

**IDEAS FROM PROFESSIONAL
MUSICIANS FOR INCREASING STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT IN MUSIC LESSONS**



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We know that teachers do all they can to find creative ways to prevent lessons getting repetitive or falling into predictable patterns. But even for experienced teachers, maintaining students' commitment long-term can be hard.

For a different angle on tackling the challenge, we spoke to three experienced and successful musicians, to see what ideas they could suggest for increasing student engagement in music lessons. All with very different backgrounds and career paths, these musicians can also act as great role models to inspire your students.

Meet the musicians

- **Chris Johnson**, multi-GRAMMY award winning musician, writer and producer described by Live Nation as 'one of the greatest and most in-demand international drummers on Earth'. His credits include Lady Gaga, Rihanna, Stevie Wonder, Snoop Dogg and Camila Cabello. Chris is an official Trinity Ambassador.
- **Michael Price**, Emmy award-winning composer for piano, orchestral and soundtrack work, including TV such as Sherlock, Dracula and Unforgotten. Michael also worked with Metallica on their 'S&M' live album.
- **David "Greenie" Green**, founder and director of RockAcad, has over 20 years of music teaching, major label session work and worldwide touring experience with the likes of Sam Fender, Reef and UK X-Factor.



IDEA 1: MAKE LESSONS 50/50

While it's important to maintain teacher/student dynamics, it's also a good idea to make students more accountable to contribute to their own engagement.

- **Tip 1:** Ask students about the music they're listening to; what kind of lesson they feel like today; what their musical goals are and who in the music world they admire to help build connections.

David Green:

'I've been teaching nearly 20 years and I learnt pretty quickly that you can't teach the same thing to every student. You have to home in on each individual - there's a lot of psychology involved - everybody learns differently, and you have to understand what they want to get out of lessons.'

- **Tip 2:** The more the lesson can become a dialogue with give and take, each of you making recommendations and decisions, the more invested they'll be. Try to ensure the student contributes as much as you in lessons.

David Green:

'I tell students to give me a list of five songs or a couple of artists they like, and I'll find songs that match the beat they're learning. With drums, there's no melody so if you're learning a rhythm, it just sounds like noise. So, sending them away with a song they love which they can practice along to is a real lightbulb moment.'

- **Tip 3:** Encourage your students to bring things to show or teach you; if they get to be the 'expert' at something, this will increase motivation.

Chris Johnson:

'Asking students what they're interested in and telling them that next lesson you want them to bring an artist or musician they like to you to teach you something, shows you're listening. Then you can use that artist in the lesson and get students talking.'





IDEA 2: MAKE MULTIMEDIA YOUR ALLY

Sometimes, it's okay to have lessons where the instrument is not the focus - perhaps it doesn't get touched much at all.

- **Tip 1:** Instead, use YouTube videos and song clips to illustrate skills and styles, discussing them together as you do. Ask students to look out for articulations or performance techniques and talk about how to incorporate them into their own practice.

David Green:

'Sometimes I'll do a lesson without any physical teaching in it. If a student needs some enthusiasm or inspiration, I'll share an amazing gig on YouTube and we'll spend some time studying the drummer. As long as they go away from that lesson feeling like they want to get back to their drumkit then it's time well spent.'

- **Tip 2:** Introduce a range of genres this way and look at the breadth of skills covered in each one - this is a chance to discuss the historical and cultural origins of music, too.

Chris Johnson:

'Growing up in a religious household, I couldn't listen to anything other than gospel music until I moved out, aged 19. Then I started learning things like: Paul McCartney came from a band called The Beatles! You have to open your eyes and I'm still always learning, exploring and loading new genres into my arsenal.'

- **Tip 3:** Find performers they're inspired by; if a student is feeling demotivated, finding someone online they want to emulate can be a great way to fire up some passion in them again.

Michael Price:

'One thing about social media now is there are musicians in different genres who you can access and watch their behind-the-scenes practice. Hilary Hahn, the violinist, started a hashtag called '100 days of practice'. Tons of people join in, and Hilary shows herself practising every day - she's incredibly real and authentic.'

IDEA 3: TALK INSPIRATIONALLY ABOUT THEIR MUSICAL FUTURE

Try spending part of the lesson researching or exploring the routes where the study of their instrument could lead a student. If they can visualise a future with their instrument in it, it'll help them see the benefit of long-term practice and engagement.

- **Tip 1:** Study musicians they admire, watch a YouTube clip or short documentary and discuss it together, observing the techniques used by the musician and how the technical elements of the instruments are contextualised within the pieces.

Chris Johnson:

'Focus on the skills they're learning - dexterity, discipline, focus, commitment - and apply these to the different future pathways they could take if they continue honing these skills. Look at further education and employment opportunities, such as university applications, or joining a band or group.'

Michael Price:

'If you manage to put in enough practice to move up, you can really go places: first in a group at school, then in a group that does shows at a county level, then a national level and then an international level. As a composer, I've been to places in the world through music that I thought I would never go - and that's because music holds this amazing international connection.'

- **Tip 2:** Even if students have no interest in pursuing music professionally, highlighting the mental and emotional impact of playing an instrument is a great way to show them the life-long benefits it will give them to relieve stress and tension, as this MusicNotes article expresses:

'Playing music can help with stress, insomnia, and depression because it acts as an outlet for difficult emotions. It can be a form of self-soothing in tough situations, and a healthy distraction from a stressful day.'





IDEA 4: MIX UP THEIR REPERTOIRE

Perhaps your student has been working within a small number of the same musical genres for a long time and they need something different to reignite their interest. If they've been playing mostly classical music until now, introduce some rock and pop pieces to widen their repertoire and keep them hooked - the [Trinity Rock & Pop syllabus](#) provides a great source of material.

Having this range of repertoire to draw from also helps students get industry ready for things like live performance or session work.

- **Tip 1:** Find pieces your student likes to listen or sing to and find the music for them to try playing for themselves.

Chris Johnson:

'It is super important, even vital, for musicians to find inspiring musical icons they can aspire to. When I was younger, I would see drummers play and think - 'Wow, I don't know if I'll ever be able to pull that off.' But that creates intrigue and makes you want to learn even more - students just need guidance on their expectations.'

- **Tip 2:** Introduce them to rock and pop pieces from different eras, to broaden their understanding of the genre and help them relate it.

Michael Price:

'The relevance of the music has to be considered. Practising music that relates to the rest of their social group or family group brings it to life. So, if what they're practising is incredibly detached from the rest of a student's world then it becomes sterile and you don't get any positive feedback.'

- **Tip 3:** Explore the similarities and differences between the classical and jazz pieces they might be very familiar with, and the new repertoire you're adding. Discuss the origins and connections between genres and instruments.

David Green:

'When I was younger, I would listen to rock music and then I'd wonder "who did they listen to?" So, I do that a lot with students now; we do a shuffle of modern pop songs and I'll recognise a beat that comes from jazz, another one might be a swing beat, then go back with them through the whole historical chain.'

CONCLUSION

Maintaining musical engagement with students is vital for the future of music, for building well-adjusted and healthy individuals and to achieve successful teaching careers.

Adapting, experimenting and remaining open to new ideas is key to surviving in a world where people have increasing responsibilities and demands on their time.

We hope the suggestions in this guide help inspire and maintain your students.

The Rock & Pop team is here to offer any further information you need to help you decide whether these music qualifications are right for your students.

Whether you want to start with just one instrument or syllabus and build from there, or you want to continue your existing qualifications but add Rock & Pop as an alternative, our team will help you map out your offer.

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