

# Web and Software Resources Review

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With the Internet and computers becoming increasingly incorporated into music making, the music classroom must keep up with the real world. However, with so many pieces of software and websites all claiming to be the best, this can be a daunting task. Tim Hallas has provided a review of some pieces of software and websites that may be relevant to Musical Futures work in the classroom. They incorporate some of the skills students build through Musical Futures, and in some cases follow the ethos of personalised learning and learning with and from peers. This review is by no means exhaustive.



## 3Fire Music – BandPlayer

This is an online learning tool designed to help students learn instrumental parts for songs and to put them in the context of a band straight away. The version of the software I tried suited the Musical Futures ethos very well and contained well-presented resources to help students' master instrumental parts for familiar songs quite quickly. The resources include videos of performers' hands and instruments with names of notes and chords indicated clearly. However, when I used the website it was a bit glitchy and when flicking between instrumental parts, the website quickly got confused and crashed. My main additional request would be slightly clearer instructions on the BandPlayer page itself regarding muting and soloing individual parts. I have spoken to the developer and he is going to work on these issues.

**COST:** Variable depending on size of school

**WEBLINK:** [www.3firemusic.com](http://www.3firemusic.com)



## I Like Music... – Desktop DJ

Desktop DJ is an online music player very much in the same vein as Spotify. Desktop DJ has focused on acquiring the correct licences to be legal for use in schools and other educational establishments. I found it very easy to use and could be a great resource for Musical Futures due to instant access to millions of songs. The idea of personalised learning and being able to allow pupils to learn any song they know is appealing. I tested the library out and threw it some well known and some very obscure artists, and it came back every time with something. Admittedly, with the more obscure artists it didn't contain a complete catalogue, but a good representation of their work. Linking this song database with a comprehensive collection of Tab etc would be the best Musical Futures song resource I can think of.

**COST:** Variable depending on pupil numbers. 10% discount for MF schools.

**WEBLINK:** <http://desktopdj.ilikemusic.com>



### energyXT – Digital Audio Workstation

energyXT is a DAW similar to Cubase and Logic etc but it is a lot cheaper than any of its bigger counterparts. However, for this you get a lot less for your money, including very little in the way of pre-programmed loops (all of which are MIDI) and fewer effects for processing sounds. It is clearly marketing itself as an equivalent of the major DAW manufacturers, but at this price band it falls more in line with Sequel, the entry level software from Steinberg and GarageBand from Apple (both of which are better suited to Musical Futures and have better sounds). The interface in energyXT is too fiddly for students to use and the end musical result is not that impressive due to the lack of instant musical output.

**COST:** €39

**WEBLINK:** [www.energy-xt.com](http://www.energy-xt.com)

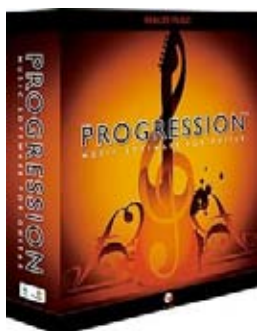


### Tube Remix – YouTube Remix Tools

For those schools with access to Apple Mac computers this is a website designed to help students remix sounds that have been found on YouTube using free software and utilities available on the platform. The website in itself doesn't have any musical output but contains a series of video tutorials explaining the process, all themselves embedded from YouTube. Tube Remix was developed by James Humberstone, a music teacher in Australia, and uses Kutiman's thru-you.com site as its model. This resource is great for students to create their own tracks using found sounds. The videos are quite long so it might be a struggle to complete in lesson time but this could be a great resource for pupils to use at home. The main problem with this resource is that it is Mac only - but it could easily be adapted to work with other software available for PC.

**COST:** Free

**WEBLINK:** [www.tuberemix.com](http://www.tuberemix.com)



### Notion Software – Progression Notation Software

Progression is a piece of software designed to score music in the style of Sibelius or Finale but with a particular focus on popular instruments. The software has many interfaces for note input including a virtual fretboard, which while not original is probably the best implementation I have seen of it. When working with students who have no notational skills this is a great way to engage with composition. For example you can write something on the guitar and then play into the computer via the fretboard and let the software translate this into notation for exam submission etc. The software also includes amp-simulators from Amplitube and pre-programmed drum loops for developing compositions. Although not necessarily ideal for initial Musical Futures projects, with students continuing into Key Stage 4 and beyond this could be a very useful tool for aiding students in notation. The larger Notion 3 package is also available for more traditional orchestral scoring and Progression files can be opened in the full software.

**COST:** Progression £66.36 and Notion 3 £173.64

**WEBLINK:** [www.notionmusic.com](http://www.notionmusic.com)



## Gigajam – Online Instrumental Lessons

Gigajam has been around for a number of years now and they have recently updated their Xtractor and Analyser software that plays back audio and analyses your performance for accuracy. There are extensive lessons available in all rock instruments including written tutorials, videos and audio recordings. These are all useful for students who have played a bit and want to develop their skills further. It includes basics on how each instrument works and then moves onto show how to play the instruments. My biggest complaint is that it all feels a bit stale and could easily be brightened up with more interesting graphics to really engage students. Although a fabulous resource it does rely on individuals working alone rather than as a group and learning from one another - there are, however, songs that groups can play once individual parts have been learnt.

**COST:** £1 per student per year

**WEBLINK:** <http://gigajam.com>



## Steinberg – Sequel 2

Sequel 2 was launched by Steinberg, the company that makes Cubase, as a direct competitor to GarageBand by Apple. This software is designed for the entry level of the market and is an excellent piece of software for the Musical Futures classroom. The inclusion of thousands of audio and MIDI loops allows instant creation of music in a variety of styles. It is also capable of full audio and MIDI recording and editing with an external microphone or keyboard. The software is very clever and will automatically synchronise loops to both the project tempo and key, so no musical experience is required at all. Although the quality of audio loops is higher than GarageBand, it is slightly less intuitive and does take 10 minutes to get your head round it. However, it is a great tool for personalised music learning and affordable for students to buy themselves.

**COST:** £42 per copy (Price breaks are available, speak to your dealer)

**WEBLINK:** [www.steinberg.net](http://www.steinberg.net)



## UJam – Online Music Creation

UJam is an entirely original idea as an online resource. The website uses internal microphones on the computer to record a student humming, singing, or playing a melody on an instrument. It then analyses the performance for pitch information and works out appropriate harmony chords to accompany it. You then select from a huge number of styles, which are all editable, and design your song structure. This is then exportable to SoundCloud, Facebook and MP3. It is perfect for use in a Musical Futures classroom as it does most of the technical side of recording for you and allows students simply to be creative. If needed there are more in-depth editing facilities to alter the original melody and change the automated harmonies too. There is no charge for this website: simply sign up so students can continue to make music at home as well.

**COST:** Free

**WEBLINK:** [www.ujam.com](http://www.ujam.com)



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### Looplabs – ClubCreate

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This is an online remixing tool which allows students to assemble thousands of pre-recorded loops into their own tracks. There are a range of different styles available, mainly in Urban genres including Dubstep and Hip-Hop. The website is very easy to use and students can be making music within a few clicks. This works at all ages including primary. What sets it apart is that several big name artists, including K\$sha and Willow Smith, have uploaded their songs for anyone to remix. This site is designed for young people so all the songs are appropriate and each style has other users' remixes for people to listen to, remix and vote as a favourite. This is great for students to do the same and get their classmates to vote on each other's remixes.

**COST:** Free

**WEBLINK:** [www.looplabs.com](http://www.looplabs.com)



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### Audiotool – Online Studio

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Audiotool is unlike any of the other websites and software. The concept is most similar to Reason but with a very different layout. You are given an infinite table on which to layout and connect assorted pieces of musical hardware, including drum machines, mixers and effects. The effects are all modelled on guitar pedals and the other equipment is copied from existing hardware. While being quite tricky to start with, it does allow setups to be saved, so it is possible as a teacher to create a preset and then get students to create electronic music from the hardware you give them. Using the Tenori-On emulator and a delay, electronic music can be created instantly with no previous knowledge of music or the software. I tend to use this with students who are slightly more advanced but in the right context it can be used by everyone.

**COST:** Free


**WEBLINK:** [www.audiotool.com](http://www.audiotool.com)

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#### About the author



Tim Hallas works for Hertfordshire Music Service as the Consultant for Music Technology and Head of Broxbourne, Hertford & Ware Music Centre. He teaches music and music technology to all ages from KS2 to KS5. He also works as a freelance writer for Music Tech Magazine and is the Digital Learning Editor for Music Education UK and Sg. In his spare time, when he has any, he still likes to play guitar.

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