

Spirited Music:

Ten ways to get started

NATRE has been developing ideas on music and RE through our 'Spirited Music' project. We know we are on to something because so many schools have been in touch to say they would like to be involved.

Here we provide a set of 10 simple suggestions for any school wanting to use music in RE. The best suggestions will come from your own work and from your pupils, but these may serve to encourage or spark off your own ideas. They might be adaptable across quite a wide age range.

Spirited Music collects examples of interesting practice and shares them around to all schools expressing interest in the project, through the NATRE website. We want to list songs and pieces of music which children have benefited from hearing – please send us five examples of music you have enjoyed using in RE and a sentence about what you did with each one.

1. Moving music

Since spirituality connects so strongly with the music that moves us, set up interviews to collect examples.



Ask children to do a piece of homework in which they interview an adult other than a teacher about three pieces of music that moved them. If possible, ask them to find out what the music was, what the occasion was and how the person they are interviewing felt about the music. While this task may often connect with religious music, it can also be 'spiritual but not religious' (like many pupils). When pupils have done the interview, create a class book of 30 interviews, written up for sharing. Listen to some examples of the 'moving music' together. Ask: how and why does music move different people in different ways?

2. Freedom songs

Music plays a huge part in liberation movements, from the songs of the US Civil Rights movement to the anti-apartheid music of South Africa.



Play the pupils some liberation songs. Try Bob Marley's 'Exodus' alongside 'Biko' by Genesis star Peter Gabriel or some songs of the Civil Rights movement – Nina Simone has some great ones, or Pete Seeger.

Ask pupils to consider why liberation songs are so important when people are struggling for freedom. Play pupils 'Something Inside so Strong' by Labi Siffre. What is the 'something inside'?

Invite pupils to consider writing the lyrics of their own freedom song, or making music around the idea of liberation. Connect this to the ways in which religions offer liberation to their followers.

3. Rhythm of life

Shiva, the Hindu god of time and of destruction, beats out the rhythm of life on his hand drum.



Consider with pupils the way that rhythm matters in all our lives – from seconds and minutes to hours, days, weeks, terms, years. Music always happens to a pattern of time, so it helps us to ‘beat’ the rhythm of life. Ask pupils to use rhythm instruments to make a piece of music that tells the story of life, from birth, through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage or partnership, and on to old age and death. Link it to work in RE on beliefs and rituals associated with the ‘big moments’ of life.

4. I used to love . . .

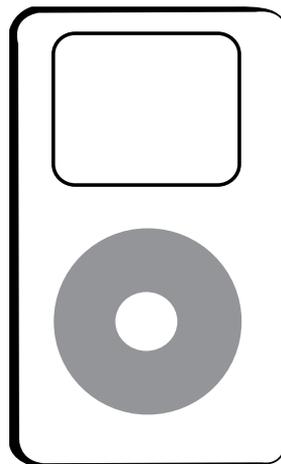
Pupils think back and identify music they loved when they were 3, 5, 7, 9, 11. Changing identity is a spiritual issue.



The ways in which we change our tastes in music are an interesting marker of changing identity. Many pupils will need to talk to parents and carers to do the ‘early years’ here. That’s good. The discussion then centres on how our music reflects our identity – then and now. Questions of identity in religion are opened up through this as well: how does ‘who I am’ change with passing years?

5. Music for life

Choose five for the ‘spiritual’ section of your iPod. This activity has been effective in helping pupils to use the language of the spiritual.



Music is essential for many young people. The portable collection of 1000 songs on an iPod is a statement of identity as much as anything else. Music is also a medium of spirituality, a key way in which religious and non-religious people express their deepest bliss and yearning. So ask pupils to work with a partner and choose five songs that really mean something to them. Use the language of spirituality if you like, but this isn’t essential.

6. Religious music in today's styles

Is it good to rave in the nave? What forms of music are young people in different faith communities generating? What works for spiritual life?



Music in faith communities can look traditional, but actually every generation of believers creates its own new music. Rock congregations, 'alternative' worship and rave spirituality have a foothold in many Christian communities (there's a neat clip of this in BBC's *Curriculum Bites* RE Series from 2005). Other faith groups do this too: Buddhism is more in the charts than you might think. What does this say about music in faith? And are there limits? See the film *Music and Lyrics* for a brilliant clip for 15+ students on the failure of a fusion between Buddhism and bikinis.

7. Play it together

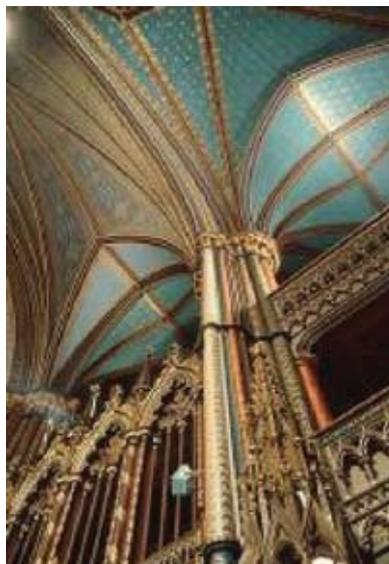
RE needs music making. It provides for kinaesthetic learning and for authentic engagement.



Using sound patterns is probably easiest with percussion and voices. Children can make their own instruments, and plan their own responses. Why not take the story of Moses – from bulrushes via burning bush to Red Sea and Ten Commandments – and ask pupils to make percussive and vocal sound effects to accompany key moments of its retelling. Or another key religious story, from a non-Jewish tradition.

8. The music of faith

Listen to three songs of faith – from the same or different religions. Compare them, looking for similarities and differences.



Try comparing: three carols for Christmas, or one carol, one Easter hymn and one from Harvest time. Compare a funeral choice with one chosen for weddings or baptism. Compare a traditional classic hymn with a children's song and 'rock worship' example. Compare Hindu bhajans with Buddhist meditation music and Christian chant. When pupils have done the comparisons, then ask them to say who would most like each of the three, and give a reason, then say which they like best, and why.

9. From the song to the dance

Using a recorded song makes it possible for pupils to move to the music in planned and expressive ways.



Choose a piece of religious music from the tradition you're studying. Dawud Wharnsby Ali or Yusuf Islam are good examples from the Islamic tradition. Take one song that is expressive of emotion and ideas, and ask groups of pupils to improvise dance moves that go with it. Put the groups together to make the activity challenging and enable them to develop their best ideas in depth. Arrange for performance – this can make an excellent primary assembly, where 9–11s perform for 5–7s.

10. Is God a musician?

This metaphor enables some surprisingly deep reflections on the nature of God.



Try this with pupils:

- If God played an instrument, I think he'd choose . . .
- If God has a favourite composer, it might be . . . because . . .
- When God sings, I think it sounds like . . .
- If the universe is God's concert, then I think it will end with . . .
- Would God be the conductor of the orchestra, or the soloist? I think . . .
- I'd also like to say . . .

If you try any of these, please do gather the work pupils do – record it, or film it, or get them writing about it. We'd love to see examples. And we'd like your ideas to include in the next 'ten ways' we write. Email lat@retoday.org.uk

Spiritual music

Spiritual music



You are advising a minister at a local place of worship (it can be a Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or any place of worship) about the music they play. With your partner, make some suggestions about the music they might choose for the occasions below. Suggest music that is spiritual and suitable for the occasion.

<p>There is a new baby born, and there is to be a ceremony of welcome. Suggest spiritual music for this occasion.</p>	<p>New Year is being celebrated. What music makes that spiritual?</p>	<p>The community has an 'open house' club for homeless people. What spiritual music might be best there?</p>
<p>Two people are in love, and want some music for their marriage service.</p>	<p>A member of the community has reached her 90th birthday, and there will be a party. Suggest the spiritual music that will work best.</p>	<p>The minister is joining members of some other religions for an interfaith meeting. Suggest spiritual music that works for more than one religion.</p>
<p>An older member of the congregation has died. Suggest spiritual music for the funeral.</p>	<p>Members of the community are planning a vigil for peace in the Middle East. Choose spiritual music.</p>	<p>Do you have a piece of music that's really spiritual, and that you love, but doesn't fit any of these occasions? What is it, and when should it be played?</p>

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My iPod playlist

If I made a playlist from my iPod called 'Spiritual', then the first seven tracks I'd put on it would be these.

Song/track/artist	Why this is a spiritual piece of music for me.	Emotions, connections, memories and dreams: how I feel about this music.
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		

When you have completed the work, share your ideas and examples in a group of three. What do you notice about other people's spiritual music?