

Press release FINAL

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UK's largest music school reveals plan to make musicians 'irreplaceable'

While the music industry debates the impact of AI, the UK's largest music school is focusing on 'human language' to ensure the next generation of musicians is irreplaceable.

Chetham's School of Music in Manchester has announced the launch of **Sign, Sing, Share**, a new framework for musicianship that has been developed over two years with leading musical polymath Dr Jonathan James.

The framework is designed to unify musical language across the school's diverse curriculum and ensure students are versatile and adaptable, skills that are needed now more than ever.

Sign, Sing, Share also presents an engaging and scalable model for music education at a time when schools are grappling with a historical decline in GCSE music uptake.

Tom Redmond, Music Director and Joint CEO at Chetham's, says: "Music graduates in 2026 are required to have 'portfolio careers', pivoting seamlessly between performance, teaching, digital session work and other opportunities. If a musician only speaks violin, for instance, they will lose opportunities in their professional life.

"Chetham's therefore faced a unique challenge - how do you ensure students develop the cognitive agility and resilience required to adapt to different settings, work with diverse groups of people and, in turn, have sustainable careers? And just as challenging is how do you use a common language to teach when students come from all over the world and work with different tutors on everything from instrumental, aural, analysis, composition, choral and theory.

"Sign, Sing, Share provides that common thread and ensures every student has a toolkit to navigate their studies and help them to adapt easily in different settings."

The three pillars of the framework are:

- SIGN - Using physical movement and hand signs to internalise rhythm, phrasing and intervals
- SING - vocalising scores, modes and harmonic progressions to ensure the 'inner ear' is engaged before an instrument is even unpacked
- SHARE - a collaborative invitation for students and teachers to improvise or extend a musical fragment

The framework is the result of a rigorous two-year audit led by Dr Jonathan James, whose background as a conductor, performer and musical polymath allowed him to map a common language across the school. He says: "The music industry is changing, and we cannot

continue to teach theory, performance and composition in isolation. Musicians must be as comfortable collaborating in a classroom as they are performing at the Proms. **Sign, Sing, Share** joins the dots between movement, inner ear and academic rigor, helping students to build the versatility they need to succeed in the industry.

“I hope that all students can find their voice through this clear and playful methodology. In an era where AI can mimic technical perfection, the ability to internalise a rhythm and evolve a creative idea is the most valuable currency young musicians can have.”

Oliver Platt, a Clarinet player currently in his final year of Chetham's, has had a positive experience using **Sign, Sing, Share**: “I brought a piece of music to one of my lessons; a piece that I thought I knew well. In the session, my tutor and I "dismantled" the piece to really understand the fundamentals. For example, we noticed that the music was almost entirely based on the mixolydian mode of the scale. We then did some improvisation which allowed us to explore this aspect and take it beyond what is written on the page.

“I found having a broad view of each element of a piece allowed for a deeper understanding. I could view the piece within its context and the composer's intentions, rather than just playing the notes. Over about ten minutes, it my transformed my understanding of the music from a series of notes, rhythms, and articulations into something much more complex.”

Chetham's is now exploring ways to share this framework with some of the Music Hubs in Greater Manchester and support more even more musicians to reimagine the notes on a page.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Chetham's School of Music

Young people from all over the world come to Chetham's School of Music in the heart of Manchester to nurture a love of music. A common bond of musical passion makes it a truly inspirational place to live, learn, and make connections. Around 330 students, aged 8-18, attend Chetham's and are taught by world-class tutors. It is the largest specialist music school in the UK and the only one in the north of England. Students are awarded places based on musical ability and potential, not ability to pay, thanks to bursaries through the Government's Music and Dance Scheme.

About Dr Jonathan James

Dr Jonathan James is a musician and educator whose background as a conductor, classroom teacher, writer and presenter informs his approach to music education. His specialism lies in group creativity, and he has led projects for Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Orchestras and more. He is also the founder and artistic director of the Dovetail Orchestra, supporting asylum-seeking musicians in England and Wales. His work has been recognised with the British Empire Medal in 2024 for services to music.