



# Top Score Music Academy

**Expert Tuition For Piano, Music Theory & Aural Skills (Grades 1-8), GCSE & AS/A2 Music**





## Our Director

### Declan Plummer BMus, MA, PhD

Declan is a music teacher, lecturer and researcher, who specialises in teaching theory, aural skills, analysis, composition and secondary school music subjects (GCSE, Leaving Cert., and AS & A2 music).

Born in Belfast, Declan's enthusiasm for classical and Irish traditional music was strongly encouraged by his parents while studying at school and attending the Ulster College of Music for piano lessons.

After successfully completing his Bachelor's degree in music at University College Cork in 2005, Declan continued his studies at Queen's University Belfast, where he acquired a Master's degree in music in 2006 and was awarded a PhD in musicology in 2011 producing a dissertation, under the supervision of Professor Jan Smaczny, that focused on the conducting career of Sir Hamilton Harty.

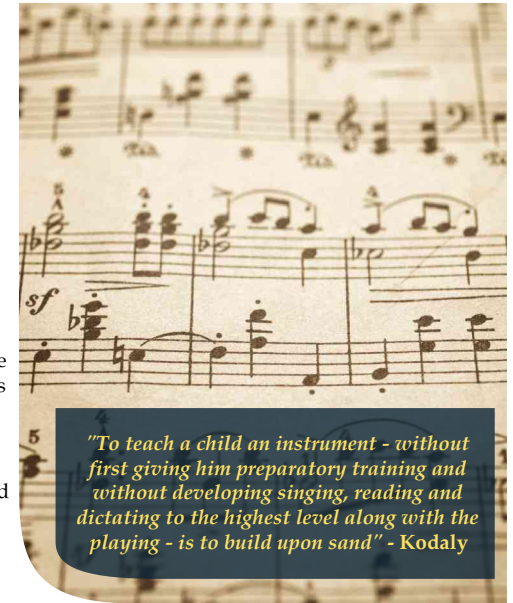
Declan has published articles on Harty in several academic journals, including *The Musicology Review* and the *Journal of the Society of Musicology in Ireland*. He also contributed to a chapter on Harty for the book, *Irish Music History, 1790-1920: Documents, Sources, Perspectives*, published by Four Courts Press in 2019. Along with the late Roy Johnston, he is also co-author of *The Musical Life of Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), the first ever publication to give a detailed examination of the city's musical history.

Since leaving university, Declan has spent years teaching music professionally and acquired significant experience working with a variety of people of different ages, abilities and backgrounds (including school children, university students and adult learners), in large classes and small tutorial groups, across a range of working environments.



Declan has been a tutor at the Ulster College of Music for many years; he teaches all units and components of the A-Level and GCSE music courses; offers tuition in aural skills and music theory (Grades 1-8 ABRSM, Trinity & RIAM boards); and has introduced new classes: notably the Advanced Music Theory class, the Music Appreciation class, and individual tuition for tin whistle, Irish flute, traditional guitar, Irish bouzouki, bodhrán and uilleann pipes. At the City of Belfast School of Music he taught advanced theory and aural skills, and at the Piano Academy of Ireland he delivered lessons in theory and musicianship. Declan also worked as a teaching assistant at the Music Department in Queen's University Belfast, where he gave lectures and tutorials for undergraduate students who studied modules in music theory and music history as part of their BMus and BA degrees.

Declan's teaching philosophy is simple: to encourage in his students a passion and enthusiasm for music that makes them eager to know more and become self-motivated, independent learners. In all of his teaching Declan is constantly expanding his own knowledge and skills to adopt new ways of engaging with students and learning new technologies and teaching strategies to give his students the best possible learning environment; one that is inclusive of everyone and where *music is taught without borders*.



*"To teach a child an instrument - without first giving him preparatory training and without developing singing, reading and dictating to the highest level along with the playing - is to build upon sand" - Kodaly*

To this end, he founded the Top Score Music Academy to promote a highly technologically-enhanced approach to music education: creating websites, Facebook groups, YouTube channels and Google Classroom courses; making hundreds of digitised PDF handouts, exam papers, and class/homework assignments in music theory and music history (all uniquely embedded with audio and video examples); designing dozens of MuseScore composition templates; and providing fully-analysed music scores for set-work analysis. His extensive experience with Zoom has been particularly positive for his students, with midi-keyboards, iPad apps, screen/audio sharing, and dozens of other interactive programmes designed to captivate and inspire his students.

Declan continues using these incredible educational tools to energise his students and infuse in them the same passion for learning that has been with him his whole life.

## Why Online Tuition?

Some parents and students assume that online tuition is always bad, probably because of negative experiences they've had in the past and using complicated software. However, if schools and tutors can learn to fully exploit its advantages then, in fact, online tuition can in many ways be superior to physical classes. This is especially true for classes in music theory, composition, analysis or secondary school subjects like GCSE music, Leaving Certificate in music, and AS/A2 music.

Most schools and teachers understand that the future of education is now going to include a lot more tuition online with students learning at home, (some schools are beginning to offer courses that are completely online). So why is online tuition fast becoming one of the main ways of learning? The simple answer is that online tuition, if done correctly, offers so many opportunities and advantages. Here is a list of just some of them:

- students are able to record all lessons (very easily in Zoom) and play them back to help with study, so they never miss a thing! This function is one of the strongest cases for digital online learning.
- it's so much easier for students to follow the teacher's presentations, notes,

and explanations by clearly seeing their screen (including digital pianos, iPad presentations & apps that can be mirrored onscreen, and countless online materials).

- students can easily ask the teacher questions, either vocally or leave a question in the 'chat', so there is more engagement in the class, especially from any shy students reluctant to raise their hand to ask a question.
- better internet access for all students because they aren't sharing the same school network, which can be very limiting and unreliable.
- better attendance and comfort, as students are at home, using their own computers that they already know how to use, and with parents able to keep better track of their progress.
- if students were in a physical classroom they would spend much of their time in front of computers anyway - learning has been computer-orientated for many years, especially at universities and colleges, and students will need to master these digital skills for future learning and employment.
- better sharing of work (class/homework assignments, scores, music files, and other materials). It's so much easier to share work, with no need to print out hundreds of pieces

of paper or risk losing any handouts and needing replacements. Students have all the resources they need, available to them 24/7.

- fewer disruptions to teaching, given that the classes can proceed regardless of restrictions to physical teaching, or even weather/travel conditions during the winter. Teachers and students doing online tuition are able to keep their classes going, while many other schools could struggle between physical tuition, online tuition or blended tuition.
- no restrictions to distance so that those students who live far away, or even in another country, could still enrol in the class, without any disadvantage.
- it saves time given that travel to and from the classroom is not needed, and students with busy schedules are not rushing around from one activity to another.

## What equipment does a student need for online learning?

To successfully benefit from online learning, it is recommended that students use a laptop/desktop (tablets and phones are far too limited and cumbersome), and that they have Zoom installed on their computers.

Students should purchase a USB microphone and USB webcam and attach them to their computer. They do not need to expensive or top range models, but too often bad experiences of online learning has been the result of relying on a computer's in-built microphone and webcam, which are rarely good and often lead to poor visual and/or audio for the student. It is also recommended that students use headphones at all times during their lessons.

Good internet access is essential!! If the signal is poor, then it's highly recommend not to use wireless, and instead connect the computer to the home router using a standard ethernet cable. This way, the signal becomes far stronger, uninterrupted, and not weakened by walls, ceilings, floors or distance from the router (obstacles that are often over-looked by students when doing online lessons).

### Equipment used by tutors:



Logitech C922 Pro Stream Webcam, HD 1080p



USB Condenser microphone 192KHZ/24Bit, UHURU Cardioid



OneOdio Over Ear Headphone Studio Wired Bass Headsets



M-Audio Keystation 61MK3 - 61-Key USB MIDI Keyboard



Using the latest developments in technology & the most up-to-date teaching and learning software!

C Major

Handwritten notes:  $\text{III} \text{ N6} \text{ G} \text{+} \text{II} \text{ F} \text{+} \text{F} \text{+}$   
 $\text{dim} \text{7} \text{ vi} \text{+} \text{ vi} \text{+} \text{+} \text{ diatonic}$

PDF Handouts: *ascending sequence in parallel 6ths*, *rising semibreves anticipates theme (i)*, *synchopation and trill finish chords*, *perfect cadence*

Video of Declan teaching with headphones.

Screenshot of Declan teaching his online students, using PDF handouts, keyboard, iPad music staff and video of himself

The Orchestra

DEBUSSY

History of Baroque The Concerto Grosso & Solo

Assignment 1: Listen to the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1...  
 1) the concerto group  
 2) the continuo

Assignment 2: Listen to the finale movement of Handel's Concerto Grosso No. 1 Op. 3 built up in rondo form...  
 Listen complete the following chart:

Video of Declan giving a thumbs up.

Screenshot of Declan teaching his online students, using interactive handouts, assignments & iPad apps.

Declan with his GCSE Class



String Quartet in C minor

EXPOSITION  
 1ST SUBJECT (Triadic, outlining I, IV, V)  
 in Tonic Key (C minor)

Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello

BRIDGE

2ND SUBJECT  
 - Initial, septimal, whole  
 - in Relative Major key (D♭ major)

MuseScore MP3, Logic Pro MP3

**Composition Tips & Tricks...the fast way!**

Our approach to teaching composition can produce quality results from our students in a matter of weeks! This super time-saving method allows colour-coordinated analysis, MP3 export, and even professional-sounding results using the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Click the audio buttons above to hear the results from a piece by one of our A-Level students!

**History of Baroque The Concerto Grosso & Solo**

**Assignment 1**  
Listen to the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1. The instruments involved in the:

- 1) concertino group
- 2) the continuo

**Assignment 2**  
Listen to the finale movement of Handel's Concerto Grosso No.1 Op.3 built up in ritornello form. As you listen complete the following chart:

Ritornello	Tutti
Episode 1	Featuring...
Ritornello	
Episode 2	

**Fully Interactive Handouts & Assignments with Audio & Video inside the document!**

Using advanced PDF editing software, we've created hundreds of amazing PDFs that are fully interactive and downloadable. Our students can do quizzes, class & homework assignments, theory exercises, read handouts, listen to audio, and watch video - all inside a single PDF!

Requiring no printing from the student, or having to find any recordings, this unique method of creating interactive PDFs produces astonishing results in online learning, and allows students to revisit handouts or assignments and listen to the music as often as they like.

**CLASSICAL MUSIC (1750-1810)**  
Dr Declan Plummer

- 1. Classical c1750-c1810
- 2. The Classical Era
- 3. The Classical Orchestra

Harmony Cloud™

- Listen & Play
- Practice
- Take the Challenge
- Your Progress
- Get Inspired

**Music History & Aural Skills!!**

Learn music history and improve aural & musicianship skills with dozens of handouts, apps and engaging multimedia presentations on Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modern music!



**Introduction example of night music**  
**see also 3rd Piano concerto slow movement**

*Written for the Koussoultzky Music Foundation in memory of Mrs. Natalie Koussoultzky*

**CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA**

**INTRODUCTION** I **BÉLA BARTÓK**  
**sul ponticello (on the bridge)** (INTRODUZIONE) **dissonant clusters**  
**around note C and C#**

Andante non troppo,  $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 78-64$

Flute I  
Violins I  
Violins II  
Violas  
Violoncellos  
Double Basses

*p legato*  
*co. sord. div.*  
*pp*  
*sol. pont.*  
*div. in 2*  
*pp*

**Fully-Analysed Scores!**

All the music scores that we provide for our classes are beautifully annotated, with colour-coordination and embedded audio, so that our students spend more class time studying music history, understanding musical terms, asking questions, and learning how to revise effectively. Students can get a massive head start with their revision!



**Major Scales**

**Scales**

A **scale** is a succession of notes lying within the range of an octave (8 notes). The notes are arranged in **order of pitch**, moving upwards (ascending) or downwards (descending).

Scale of C Major ascending: begins and ends on C

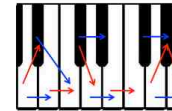
C D E F G A B C

Scales are the basis for composing music: all melodies and harmonies in western music are created by notes that belong to scales. When a piece of music uses notes from a particular scale it is said to be in a particular **key** (see Lesson 7 for keys). For example, the children's song *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* is in the key of C Major because it uses many notes from the C major scale:

*Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*

A scale is created by measuring the distances between each of the 8 notes that make up the scale. These distances are a series of **semitones** (ST) or **tones** (T).

A **semitone** is the smallest distance between two notes. On the piano it's the distance between any note and its nearest neighbour:



A **tone** is a distance of two semitones:

**Intervals**

**Intervals**

The distance between any two notes is called an interval.

If the two notes are played together then the distance between them forms a **harmonic interval**



If one note comes after the other then the distance between them forms a **melodic interval**



- When working out the distance of an interval, **both notes are counted**.
- Intervals are calculated **from the bottom note up**, even if the top note comes first!
- Treat the bottom note as the **first note of a major scale**.
- Work out if the top note belongs to the bottom note's major scale.

**Calculating Intervals**

- Start at the bottom note
- Count all the notes from the bottom note to the top note (e.g. C1, D2, E3, F4, G5)
- Treat the bottom note as the first note of a **major scale**.
- If the top note is in that scale, then we call the intervals by the following names:

Major 2<sup>nd</sup> Major 3<sup>rd</sup> Perfect 4<sup>th</sup> Perfect 5<sup>th</sup> Major 6<sup>th</sup> Major 7<sup>th</sup> Perfect 8<sup>th</sup>

If the top note is not part of the major scale then follow these rules:

**For Major Intervals (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>)**

One semitone more than major is **augmented**

One semitone less than major is **minor**

**For Perfect Intervals (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>)**

One semitone more than perfect is **augmented**

One semitone less than perfect is **diminished**



**Beginner Music Theory!**

Over years of teaching, we have collected and summarised hundreds of books and texts into simple, fast-learning handouts that give our students the rules and guidelines they need to understand all concepts of music theory, quickly and easily! No more boring, dry, repetitive exercises! Learn music theory the fun and fast way!



**Advanced Music Theory!!**

Using MuseScore, we've digitised all exercises for Grade 6, 7 and 8 Theory, allowing our students to playback and hear their answers instantly, and to try numerous alternatives quickly and easily!

We've spent years collecting and summarising hundreds of books and texts into simple, fast-learning handouts so that our students can quickly understand complex topics, from figured bass, non-harmony notes and chromatic harmony to 4-part chorales, trio sonatas, composition and score analysis!

**50% OF OUR A-LEVEL STUDENTS AND 75 % OF OUR GCSE STUDENTS RECEIVE GRADES A OR A\***

**Top Score Music Academy** offers online tuition in:

- Piano (Classical, Rock/Pop & Blues)
- Music Theory (all grades & boards)
- Aural Skills (all grades & boards)
- Music Composition & Analysis
- Music Appreciation & History
- GCSE Music
- Leaving Cert. Music
- AS & A2 Music
- Exam coaching

If you would like to join one of our classes, and experience the fun, technologically-enhanced approach to our music tuition, then email us:

info@topscoremusicacademy.com

*"If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music" - Albert Einstein*





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