

ABRSM Pathways through the Bassoon Syllabus

This poster showcases exciting pieces from the new syllabus, grouped by theme and colour-coded for clarity. Most selections are fresh, lesser-known works chosen for their strong teaching potential. Use the poster in your lessons, to inspire lesson planning, explore new repertoire, and introduce engaging, topic-based pathways to your students.

Grade 1

A6 Straight to the Point by Mike Mower

This solo piece in G major is jazzy and impactful. It features effective but accessible crotchet and quaver rhythms and is written in 4/4 time. The staccato articulation and bold dynamic markings develop lower register tonal confidence whilst a few chromatic notes (F naturals and C sharps) add to the quirky melodic flavour.



B9 Boat on Tai Lake, Trad. Chinese, arr. A. & J. Oosthuizen

Based on a 5 note Chinese folk tune, this duet in 4/4 time is sympathetically written for the bassoon with good choices of slurs and excellent opportunities for breathing.



B12 Water Lillies by Sarah Watts

Based on 6 notes, the modal melody in crotchet rhythms conjures up a peaceful picture of water lilies and is a useful teaching focus for practising sustaining short legato phrases at a quiet dynamic with good opportunities for breathing. The final long note is a worthwhile challenge.



C1 Damkol damkol by Siavash Beizai

This atmospheric, accompanied piece is based on a Persian scale and features catchy rhythms and varied articulation. The quirky mordants are sympathetically placed on longer note values and make a great introduction to playing ornaments.



C4 Another Apple by Karen Gourlay

Karen Gourlay studied jazz and believes that high quality musical experiences are essential for supporting musical development. This duet in F major is effectively crafted to create syncopated rhythms with simple means - the rhythmic repetition within contrasting dynamics builds confidence, and the rousing ending is great fun to play.



Grade 2

A4 Haul the Wagon by Lysenko

Ukrainian composer and ethnomusicologist Mykola Lysenko is credited with founding a national Ukrainian music tradition amongst contemporaries such as Grieg and Dvorak. This energetic tune in A minor encourages characterful playing with vivid musical directions and helpful breath markings.



B5 Llama's Lullaby by Gipps

This original piece for bassoon and piano in triple time encourages expressive playing with the piano's lilting triplet rhythms lulling the bassoon's legato melody into the world of dreams - players will love the ending which evokes the Llama yawning.



C4 The Demon Next Door by Amanda Oosthuizen & Jemima Oosthuizen

This attractively presented solo piece begins softly with the direction "a spooky knock at the door". The staccato notes in catchy syncopated rhythms are fun to play and great for developing tonguing confidence, with the bold dynamic contrasts and impactful ending encouraging expression.



C6 The Elephant by Saint-Saens

This well-known piece, arranged in C major by the bassoonist and teacher, Graham Sheen, plods along in triple time with a dance-like quality and a touch of humour. The slurred couplets, across intervals of 4ths and 5ths need clean finger agility, and the ascending quaver scale up to a middle C is made accessible with its tongued articulation. The "pomposo" direction, varied dynamics and well-placed accents encourage expression.



Grade 3

A5 Street Entertainers by Judyth Knight

The catchiness of this sympathetically written melody in 6/8 time ensures players will quickly build confidence of compound time signatures. It features a good variety of slurs and detached articulation and an effective, playful ending.



B7 If You Should Go by W. G. Still

The mood is lyrical but understated, and the wistful poem that the piece is based on is included below the score. With huge opportunities for individual expression, this gentle rhapsody needs good breath control at quieter dynamic levels to keep the intonation focused and the tone sustained.



B9 The Road to Lallengollen by Sarah Watts

Sarah Watts exploits the more lyrical qualities of the bassoon in this evocative piece. The high G and F sharp at the end need good breath control to keep in tune.



C3 Cat by Lizzie Davis

Lizzie Davies says "There are around 8 million cats in the UK and their hunting and stalking capabilities have been captured by many composers". This characterful solo piece features staccato phrases that mimic the outstretched claws of the "stalking" cat, alternating with more slinky, legato movement. Great for developing agility and confidence in playing chromatic scales!



C6 Secret Agent by Christopher Gunning

This highly accessible piece has an intriguing title that gives more than a hint of the expressive opportunities within it; the pauses and slowing effects are a great introduction to rubato as well as aiding breathing. Sympathetic slurs and tongued articulation give contrast, and the quaver movement supports a wide range of dynamic contrast, all adding to the mystery and drama of the story.



Grade 4

A2 Menuet by Bonis

Elegant and quirky, this concert piece by the late-Romantic French composer Mel Bonis is useful for consolidating work on trills and developing tonal control through the range.



B2 Tropical by P.-M. Dubois

The French composer Dubois was a pupil of Milhaud and favoured interesting harmonies and lighter textures. This evocative piece conjures up a hazy, impressionistic landscape and features long legato phrases and fluid semiquaver runs that demand finger agility and good breath control.



B6 L'apres-midi d'un dinosaur AND Little Waltz by Jacob

Players will enjoy emulating the cumbersome dinosaur in L'Après Midi d'un dinosaur, with its 3/2 metre and plodding, detached longer note values that require tonguing stamina. Lighter articulation and steady intonation across a range of dynamics are needed in A Little Waltz to emphasise the dance-like triple metre.



C1 Rusticana by Arriev

This cheerful and agile piece featuring playful staccato quaver motion, is full of humorous, rustic charm. The short stretches of tenor clef near to the end make a great introduction into tenor clef reading.



C4 Pure Gold by Keith Ramon Cole

"A driving rock tempo" is the direction for this punchy showstopper. Written in C major in 4/4, with catchy, syncopated rhythms and flattened 3rds and 7ths, the melodies are bold, assertive and infectiously memorable, aiding learning.



Grade 5

B5 Lento e teneramente by Adolphus Hailstork

Adolphus Hailstork's music blends elements of his African American, native American and European heritage. This rhapsodic compound metre movement features an improvisatory middle section that demands breath control at quieter dynamics, and outer sections which require thumb agility to maintain evenness in the legato arpeggio patterns.



B4 Poetic - somewhat sad by Paul Carr

Paul Carr has scored several films and often writes in a lighter style. Poetic is the second, slow movement of his Sonatina for bassoon, and the melodic writing with its decorative elements and descending leaps demands finger agility and tonal control. The faded ending on a mid-range Eb works very well for the instrument.



B9 Song for the Lonely by W. G. Still

Still was a prolific African American composer whose music offers an individual sound world of understated simplicity and lyricism. The challenges are interpretative rather than technical, the fluid legato melodies demanding flexibility and subtle colouring.



C2 Blue Bassoon by Alan Bullard

Blue Bassoon wows the listener with a breadth of moods; the laid back and bluesy outer sections in 4/4 contrast with the lively A major middle section that colours the melodic language with flattened 3rds and 7ths. The decorative semiquaver runs in the final section demand agile finger coordination and a strong rhythmic ensemble with the accompaniment.



C7 Peggy's Minute Rag by Elena Kats-Chernin

This lively and approachable piece by the award-winning Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin, is an unstoppable tour de force of catchy ragtime rhythms, demanding finger dexterity and agile tonguing. Score directions also encourage an effective ensemble with the piano.



Grade 6

A8 Minuet by Schnittke, arr. Denley

This elegant G minor dance by Schnittke, one of the most stylistically diverse composers of the 20th Century, places a more modern twist on the classical form of the Minuet. The unusual rhythmic groupings of the final passages are a useful teaching point, and the high 'pp' B of the ending demands good breath support to stay in tune.



B2 No. 1 (from Three Pieces Blue) by Paul Carr

These aptly named pieces have a "calming and chilled-out nature". No. 1 features fluid, decorative rhythmic patterns in long legato phrases that call for breath control and tonal consistency through the range, with the changes of metre requiring a good stability of pulse.



B11 Miriam, Miriam by Errollyn Wallen

Errollyn Wallen became the first black woman to serve as master of the King's music in 2024, and her music draws on influences that include the Avant-garde and popular song. This solo piece has a strong song-like, improvisatory quality; the wider interval slurs and sustained notes at the height of the range need strong support and breath control.



C1 Capri by Roma Cafolla

Roma Cafolla's music is melodious and accessible, expressing both her Celtic and Italian ancestry. The changes of tempo within Capri require a good ensemble with the piano, and the fluid, legato phrases encourage finger agility and good breath control. The stringendo ending is playful and impactful.



C10 3rd movt from Concertino by A. Ridout

Full of the wow factor, this scherzo-like movement is features quirky, angular rhythms and sudden outbursts of lyricism that diffuse the lively staccato passages. The cadenza exploits a wide range of the instrument and requires finger dexterity and tonal control.



Grade 7

A4 Tarantella by Pivonka

Rhythmic energy and boundless momentum are the focus in this fiery piece from Pivonka's Rhythmical Etudes. It gives the chance to show off finger agility, tonguing control, and tonal consistency through the range and is great fun to play as well as being very well written for the instrument.



A6 Rondo Espagnol by James Rae

Bursting with personality this piece is a great choice for a technically based piece with showstopping qualities and a uniquely Spanish melodic flavour. The driving staccato rhythms across the full range of the instrument within rapid metre changes and dramatic shifts of dynamic demand tonguing stamina and tonal control, whilst the more lyrical outbursts provide opportunities for individual expression.



B1 Song by Leila Agolli

Agolli was born in Albania in 1950 and served for several years as director to the national ensemble of folk song and dance. Song, from Song and Dance exploits the upper range of the instrument and is written in tenor clef. It's unusual melodic contours and repetitive rhythmic qualities are reminiscent of Albanian folk music, and there are good breathing opportunities to assist in high register tonal support.



B11 Eo Rossa by John Williams

Each piece from this highly individual set by the legendary film composer John Williams represents a different tree from ancient Celtic mythology. No. 3, the tree of Ross (yew), has spacious phrases and intricate rhythms that demand rhythmic precision and flexibility of pacing, as well as finger dexterity and strong breath control.



B9 Reverie by Vinter

This evocative piece by Vinter, well known for his music for brass bands, provides a useful consolidation of less common rhythmic groupings, including sextuplet semiquavers and septuplet quavers. Agility of thumb and fingers is needed to gain fluidity in the faster moving figurations and the dramatic shifts of register and dynamic demand strong tonal control and breath support.



Grade 8

A11 Tortan by John Williams

Five Sacred Trees was inspired by Celtic mythology as well as the composer's own love of the forest. In Tortan, the tree of witchcraft, the alert articulations create a jig-like, infectious mischief and energy relying upon a precise synchronisation between the tongue and fingers, together with strong breath support to drive momentum.



B1 Girl on a Beach under a Sunshade by Paul Carr

This accessible piece "after a pencil sketch" takes us to a hazy beach scene, with a light, nostalgic jazz quality to the melodic writing. Tone is the focus, with the legato lines demanding focused intonation and a warm, consistent sound through the range.



B4 Summertime by Gershwin, arr. Alley

"Lazy-summer-afternoon-ly" is the direction for this iconic melody, requiring stamina and flexibility. Strong breath support is needed to maintain the long legato lines high in the range with focused pitch and a warm, controlled and consistent sound.



B5 Variation Expressive AND Variation Ostinato by Ida Gotkovsky

This pair of variations by the French protégée of Olivier Messiaen, challenges advanced players with frequent changes of metre and driving staccato arpeggiated passagework. The angular, chromatic melodies of Expressive require tonal consistency across wider legato leaps, and Variation - Ostinato is a rhythmic tour-de-force, calling for finger dexterity and tonal control within rapid changes of dynamic.



B9 Elegy for Innocence by Jeff Scott

Jeff Scott is an American composer and horn player who performs at Broadway. Written in a tonal style, the opening phrases of this expressive elegy have a spacious, hymn-like quality, and the faster episodes an improvisatory feel. The bassoon is taken to the extremes of the high range, with dramatic shifts in dynamics demanding good breath support, tonal control and finger dexterity.



KEY

- A more modern take on a classical idea
- A modern twist
- Female composer
- Drawing on folk influences
- Fast and funky!
- Agile and playful
- Animal magic
- Laid back Jazz vibe
- Leisurely and lyrical playing
- Music that paints a picture
- Showstopping wow factor
- Storytelling through music
- Technically challenging