# Topic Exploration Pack

# Area of study 2: Popular Song: Blues, Jazz, Swing and Big Band

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##

These instructions cover the student activity section which can be found on [page 9](#_Student_Activity). This Topic Exploration Pack supports OCR A Level Music.

**When distributing the activity section to the students either as a printed copy or as a Word file you will need to remove the teacher instructions section.**

### Mapping to specification level

From the A Level specification:

* engage actively in the process of music study
* develop performing skills to demonstrate an understanding of musical elements, style, sense of continuity, interpretation and expression
* develop composing skills to demonstrate the manipulation of musical ideas and the use of musical devices and conventions
* engage with, and extend appreciation of, the diverse heritage of music in order to promote personal, social, intellectual and cultural development
* develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of instruments and styles, and of relevant approaches to both performing and composing
* appraise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music, and develop understanding of musical contexts and a coherent awareness of musical chronology.

### Introduction

'Area of Study 2: Popular Song: Blues, Jazz, Swing and Big Band' is a compulsory area of study for both AS and A Level Music. This AoS focuses primarily on vocal jazz and blues and includes one prescribed work.

The primary musical elements that students are expected to understand are outlined in the specification. In general terms, the focus for this area of study centres around use of vocal techniques and interpretations of 'standard' repertoire; including types of accompaniment, delivery of melodic and lyrical content, as well as the relationship between the voice and the accompaniment. Students are also expected to understand contextual influences on the music they study; including the impact of time, place, technology and social factors on artists and composers.

This topic exploration pack contains a variety of activities designed to assist your delivery of this area of study. They include performance and activities, as well as analysis and listening questions to help students prepare for examinations. Ideas for further listening and study are also given.

### Activity 1: Approaching the prescribed works

Each year, OCR prescribes one set work for this area of study. Students are expected to study this work in detail, but also to use the work as a 'springboard' for wider listening. For Area of Study 2, the set works are selected tracks from a specific album by a well-known singer. In this activity a number of approaches to studying a set work that can be applied to any of the works set by the board will be suggested.

1. **Get the 'real book chart'**

Many of the works featured in the area of study will be a performance of a 'jazz standard', a work performed time and time again by a number of musicians. The chords, melody, and often lyrics, will likely appear in a 'real book', a compendium of famous jazz tunes. There are many 'real books' available (some more accurate than others), so check the one you have contains the tunes you need. Often, the tunes can be found individually on sites that offer digital downloads of sheet music (some digital downloads also allow you to change the key of the chart, to match your set work). Once you have the sheet music from a 'real book', you can really start to interrogate harmonic and melodic elements of the works with your students.

1. **Performance**

Performance of as many of the works as possible with your students is a must. A 'real book' chart contains chords and melody, so most of you musicians will be able to access these works using one of these. There are several options for performance; whole-class singing, group performances, or even a sequencing task using music technology. Students can use notated music, read chord symbols, or learn songs by ear. Parts can be simple, or more complex, depending on the musicians in your classes. The various aspects of a performance can be heavily differentiated:

**Vocal melody:** Sung as written/sung with added melodic embellishments/improvised scat solo over the changes.

**Instrumental melody:** Played as written/played with melodic embellishments/improvised solo over the changes.

**Chordal Accompaniment:** Simplified chords/Extended chords/'Comping' with improvised rhythmic ideas.

**Bass line:** Root of each chord only/Arpeggios/Walking bass line.

**Rhythm:** Simple 'swing' rhythm (or similar, depending on the piece)/full drum kit part.

1. **Workshopping**

Once your students can perform the chords and melody of the prescribed work, it is important to workshop the piece to gain an insight into how jazz musicians work:

* Listen to the piece and try to copy and vocal techniques used by the artist on the record.
* Make slight adjustments to the melody. Compare the effect against the accompaniment.
* Improvise new ideas of the changes, either using the voice or a melody instrument.
* Experiment with different accompaniment styles and compare the effect of these.
1. **Research**

Encourage students to get to know the artists and their work in detail. What influenced them? How did they work? Where does this set work appear in their overall canon? What other music was being made at the time of this one? Is this work typical of this artist's style? It is very important that students can place the set work in a wider context.

1. **Wider listening**

Students need to show evidence of wider listening as part of this course. They should listen to other versions of the song(s) in question, and also other works by the artists selected by the exam board. They should listen to pieces in similar styles, and from similar time periods. One way to broaden students' knowledge of repertoire is to create a collective 'bank' of tunes. A collaborative YouTube or Spotify playlist is a good idea. Another idea is to create a simple form, in the style of a cheesy 'karaoke song request' (see **Learner Activity 1**). Students select a related work, write down the details, like one would in a karaoke bar, but also include details of WHY their piece is related to the set work (i.e. shared musical features, shared context, similar style/period etc.).

### Activity 2: ‘Vocal techniques

Jazz and blues singers use a range of vocal techniques, and it is important that students have a good understanding of what these techniques are, what they sound like and how they are used. Important technical terms related to the voice include but aren’t limited to:

* Chest voice - The lower notes of a singer’s range; in the same general range as one's speaking voice. The sound is generally associated with warmer tone.
* Head voice - Singing in the higher part of the range. The head voice is usually associated with light, bright sounds.
* Falsetto - A high register similar to the head voice.
* Belt - Using excessive air flow and vocal cord tension in an attempt to sing louder.
* Scat - improvised jazz singing in which the voice is used in imitation of an instrument.
* Break - The sudden change in tone between the head and chest voice, caused by vocal tension.
* Vibrato - A slight, but regular fluctuation in a singer's tone.
* Phrasing - The breaths or “stops” in-between sets of notes.

YouTube videos and specialist singing websites often include more in-depth explanations of these techniques, as well as accompanying videos or sound clips. You could also enlist the help of vocal specialists in your school to help demonstrate these techniques to your students.

To help their understanding, students should create a 'glossary' of technical terms. One activity you could try is splitting your class into twos or threes and giving each group one or two technical terms, without definitions.

Then ask students to produce a very short presentation that includes an explanation of the term, a 'live' demonstration of the term, and an example of where the term can be heard in an appropriate piece of music. For a possible task sheet, see **Learner Activity 2**. This activity can really help solidify students' understand of technical terms, and doesn't have to be limited to vocal techniques.

### Activity 3: The Jazz Standard with possible answers

Compare two versions of a blues/swing standard.

To illustrate how a jazz standard can be interpreted different by artists, it is good idea to ask students to compare two versions of the same song. For this activity, students will compare two versions of the jazz standard 'It's Only a Paper Moon':

Extract A: Ella Fitzgerald (and The Delta Rhythm Boys) - It's Only a Paper Moon

*From the album 'The War Years (1941-1947)' (1994, Verve Records).*

Extract B: Frank Sinatra - It's Only a Paper Moon

*From the album 'Sinatra's Swingin' Session!!! And More' (1961, Capitol Records).*

See **Learner Activity 3** for a sample grid students could use to set out their ideas. Possible answers are outlined below:

|  | Extract A: | Extract B: |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Tempo | * Medium swing
 | * Slightly faster than Extract A – medium/up tempo swing
 |
| Instrumentation | * Piano, bass, guitar, drums (jazz rhythm section)
* Female vocalist
* Male backing singers
 | * Larger ensemble
* Big Band, strings, extended instrumentation (tuned percussion and woodwind)
* Male vocalist
 |
| Vocal styles | * Light vibrato on female voice
* Vocalise – ‘oos’ from backing singers
* Close harmony verse from backing singers
* Improvised scat singing and dialogue during backing singers section
* Melodic embellishments in the final section.
 | * Vibrato on male voice
* Higher register/some melodic embellishments towards the end of the extract
 |
| Structure | * Introduction
* Repeated 32-bar AABA structure
* CODA
 | * Introduction
* Repeated 32-bar AABA structure
* Band ‘solo’ section
* Short CODA
 |
| Other |  | * Many countermelodies/

composed elements |

To give students a broader sense of repertoire, then can repeat this activity with other standards, artists or styles. Learner Sheet 3 can adapted depending on the needs of your students.

### Activity 4: 32 Bar Popular Song

Throughout this area of study, students will discover that the 12 bar blues (see the Instrumental Jazz Topic Exploration Pack), and the 32 bar popular song form, are two of the most common harmonic structures found in vocal jazz and blues. Listed below are a few approaches to understanding how 32 bar popular song form works.

1. Find a lead sheet for a popular 32 bar song. A list of suggestions is included in the 'additional teacher preparation' section of this pack.

2. Play through the piece, singing it as a class.

3. Ask students to label and annotate the sections (AABA), and discuss the following questions:

**A (first 8 bars):**

- What key is the piece in?

- Do the chords all fit in the key? Are there any chromatic/extended/altered chords?

**A (usually a repeat of the first 8 bars):**

- Does the repeat of the 'A' section contain a similar melody/but different words?

- Do the harmonies/melodies change, particularly towards the end of the section, as we approach the 'B' section?

**B (middle 8/bridge):**

- Have we modulated? If so, where to?

- Do we have new harmonic/melodic ideas?

- How do the chords prepare us for the return of the 'A' section?

**A (final 8 bars):**

- What are the similarities/differences between this section, and the initial 'A' section?

Students will need to study several 32 bar songs to understand the similarities between them, as well as how integral this structure was to composers in this period. If they listen to recordings of the standard they are annotating, they can listen to modulations/chord changes whilst following the lead sheet. Recordings may be in a different key, with some chord substitutions, as well as a variety of intros and endings. Nevertheless, students should be able to follow the major harmonic movement within the 32 bar form.

### Additional teacher preparation

**Essential vocabulary**

* 'The Changes' - a jazz term referring to the chord changes in a particular piece.
* 'A standard' - a vocal or instrumental composition performed by a variety of different artists; so popular it has become part of a 'standard repertoire' that all jazz musicians should know.
* 'A chorus' - as well as a repeated refrain in a song, a 'chorus' can refer to a complete 32-bar section in an AABA popular song form piece.

**Reading recommendations**

* Giola, T. (2012) The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire. OUP USA. ISBN: 978-0199937394.
* Rawlins, R. and Bahha, N. E. (2005) Jazzology: The Encyclopedia of Jazz Theory for all All Musicians. Hal Leonard Corporation. ISBN: 9780634086786.
* AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus – Song forms and their historical development, Ralf von Appen and Markus Frei-Hauenshild (Samples, 2015): <http://www.gfpm-samples.de/Samples13/appenfrei.pdf>

**Common 32 bar (AABA) jazz standards**

* I Got Rhythm (G. Gershwin)
* Easy Livin’ (R. Rainger, L. Robin)
* Blue Skies (I. Berlin)
* Over the Rainbow (H. Arlen)
* Blue Moon (R. Rodgers, L. Hart)

**Recommended Vocal Jazz/Blues albums**

* The Ella Fitzgerald ‘Songbook’ series – a series of eight studio albums released on the Verse label between 1956 and 1965, chronicling the works of major ‘jazz standard composers’:
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook (1956)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Rodgers & Hart Songbook (1956)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook (1957)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Irving Berlin Songbook (1958)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the George and Ira Gershwin Songbook (1959)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Harold Arlen Songbook (1961)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Jerome Kern Songbook (1963)
* Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Johnny Mercer Songbook (1964)
* Diane Schuur & The Count Basie Orchestra (GRP Records, 1987)
* Nina Simone Sings The Blues (RCA Records, 1967)
* Ma Rainey – Mother of the Blues (JSP, 2007)
* Frank Sinatra – Songs for Swingin’ Lovers! (Capitol Records, 1956)

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# Topic Exploration Pack

## Popular Song: Blues, Jazz, Swing and Big Band

## Student activity section

### Activity 1: Wider listening template

|  |
| --- |
| **Karaoke Song Request** |
| Your name |  |
| Song title and artist |  |
| Extra info!How is this work related to your set work? |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |

.

### Activity 2: Vocal techniques

Your teacher will give you two or three musical terms that describe vocal techniques. In your groups, your task is as follows:

* Prepare a short presentation to explain these terms to your classmates.
* Structure your presentation as follows:
	+ A clear definition of the term.
	+ A live musical example of the term in action.
	+ A piece of music where use of the term can be heard clearly.

**Our terms:**

| **1.** |  |
| --- | --- |
| **2.** |  |
| **3.** |  |

**Presentation planning:**

|  |
| --- |

### Activity 3: Compare two versions of a jazz standard

| **Extract A:** |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Extract B:** |  |

Complete the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Extract A: | Extract B: |
| Tempo |  |  |
| Instrumentation |  |  |
| Vocal styles |  |  |
| Structure |  |  |
| Other |  |  |