

Simon Rushby is a freelance teacher, writer and musician, and was a director of music and senior leader in secondary schools for many years. He is the author of books and resources for music education, an examiner and a songwriter, composer and performer. He has also been a principal examiner for A level music.

by Simon Rushby

INTRODUCTION

In this resource we will look at music by the artists and composers prescribed by AQA in Area of Study 6: Contemporary Traditional Music. The focus will be on providing background on these artists and exploring selected music, with suggested listening and essay questions that you can use with your AS and A level students.

AQA's Appraising Exam

AQA's AS and A level qualifications in music have three components, the first of which is Appraising, worth 40% of each qualification's total marks. Appraising is assessed in the form of an exam paper with three sections: Listening, Analysis and Essay.

There are six Areas of Study (AoS) at AS level, and seven at A level. AoS 1 (the Western classical tradition 1650-1910) is compulsory for all students, and they must answer questions on **one** of the other six for AS, and **two** for A level.

The format of the summer exam is quite complex, but essentially students will have to answer questions as follows:

AS LEVEL

Section A (Listening)	One set of questions on AoS1, and another set of questions on their chosen AoS. A set of questions comprises listening questions on four excerpts of unfamiliar music by the artists specified by AQA, and one of these questions will require an extended answer.
Section B (Analysis)	This will be focused entirely on AoS1 and will comprise one set of linked questions about an extract from one of the set works in that AoS. In this section, students will be able to choose which of the two 'strands' to answer questions on.
Section C (Essay)	One essay question on their selected AoS.

A LEVEL

Section A (Listening)	One set of questions on AoS1, and two other sets of questions on their chosen AoSs. A set of questions comprises listening questions on three excerpts of unfamiliar music by the artists/composers specified by AQA, and one of these questions will require an extended answer.
Section B (Analysis)	This will be focused entirely on AoS1 and will comprise two sets of linked questions about two extracts from the set works in that AoS. In this section students will be able to choose which two of the three 'strands' to answer questions on.
Section C (Essay)	One essay question on their selected AoS.

Here, however, we will focus the prescribed artists/composers and some of their music without getting too bogged down in the requirements of the AS and A level exam papers, as the content for AoS6 is the same for both qualifications. However, there will be some suggested tasks and questions for use with students preparing for either exam.

AOS6: THE PRESCRIBED ARTISTS AND COMPOSERS

Astor Piazzolla

The Argentinian bandoneon player and composer Astor Piazzolla grew up in New York and Mar del Plata, Argentina, and was encouraged to learn the bandoneon by his father. He quickly became interested in the leading tango artists of Argentina and moved to Buenos Aires in 1938, at the age of 17, joining the orchestra of one of the leading bandoneon players, Anibal Troilo.

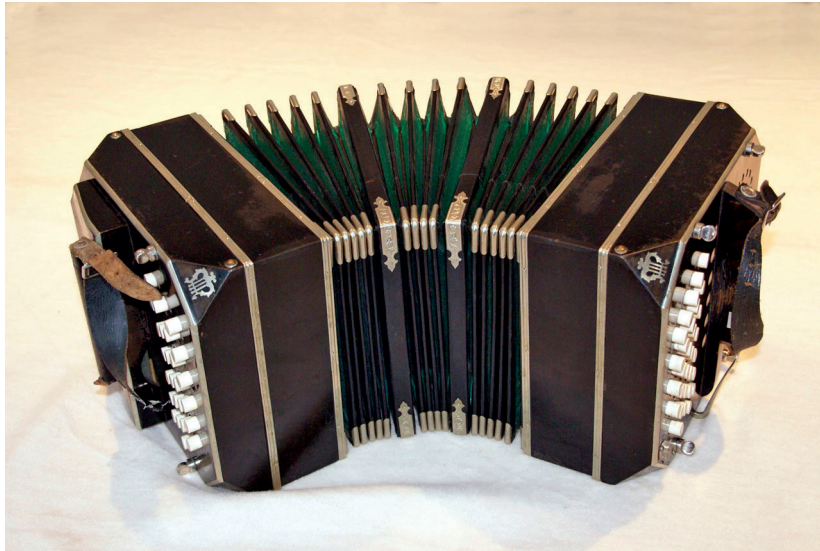
Piazzolla studied with both tango and classical teachers, developing a simultaneous love of his native Argentinian music and Western classical music, particularly that of Bach. Having developed his compositional techniques as chief arranger for Troilo's orchestra, Piazzolla soon began to compose in both styles and formed his own orchestra.

However, in 1949, at the age of 28, he pushed tango aside and expanded his study of classical and jazz styles. Becoming more and more unhappy with tango playing, he worked hard to find his own style as a classical composer. In 1953, one of his works was performed by an orchestra with two bandoneons included, causing a scandal among the Argentinian audience, many of whom objected to this combination of heritages.

Piazzolla moved to Paris in 1954 and studied with renowned composition teacher Nadia Boulanger, who encouraged him to re-incorporate his tango influences into his work. Consequently, he took up the bandoneon once more and focused on combining the passion of the tango with the sophistication of classical composition. Returning to Argentina, he formed the Octeto Buenos Aires and developed his own style, which was not always in harmony with those in Argentina who believed in preserving tango traditions. Fed up with the criticism, he moved back to New York in 1958.

Returning to Argentina in the 1960s, Piazzolla enjoyed three decades of success as a composer and performer of his own music, and developed a worldwide reputation. He spent time in Paris, Italy (where he wrote his famous 'Libertango'), Buenos Aires and New York, and worked with countless musicians from all genres, including classical, electronic, jazz and rock, infusing all of these styles with his own brand of tango music. By the time of his death in 1992, Piazzolla was a world-renowned composer and performer.

THE BANDONEON



Piazzolla is one of the most famous players of the bandoneon, which was once perhaps unfairly called 'the poor man's accordion'. It carries the distinctive sound of the tango and differs from the accordion in a number of ways. While accordions have different registers and their sound is relatively even throughout each register, bandoneons have a constantly changing sound, which depends on factors such as the amount of air going through the bellows. They have buttons rather than piano keys, which play single notes (not chords, as in some accordions). They are rectangular and often played resting on one or both knees – Piazzolla's preferred playing position was standing up with his foot on a chair. Bandoneons are more capable of accents and expressive nuances than accordions.

TANGO

Those who watch the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing* will be familiar with the tango. It is a dance that developed in Argentina and Uruguay, and is still today synonymous with those regions, originating in the poor areas of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. It is a passionate dance, the choreography of which often shocked more conservative middle classes.

Tango itself is a fusion, with roots in the musical history of Native America, Africa and Europe, and with its beginnings possibly (like blues) in the social gatherings of slaves in South America in the 18th and early 19th centuries. In the 20th century, the popularity of tango spread, particularly to Paris and other European capitals, and also to New York, as Argentinian tango performers relocated to other parts of the world.

Tango's history in Argentina has mirrored that of the country itself – declining in times of hardship and depression (such as in the 1930s), but resurgent at other times, such as the time of Juan and Eva Perón in the 1940s and 50s, when the rights of the lower classes were championed.

The main feature of the tango is a 2/4 rhythm, notated usually in one of the ways shown below:



Tango songs are often in two parts, each the same length and in related keys, and are often performed by violin or guitar as well as bandoneon. Piazzolla's tangos, fused with classical and jazz style, were often known by the name 'nuevo tango'.

EXERCISES FOR CLASS USE

COMPARISON EXERCISE

Get students to listen to the Habanera from the opera *Carmen* by the French composer Bizet, followed by Piazzolla's 'Libertango' and consider the shared characteristics of a Cuban/Spanish habanera and an Argentinian tango. There are many!

LISTENING EXERCISE

Listen to the first two minutes of 'Anxiety' – the third of Piazzolla's *Five Tango Sensations*:

1. Describe in as much detail as possible the instrumentation of this extract.
2. Describe in as much detail as possible the rhythm and metre of this extract.
3. Describe in as much detail as possible the harmony and tonality of this extract.

Suggested answers:

1. The extract is for bandoneon and string quartet (two violins, viola and cello). The cello has a very rhythmic part, the other strings play mainly supporting chords, and the bandoneon has the main melodic material, though there are some counter melodies from the upper strings.
2. There is a strong simple duple metrical feel, which conveys the tango character. Melodies tend to start on the off-beats and there is plenty of syncopation to offset the strong pulse played by the cello.
3. The extract is in a minor key with a strong chromatic element to the melodic lines. Harmonies tend to be tonal but dissonant with a lot of extended and added-note chords. There are sudden key changes – often by a semitone or tone.

Toumani Diabaté

AQA's second prescribed artist is probably the world's best-known and most accomplished player of the kora, a multi-stringed west African lute-harp. Born in Mali in 1965, the son of kora player Sidiki Diabaté, Toumani taught himself to play the instrument as his father was often away on tours. As he developed as a player, he felt it was important to place kora music on the world stage, rather than keep it as a west African genre, and so he allowed his playing to be influenced by classical, jazz and other folk traditions such as flamenco.

In 1989, Diabaté released his first album – and the first album of solo kora music ever released – called *Kaira*. This debut made Diabaté a household name in his own country, and requests for performances at home and abroad flooded in. He collaborated almost immediately with a British jazz bassist and a Spanish flamenco group, releasing another acclaimed album with them under the band name Songhai, and followed this up with another collaborative album in the mid-1990s.

Throughout his career, from 1990 onwards, Toumani Diabaté has travelled the world promoting both his own brand of fusion and the traditional Malian style of the kora, and he has almost single-handedly raised the instrument onto the international scene. Further collaborations have taken place with musicians from all genres and countries, including Blur's Damon Albarn and his son Sidiki, who has also emerged as a renowned kora player. Toumani Diabaté won a Grammy award for his collaborative album with guitarist Ali Farka Touré entitled *In the Heart of the Moon*. He continues to perform and record, and there are many examples of his work online, such as this short clip.

THE KORA



The kora is a kind of hybrid, part harp, part lute, that is associated chiefly with the Malinke (or Maninka) people of west Africa, a people with a strong musical heritage (and whom students who study Edexcel GCSE Music may come across when looking at the Afro-Celt Sound System set work). The modern Republic of Mali, with its capital Bamako, is the main centre of the Malinke people and so the kora is often seen as an instrument of Mali. However, koras are common in many west African countries.

The kora has a long neck, made of hardwood, which passes through a gourd resonator. It has 21 strings, originally made from fishing line, which pass over a bridge with ten strings on one side of the centre, and 11 on the other. The instrument is played vertically, resting on the ground or on a stand, with the musician sitting in front of it and using the thumb and forefinger of each hand.

Koras can be tuned by moving rings on its neck, or with tuning pegs on more modern instruments, but once the strings are tuned they cannot be changed during playing, making the instrument more like a lever harp than a guitar.

Before beginning to play it, the kora player will tune the instrument to one of four seven-note modes, called *Tomoraba* (also known as *Silaba*), *Tomora Mesengo*, *Hardino* and *Sauta*, all of which have a 'tonic' note (usually somewhere in the region of the Western note F). The first and eighth strings on each side are tuned to this tonic. Tunings of the strings are quite similar to the Western tempered scale, but with varying degrees of sharpness, which makes the kora sometimes sound a little 'out of tune' to Western ears. However, this style of tuning also gives the instrument a vibrant, resonant sound.

Although Toumani Diabaté is probably the most famous, there are many kora players, and often they are *griots*, which are families of storytellers. Another well-known kora player is Seckou Keita, who is Senegalese

and known for playing a double-necked instrument (which allows him to employ a more diverse tuning). Keita now lives in England and, like Diabaté, performs all over the world. The Diabaté family itself can trace its griot heritage back many generations.

Skilled kora playing includes a cyclical bassline and accompaniment pattern (played in the form of an ostinato and called *kumbengo*), together with improvised melodies and embellishments called *birimitingo* which can be highly virtuosic and complex, all from one player. A player and his background are both often identifiable by the way he plays. Occasionally there will be some percussive 'knocking' on the body of the instrument, called *bulukondingo podi*. Kora music is traditionally passed down orally and is not notated.

EXERCISES FOR CLASS USE

ANALYSIS EXERCISE

Here is a clip of Toumani Diabaté and his son Sidiki performing at Glastonbury a few years ago. Watch it and get students to note the various characteristics of kora music, including:

- a multi-layered texture, with at least three parts (bass, accompaniment and melody) present.
- polyrhythms.
- a variety of timbres created by playing with different parts of the fingers and nails (which are very long!) and on different parts of the instrument, just like on a guitar.
- the bassline is normally played by the thumbs, and strings are plucked as open strings and also muted.
- a repetitive structure, very ostinato-based, which increases and decreases in excitement at various points.
- a rich, concordant harmony with (usually) major-sounding chords and multiple added and passing notes.
- virtuosic embellishments and improvisations.

LISTENING AND FURTHER RESEARCH EXERCISE

This short documentary is well worth watching. It is about the making of the album *In the Heart of the Moon*, on which Diabaté collaborated with celebrated Malian guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Ali Farka Touré. Before or after watching it, you can use the first two or so minutes of the documentary – which is part of a performance of one of the tracks from the album at a concert in Brussels in 2005 – as the basis for a short listening exercise.

1. Is the piece in two, three or four time?
2. Describe as fully as you can the main musical features of the accompaniment figure, played by the guitar from 0:58 onwards.
3. How many 'bars' long is each repeat of this figure?
4. Describe the rhythms played by the kora from its entry up to around 1:30.

Answers:

1. It is in a fairly brisk four time.
2. It settles into an ostinato – a repeating figure that includes a short descending melodic phrase and two chords, the second of which is syncopated. The two chords resemble a dominant-tonic progression a little like a perfect cadence. The rhythm is maintained with repeated on-beat tonic notes (the note F, in fact).
3. One repeat of this figure lasts for two bars (not that this kind of music deals in bars!).
4. Toumani Diabaté plays first triplet crotchets, and then a quiet, repetitive flurry of triplet quavers, and occasionally doubles the syncopated bass notes of the guitar.

Anoushka Shankar

The third artist on AQA's list is British-Indian sitar player Anoushka Shankar, who was born in London in 1981 and is the daughter of famous Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar and half-sister of American singer-songwriter Norah Jones. She grew up in London, Delhi and California, and by the age of ten was performing in concerts with her legendary father, who in the 1960s had a profound influence on the Beatles, particularly George Harrison.

Anoushka Shankar released her first album while still at high school in California, and was nominated for a Grammy award for her third album, *Live at Carnegie Hall*, at the age of 20 – this album includes 'Rag Desh', which was a set work for Edexcel's 'legacy' GCSE specification. Not to be outdone, her half-sister Norah Jones won five Grammy awards in the same year for her debut jazz-pop album *Come Away With Me*.

Anoushka Shankar has had a varied career and, like Toumani Diabaté and Astor Piazzolla, is best known for her collaborations with creative people from other musical genres, creating her own unique brands of Indian fusion. Arguably her most interesting albums are *Rise* (2005) which was the first for which she wrote her own material, and *Breathing Under Water* (2007), a collaboration with fellow British-Indian musician Karsh Kale, which contains many examples of Indian fusion with electronica and dance music.

Breathing Under Water is a set work for Edexcel's current A level Music specification, and it is covered in detail in its own *Music Teacher* resource (January 2018), much of which will be relevant to students studying the AQA course.

Mariza



Next on the list is the Mozambique-born Portuguese singer Mariza Nunes, known professionally simply as Mariza, who has been a leading light for the last two decades in the worldwide popularisation of fado, a traditional Portuguese style of singing with guitar accompaniment.

Fado developed in the Portuguese capital Lisbon, and it was to there that Mariza's family moved from Mozambique when she was three, opening a restaurant where she lived throughout her childhood. Mariza grew up singing along with the local fado singers who performed at the restaurant, and when as a teenager she became interested in more contemporary styles such as jazz, rock and Latin music, she started combining her fado upbringing with these styles.

Mariza's 'big break' came when producer Jorge Fernando discovered her singing and encouraged her to record an album. Before her first album, *Fado em mim*, was even released (in 2001), Mariza had appeared on national television, won a radio award and performed to rock singer-songwriter Sting. Since she was already becoming well known, it was no surprise that her debut album was a great success both nationally and internationally, and in 2003 she won a BBC radio award for best European world music act, and appeared on TV show *Later... with Jools Holland* (you can see that performance here). It's hard not to feel the intense emotion and passion that Mariza puts into her performances when watching this.

That year, she released her second album, *Fado curvo*, and toured internationally. She sang a duet with Sting in a performance for the 2004 Athens Olympics, and it was on her third album, *Transparente* (2005), recorded in Brazil, that she began to depart from the more traditional fado style and bring more classical and jazz influences into the music.

More touring followed, and Mariza was by now appearing at some of the most iconic venues in the world, such as Carnegie Hall in New York and the Sydney Opera House. Three years later came the album *Terra* (2008) – a collection of more personal repertoire – and then in 2010 a return to her roots with an album entitled *Fado tradicional*, in which she explored the music of some of the great fado artists who had influenced her in her younger years.

Mariza continues to tour and collaborate with artists and composers around the world, and a 'best of' album was released in 2014 – this could be a good album to start with for those unaccustomed to this artist's music and style. She continues to live in Lisbon.

FADO

Anyone researching fado will very quickly come across Mariza's name, but the musical genre has existed in Portugal since the beginning of the 19th century. The name translates literally as 'fate' and the style is a vocal one, documenting in a narrative fashion the hardships of life, and performed by singers and guitarists in Lisbon cafes and restaurants.

Fado is traditionally melancholy and filled with emotion and expression, both through physical movement and through the singing. The Alfama district of Lisbon was a hotbed of Brazilian and Spanish styles, including dances like the Brazilian fado (different to the vocal genre), Spanish fandango and Portuguese song form called modinha. It was the mixing of these styles in the Alfama district that led to the development of fado in the 1830s, when a tavern singer called Maria Severa became a famous exponent of the style.

Later in the 19th century, another style of fado developed in the university city of Coimbra, gaining prominence among students and therefore differing from the Lisbon style as it was performed in higher-class circles. However, in the 20th century it was the Lisbon style that became more nationally renowned, thanks in no small part to Amália Rodrigues who from the 1930s onwards was the most famous exponent of the style, singing passionately about folk and poetic subjects and incorporating rhythms from Spain and Mexico. When Rodrigues died in 1999 there were three days of national mourning in Portugal, and it was at the television tribute to her that Mariza was catapulted to fame.

Mariza was not the first fado artist to consider fusing it with other styles, but she has definitely played a leading part in the renaissance of the genre in the 21st century.

EXERCISES FOR CLASS USE

ANALYSIS OF THE FADO STYLE

Using this performance of 'Loucura', given by Mariza in London in 2010, work with your students on identifying the key aspects of the fado style, focusing on the following questions:

- What melodic characteristics do you notice?
- What rhythmic characteristics do you notice?
- What harmonic characteristics do you notice?
- What instruments are being used, and how?
- What aspects of Mariza's performance particularly convey the emotion of this music?

You and your students will come up with more, but the key characteristics that really stand out in this engaging performance include:

- A narrative singing style, dictated by the rhythms of the words and arranged into short, emotionally driven phrases.
- A minor key, with harmonies decorated by guitar improvisations and the vocal melody (particularly in Mariza's extensive ornamentations and melismas).
- A steady, slowish duple metre, provided by the guitars, and allowing the singer to be rhythmically very 'loose'. There are emphases such as the descending triplets at 2:48 which add to the passion.
- A combination of six- and 12-string guitars, including one tuned quite high (almost like a ukulele) and an acoustic bass guitar.

You could, if you have time, compare this with this performance of 'Ó gente da minha terra', given by Mariza in 2011, ten years after her performance of the same song on *Later... with Jools Holland*.

Bellowhead

This outstanding British 11-piece folk band was formed in 2004 when established folk musicians Jon Boden and John Spiers decided (apparently while sitting in a traffic jam!) that they should get together a band of the best folk musicians they knew to play at festivals. The huge and diverse wealth of experience from Bellowhead's members meant that it was inevitable that their style of music became a fusion of folk, funk, rock, classical and jazz, and they quickly established themselves as the leading, most forward-looking folk band of their time.

Bellowhead had festival bookings before they had even released an album, and their energetic shows became legendary. Their third album, *Hedonism*, was the best-selling independent traditional folk album of all time, and they even made it into the mainstream UK album top 20 with their fourth, *Broadside*. They were frequently featured on BBC radio and won many awards, including best live band at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards a staggering five times.

Bellowhead's members were multi-instrumentalists and singers, and so their fully textured and varied sound was a key feature of the success of their live shows. Their line-up included strings and brass as well as percussion, guitar, banjo, bouzouki and concertina, and the instrumentation of each of their songs was different and colourful. Jon Boden, as their front man, decided in 2016 to stand down from the band, and they collectively agreed to disband and pursue their own separate projects after a highly successful 'farewell tour'. Spiers and Boden still perform now as a duo.

APPROACHING SECTION C QUESTIONS

Watch this live performance by Bellowhead of 'London Town'.

In Section C (the essay section) of AQA's AS level specimen paper, students are asked to take any of the artists studied and 'explain how they have taken a traditional style and developed it for a contemporary audience'. Bellowhead's live shows, as seen in this video, are popular with huge numbers of fans of all ages, but their music often comprises very old, traditional English folk songs such as this one.

'London Town' was originally called 'Up to the Rigs of London Town', and dates back to 1924, when it appeared in the collection of a folk singer named Harry Cox. It was recorded many times by folk singers, often with different words, and appeared on Bellowhead's first album *Burlesque*.

Discuss with your students how Bellowhead adapt this almost 100-year-old folk song for a modern audience and get them to construct an answer to AQA's question. A good way to do this would be to use a table rather like the one below. I have begun to fill it in with a few suggested points – there are many others to find!

Element of Music	Traditional features	Contemporary features
Melody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vocal melody in a rhythmic folk style. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Brass licks reminiscent of ska music.
Harmony and Tonality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Repeating four-chord progression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Minor-key verse in the middle adds variety. ■ Key change after audience participation section.
Rhythm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong four-in-a-bar feel with offbeats also emphasised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Syncopated bassline. ■ Rock drum beat enters later.
Texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fast fiddle and banjo counter melody. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Texture is varied between verses, including a very exciting build-up with a long held note.
Instrumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use of accordion, banjo, fiddle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Addition of brass, oboe and other instruments not normally associated with English folk music.
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Verse and refrain structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Long middle section added.

Another excellent Bellowhead song, and a big change from 'London Town', is 'Haul Away' - a kind of Irish reel - which can be found here.