

ENSEMBLE VISION:

Signature Sounds



WELCOME TO SIGNATURE SOUNDS

Ensemble Setup:

Signature Sounds follows the standard big band setup:

2 Alto Saxophone; 2 Tenor Saxophone; 1 Baritone Saxophone; 4 Trombone; 4 Trumpet; Drums, Guitar, Bass, Piano, and vocals.

Players of other instruments are normally invited to join Jazz Sounds, and may be invited as a guest soloist where repertoire requires additional instrumentation.

Skill Set:

Typically, players in Signature Sounds are grade 8 or above, or the equivalent, with significant playing experience in jazz ensembles, and fluent sight reading skills. Signature Sounds is a solo ensemble, where all players will have opportunities to lead on solos within the ensemble, according to their aspiration and the decision of the director.

Auditions:

As with all Music at Reading ensembles, membership is drawn from students, staff, alumni and community members. All members of Signature Sounds are auditioned at the start of each academic year. Places are awarded on merit initially, and then to students, staff, alumni and community members in that order of preference.

1. Candidates should perform an unaccompanied piece or extract, up to two minutes long, of their own choosing.
2. Candidates should bring one jazz standard, up to two minutes long, to be performed with accompaniment; candidates should be able to perform the head, and attempt to solo over the form. It is not a necessary requirement to be able to solo well to be in this band, but it will give the director an idea of each candidate's confidence and ability to solo.
3. Candidates will be interviewed and given the chance to ask questions; topics of conversation are likely to include their ambitions within the band and as a musician, and availability for rehearsals and performances.

Auditions are held in the first week of the Autumn term, and rehearsals begin with the membership of the band fixed from Week 2 drawing on successful candidates from the audition list. In the case of performers being judged as a borderline candidate after an audition, these candidates will be invited to sit in with Signature Sounds for 2-3 weeks of rehearsals. The Artistic Director and Signature Sounds Director will make a decision, as follows, on the basis of their contribution to Signature Sounds during their trial.

(a) the performer should remain in Signature Sounds

(b) the performer should be placed on the waiting list for Signature Sounds, and directed to join Jazz Sounds.

Throughout the year, places are likely to open up in Signature Sounds. Auditions will only be opened to waiting list members who attend Jazz Sounds. Additional performers with suitable credentials, who apply for Signature Sounds after the Autumn term audition period, will be directed to join Jazz Sounds and added to the waiting list, following the same selection process.

Membership Commitment:

Signature Sounds members are expected to commit to all rehearsal and performances in the period of time that they are a member, to arrive punctually and prepared for the rehearsal with their instrument and sheet music. Where attendance drops below acceptable levels (normally 90%) members may be asked to leave Signature Sounds, and membership fees will not be refunded. We strongly encourage members to join for the whole academic year, or at least for a term. Music at Reading will issue the schedule of rehearsals and performances for all Music at Reading Ensembles before the start of the academic year in order that members can plan ahead to accommodate their membership commitments with other activities.

Normally, Signature Sounds rehearses in L29 on Monday evenings in term time, 18.30 - 20.30. Members should arrive by 18.15 to warm up in sections, led by the section leader. Additional rehearsals will be held on performance dates, to allow for sound check and dress rehearsal at the venue.

Leadership:

Members of Signature Sounds are encouraged to develop a reflective attitude towards their playing in order to understand their contribution to the ensemble. Throughout rehearsals and after performances, the Director will encourage members to reflect on the following:

	What do I think of the way Signature Sounds plays?
	What do I think of the way Signature Sounds looks and acts on stage in performance?
How are we playing as a Signature Sounds?	What do I think of the progress we are making in our musicianship skills?
	What could we do better in rehearsals, and what suggestions can I make to help us achieve this?
	How am I listening to and evaluating the sound we are making?
	What am I doing in rehearsals and performances to be a good team player?
What is my contribution to the Signature Sounds?	How can I be useful to other players in my section and the rest of the band?
	What do I do to support my colleagues?
	What do I do to support the Director?
	How am I developing as a leader within my section and the band?
	What is my track record with punctuality and attendance?
What is my commitment to the Signature Sounds?	What have I done to promote the band among friends and family?
	How many people have I brought to our performances?
	Am I doing enough personal practise between group rehearsals?

Musical Leaders:

In the Spring term, Music at Reading invites members to apply for the Musical Leaders scheme. This is an enrichment programme for advanced performers keen to develop their skills in solo and ensemble performance, and ensemble directing. Musical Leaders are expected to be regular performing members of Music at Reading ensembles. They may choose to take additional leadership roles in their ensemble, such as sectional leader, soloist, and assistant conductor. In Signature Sounds, this could include warming up the ensemble, leading technical exercises and musicianship work, running sectional rehearsals, and directing the band. It may also include playing written and improvised solos, and making arrangements for the band to perform.

Musical leaders will model appropriate behaviours in terms of punctuality, attendance, self-organisation and personal preparation in rehearsals and performance. Being a Musical Leader can contribute towards the University RED awards.

Musicianship:

In rehearsals, musicianship training focuses on intonation; jazz scales and chords; rhythmic co-ordination in the ensemble; articulation and dynamics; phrasing and shaping; and improvising. The ensemble director will determine musicianship content related to the repertoire played; the broad outline for Signature Sounds is as follows:

Autumn term

Intonation	Warming up effectively as an individual, as a section and as a band Technical advice for tuning individual instruments
Scales and chords	Introductory drills on jazz scales as a band
Rhythmic co-ordination	Playing together as a band by establishing good rhythm co-ordination Switching between swung quavers and straight quavers
Improvising	Tuition in rhythmic and melodic improvisation Building chord stabs from chord patterns in different styles
Repertoire	Learning core grooves of Swing and Latin, and pop arrangements

Spring term

	<i>Building on the work of the Autumn term, sessions focus on</i>
Intonation	Section leaders lead tuning, and assess intonation during performance
Scales and chords	Playing jazz scales in different articulations
Rhythmic co-ordination	Placing notes before, on and after the beat according to the groove, syncopation patterns
Improvising	Creating solo material to develop performances
Repertoire	Learning core grooves of Ballads, and developing Swing and Latin repertoire

Summer term	<i>Building on the work of the Spring term, sessions focus on</i>
Intonation	Section leaders lead tuning, and assess intonation during performance, focusing on effective intonation at different dynamics
Articulation and dynamics	Shaping phrases with dynamics as a soloist, as a section and as a band. Building effective phrases and letting the music flow
Performance practice	What do we look like on the Bandstand
Improvising and soloists	Creating solo material to develop performances Coaching soloists, featuring individuals and sections
Repertoire	Building a mixed portfolio of repertoire