

TIPS FOR TEACHING ROCK AND POP MUSIC

TRINITY
ROCK & POP
2018

TEACHERS GIVE THEIR ADVICE ON TEACHING ROCK AND POP MUSIC

We asked a range of teachers working with students learning a rock and pop instrument to give us their top teaching tips.

PUT THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES IN CONTEXT

'If you've got a student who wants to learn slap bass, or modal theory, or sweep picking, or rhythmic displacement, or whatever... don't limit study simply to the mechanics of the technique, or to notes on the page - look at repertoire too. How, where and when can they use the ideas?' **Steve Gisby, bass teacher**

'All great rock and pop music comes with an important background or message. I find that students are fascinated by the history behind the songs, so a study of the lyrics for all instrumentalists will help to give an impassioned performance.' **James Sedge, drums teacher**

PLENTY OF PRACTICE RUNS!

'As exams are performance-based, I have always found it useful to have students perform to themselves; use a mirror, film them performing their songs or even set up a pre-exam concert for your students to have a dry run ahead of the exam day. This encourages confidence and familiarity with the exam procedure.' **Vicky Matthews, vocals teacher**

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PLAY WITH OTHER MUSICIANS

'Playing along to a recording is great, however, the recording never varies. There are ensemble skills that students need to develop: listening, reacting, adapting, dynamics, tone, timekeeping, and of being aware how their part interacts with others.' **Steve Gisby, bass teacher**

SHARE IN AND ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS' OWN MUSICAL INTERESTS

'A few minutes listening to, discussing or playing your students' favourite song is not a waste of lesson time - it's where you can take an interest, connect and share their enthusiasm about music - this will motivate them to practise more.' **Julie Parker, keyboards teacher**

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO MEMORISE

'To get a deeper connection with the music I think it is helpful to memorise the songs before a performance or exam. An over-reliance on reading the charts can result in a stilted, hesitant performance. I get my students to play the whole song with their eyes shut - it can be quite a powerful experience for some students to fully engage with the song from memory.' **James Sedge, drums teacher**

BE THE KIND OF TEACHER WHO LIGHTS A SPARK IN THEIR STUDENTS

'If a student doesn't see practice as work, but as something they can't wait to do, driven by curiosity, for the joy of learning, discovering new techniques, concepts, music and ways to express themselves, then you're on to something!' **Steve Gisby, bass teacher**

INTRODUCE THE IDEA OF EXAMS LATER

'I tend not to talk about exams at the beginning. For me it just starts with a great book, with great songs inside. Only when I feel that the student has mastered the songs do I mention the possibility of entering the exam. By now the prospect is not so scary and intimidating, and the idea of having a nice certificate on the wall is very appealing to both students and parents.' **Paolo Vanoncini, guitar teacher**

ENCOURAGE DEDICATED PRACTICE TIMES AND USE A PRACTICE DIARY

'It doesn't work if students only practise when they feel like it! They need to dedicate regular time slots that are strictly kept to for each day of the week. The filling in of a Practice Diary is an excellent way for the teacher and the student/parents to have a weekly dialogue about practice. Only 15 minutes a day adds up to over an hour per week - this is ideal for young/beginner students.' **James Sedge, drums teacher**

'It is worth reminding them not to leave their practice to the last minute! This means not only before the exam but also before their next lesson. The best solution, as with any revision or preparation for an exam - help them devise a practice schedule... and stick to it! Picking the same time each day to set aside for practising is often a good routine to adopt.' **Vicky Matthews, vocals teacher**

PLAY TRINITY ROCK & POP APP

Check out our practice app for all Rock & Pop 2018 songs which puts you and your students in front of a digital mixing desk at trinityrock.com/app.

START AT A SLOWER SPEED

'Once we have picked a song, I usually like to teach it at a slower speed... for that I use an app. Most students can play the correct notes with the correct rhythm, but not at the original speed, particularly at the very beginning, and that can be frustrating. Slowing the speed by just 10% can let the student play alongside the track, giving him a real sense of accomplishment.' **Paolo Vanoncini, guitar teacher**

USE NOTATION AND MUSIC THEORY APPS FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

'Theory should not be avoided until the higher grades, and it's not a separate subject. It's integral, useful and relevant from the start, and it needs to suit the needs and preferences of today's rock and pop students.' **Julie Parker, keyboards teacher**

BUILD AWARENESS OF IMPROVISATION AND STYLISTIC UNDERSTANDING

'What makes the blues sound like the blues? Why does reggae sound different to funk? Students need to know how to take an initial idea and then develop it in a fluent and creative way that's authentic for the style.' **Steve Gisby, bass teacher**

GET INTO SOUNDS, GEAR AND YOUR STUDENTS' PRACTICE SET-UP

'If you know and take an interest in the instrument your student has at home, you can advise how to use it effectively (all manuals are online now), and discuss how they practise at home - this may include logistics/headphones/leads etc. Students like setting up sounds, and it's worth it because the songs will sound great!' **Julie Parker, keyboards teacher**

CHOOSE A PROGRAMME OF SONGS THAT WILL SUIT YOUR STUDENTS

'Take into account their own backgrounds, likes, experiences and skill set. The songs chosen should highlight each students' strengths but also should allow for developing instrumental skills. After all, we are working with aspiring musicians and the ultimate goal is that they are able to continue making progress and make music on their own without needing us there.' **Vicky Matthews, vocals teacher**

'My approach is fairly simple... it all starts with the student. What does he like? What does she listen to on her phone? What would he love to be able to play in six months? For me it's vital to get to know my student as soon as possible, so that I can decide what to propose and present. If I realise that she is into Indie, I'm probably not going to say 'hey, why don't we work on this Iron Maiden song?' **Paolo Vanoncini, guitar teacher**

IDENTIFY SONG TEACHING POINTS

'We all know how dispiriting it can be to be stuck on a song for too long - the student is not ready to take the exam but is already tired of the song. By breaking the song down into its techniques/parts and working on them before starting the song, the student then only has to work on learning the arrangement. More emphasis can then be placed on groove, touch, dynamics connected to the song.' **James Sedge, drums teacher**

MAKE THE CONTENT OF THE EXAM CLEAR TO YOUR STUDENTS

'Ensure they know exactly what is involved, not just the songs they are performing. Give them an outline of the mark scheme so that they can see for themselves exactly how they will be graded for every aspect of the exam. When students know what the success criteria is and exactly how they can make progress, each step becomes more achievable.' **Vicky Matthews, vocals teacher**

LEARN ABOUT THE ORIGINAL ARTISTS' OTHER SONGS

'I don't think you can get enough information about the playing styles through learning just one song. I make Spotify playlists for my students to direct them to the songs that I consider to be the best examples. For example, if I was teaching guitar rhythm playing in a disco/funk style, Nile Rodgers would be my first call. My playlist for Nile Rodgers would contain his work with Chic, Sister Sledge, David Bowie, Madonna, Daft Punk etc.' **James Sedge, drums teacher**

SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS

The artists' original versions of the Rock & Pop 2018 songs are all in one place in our Spotify playlists. Follow to easily find the tracks whenever you want to have a listen and get some inspiration. [See our Spotify profile and playlists.](#)

LEARN THE SONGS YOURSELF

'I also would like to stress the importance of knowing the material in the books and being able to play it. Yes, I know, we've got the demo tracks, but there is nothing like seeing and hearing someone in front of you play one of your favorite songs. It's magical and inspiring, it's live music, and it can light a spark that could last forever.' **Paolo Vanoncini, guitar teacher**

IDENTIFY AND HELP DEVELOP YOUR STUDENTS' MUSICAL PERSONALITY

'Try to figure out who each student is, musically speaking. What kind of musician are they? It's about knowing how to present an idea in the way that's the most relevant and interesting for them, and what sources to draw examples from.' **Steve Gisby, bass teacher**

'Each voice is different. Every singer is discovering their own distinctive and striking sound that expresses who they are. It is important to know the songs by listening to the original and making use of the demo tracks. Then, however, encourage your student to take all of this on board, but develop their own approach to performing the song.' **Vicky Matthews, vocals teacher**

FIND MATERIALS THAT CAN BE USED TO SET GOALS

'I've always found it important to have a guide, a reference book or teaching material that can be used to set goals and serve as guidance for students. The Rock & Pop publications have filled a void that I felt was always there. This had to do with electric guitar students who were obviously talented and ambitious, with a desire to learn more but also wanting to challenge themselves with an exam and the respective certification that comes with it. With the Rock & Pop books it is much easier for me to talk about 'exams' with a young student, who, let's face it, just wants to play and have fun.' **Paolo Vanoncini, guitar teacher**

BUILD UP DETAIL GRADUALLY AND TEACH TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

'When starting a new song, I teach a skeleton version first - this could be root notes for each chord for example - and play roughly through the whole song. I then build up the detail by adding new layers one by one, to gradually 'flesh out' the skeleton. Progress is more satisfying using this method, and the new layers are all good teaching points. They are transferable techniques which can be applied to other songs.' **Julie Parker, keyboards teacher**

ACCESS ALL AREAS...

For further support resources visit the Rock & Pop Practice Room at trinityrock.com/practice-room.

- ⚡ **Producer's Notes:** Printable handouts which look at songs featured in the Rock & Pop 2018 syllabus, including notes on the artist, genre, production, composition and much more.
- ⚡ **Rock & Pop Sessions:** Performances of Rock & Pop 2018 songs by the professionals.
- ⚡ **Demo videos:** Videos looking at specific skills and techniques.
- ⚡ **Improvisation articles:** Articles looking at how to approach improvising in different styles and genres, with example videos.

REAL SONGS. REAL SKILLS. REAL PROGRESS.