

ENSEMBLE HANDBOOK:

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:

How are we playing as a Signature Sounds?	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? 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

PERFORMANCE DRESS CODE:

Signature Sounds members should wear the following for performances, unless stated otherwise. The overall performance look for Music at Reading ensembles is black with red accents. Specific instructions for events will be included in each Performer Briefing.

Formal:

- Plain black shirt or dress; no logos or patterns. Dependent on the event, glitter or sequined dresses may be appropriate.
- All black lower half, including black socks or tights, and shoes (without patterns or logos). Please ensure that skirts are of an appropriate length when seated.

Informal:

- Music at Reading t-shirt, available to purchase from Music at Reading.
- All black lower half, including black socks or tights, and shoes (without patterns or logos), unless specified by Music at Reading.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION:

Email:

Important information will be emailed out to all ensemble members. It is your responsibility to ensure that your email address is up to date, and to let us know of any changes through the website.

Social Media:

Last minute information will be released on Facebook and Twitter; follow us and turn on notifications to stay up to date.

Go to the website for information about:

Events:

Each event throughout the year is listed, with the ability to search by key words and dates, download directly into your calendar, and display as a list or in calendar format.

Blog:

Follow our blog for behind the scenes peek at Music at Reading. Throughout the year we'll have guest blogs from our members and Musical Leaders, plus tips and advice to combat auditions, performance anxiety, and so much more.

Gallery:

Find professional photographs from our recent events.

Member Zone:

All information specific to membership of Music at Reading ensembles will be uploaded to the Member Zone of our website, found by hovering over the Home button in the menu: <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/music/member-zone/>

Please use the online links in the member zone to report absences, update your contact information, check *Notices*, and download information, including performer briefings for specific events, rehearsal schedules, and ensemble handbooks.

See the *How To* guides if you are unsure how to use any aspect of the website.

PRACTICE ROOM ACCESS

Music practice rooms are available for all members of the local area, including students, staff, and community members, in Building L29, London Road campus.

- Eight general purpose practice rooms; suitable for up to 5 people; no booking required.
- All practice rooms have upright pianos, music stands, and mirrors
- Two studios for ensemble rehearsal; only bookable by staff and students of the University.
- Both studios have a grand piano (or two), music stands, and a drum kit.

The facility may be used for individual music practice and ensemble rehearsals, but is not available for private tuition or commercial activity.

Opening Hours:

Monday-Friday, 08.30-21.30

Weekends, 08.00-20.00.

University Closure Dates: Closed.

Access and Fees:

Practice Room Access is not included in Music at Reading membership. Access fees can be paid through our online store; these fees subsidise the cost of instrument repair, and upkeep, cleaning, and security of the building. Entry to Building L29 is controlled through your University of Reading campus card, or a guest access card.

SCHEDULE:

Signature Sounds rehearsals are usually:

Autumn Term: weekly rehearsals from Monday 30th September; final rehearsal on Monday 2 December.

Spring Term: weekly rehearsals from Monday 13th January; final rehearsal on Monday 23 March.

Summer Term: weekly rehearsals from Monday 20 April; final rehearsal on Monday 1 June

Rehearsals usually take place in Building L29 at the London Road campus of the University.

Doors will open at 18:15; the rehearsal will begin at 18:30, and end at 20:30.

Performances:

Sparkle and Shine – Mojo's Bar, RUSU – Friday 29 November

A Hollywood Christmas – Reading Minster – Friday 6 December

Vintage Valentines – Mojo's Bar, RUSU – Friday 14 February

Big Band Big Lunch – London Road Campus – Saturday, Early June 2020

All dates are available to download directly into your calendar from the Member Zone.