other small group. Then, start by choosing a variations technique (there are many to be found in the recordings above) and try your hand at say, 3-4 variations. Do feel free to send me ([sjp@stedmunds.org.uk](mailto:sjp@stedmunds.org.uk)) any work/ideas along the way and I will give you some feedback, starting with the melody line.

The music software programme Sibelius is very useful for the score-writing process. If you have not got a copy, there is a free version for students that can be downloaded at <https://my.avid.com/get/sibelius-first> although it does have limited functionality with up to four staves.

## Appraising

The 'Listening' paper requires you to practice various skills, including dictation, recognising keys, chords and cadences and spotting mistakes. In addition to this, you will need to become efficient at reading and analysing orchestral scores, many of which will include transposing instruments.

In order to keep up your ear training, the website <https://www.teoria.com/> is free to use and contains a large resource of music theory and ear training exercises. Short, regular bursts of practice are advised.

For analysis, you should have a go at analysing a piece you know well or that you are learning: avoid orchestral scores in the first instance. Print out a fresh copy of the music to annotate. The points you should be looking for include:

- What key is the piece in?
- Where are the modulations?
- Where are the cadences? Can you analyse any harmonic progressions?
- Identify the main themes and look for any development.