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Music Unlocked: Into the Practice Room

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A sense of perspective

- *Fear* is an irrational response arising from the failure to evaluate actual risk. Responses arising through fear are almost certain to be more risk-averse than they need be.
- *Precaution* is a rational response arising from scientific uncertainty. Precautionary responses may often turn out to have been more risk-averse than they need to have been as scientific understanding increases.
- *Risk* is a rational response based on the most comprehensive scientific information available and is, by definition, permissive of an activity.



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The fundamental questions

1. Is the level of risk acceptable?
2. Does it outweigh the alternatives?
3. Have we done all we can to minimise it?



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Is the level of risk acceptable?

1. Follow Control Measures
 - ✓ *What you should be doing*
2. Evaluate Control Measures
 - ☐ *What your school might or could do*
3. Quantify Probability
 - ❖ *What scientists are attempting to do*

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The First Choirs Standing



- ✓ Followed all the control measures very carefully
- Nobody got sick

Using the same method of calculating the probability of dying in an air crash, it was safer! (But we do need lots more people to sing and play!!)



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Does it outweigh the alternatives?

In risk assessment, we identify hazards.

A hazard is “anything that has the potential to cause harm”.

These things have the potential to cause harm:

- Being on your own at home for several months
- Not seeing your teacher for over four months
- Losing the incentive to practise
- Developing bad technique with no teacher to correct it
- Spending all day on social media instead of music making
- Losing your livelihood because students have given up music



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Have we done all we can to minimise it?

This is your school's responsibility under Health and Safety Law.

They should have produced a set of control measures that you will follow carefully.

Remember! Outbreaks of Covid are almost invariably the result of people behaving stupidly or becoming complacent or careless.

Seven people who were in three different parties on TUI flight 6215 from Zante in Greece to Cardiff airport on Tuesday have tested positive for Covid-19. **Basic control measures were not followed by everybody on the plane.**

Nobody in any of the first choirs standing (including 23 choirs in Norway studied by Caplin and Flick) got sick. **Everybody followed all the control measures carefully.**

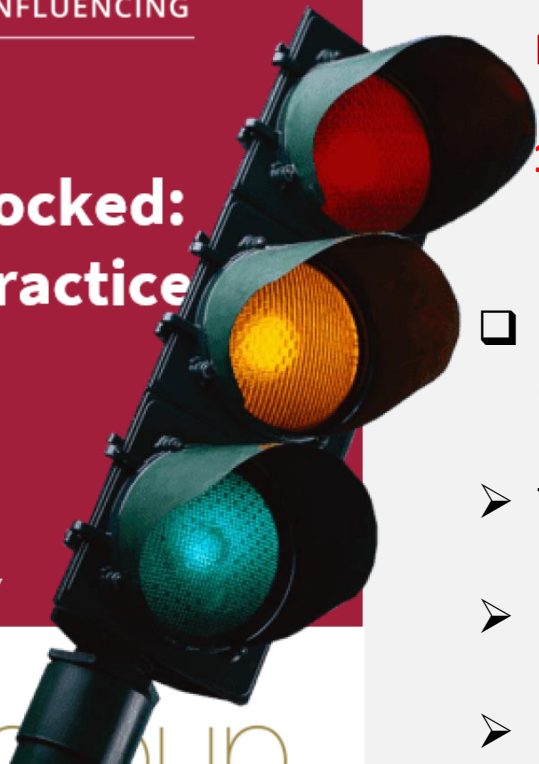
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My top five. I would draw a red line if I felt these were not being addressed.

1. The R number in your region or town is high

- ❑ If it is high, near to or above 1, all other control measures may be less effective.
- This is not your responsibility.
- Neither is it your school's responsibility.
- It can only be the responsibility of the government or regional health authority.
- ✓ By and large, however imperfectly, they *are* exercising this responsibility. (“Whack-a-mole”)

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2. Quarantine

“Singers asked not to attend if feeling unwell”

“Singers instructed not to attend if they have covid-like symptoms and asked not to attend if they feel unwell.”

“Instructed not to attend if any symptoms.”

Your school should have in place measures to exclude pupils who may have the virus

If you are in a room with a pupil who is perfectly healthy, your chances of catching the virus from that pupil are zero! To that extent, you are better off than the class teacher who is with 15 or more pupils all day.

The risk here is that a pupil may be an asymptomatic carrier. We do know that children generally get the disease very mildly and they or their parents may not even know they have it.

We don't actually know enough about this yet and we won't until schools have been back for some time. *Therefore I would expect my school to exercise precaution.*



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2. Close personal contact

- ❑ This is still the greatest transmission risk.
- ✓ Your room needs to be big enough to maintain a good social distance. I'd still go for 2m if possible.
- ✓ Resist the temptation to get near to the pupil in order to correct a technical fault.
- ✓ Masks *do* help with this. It would not be unreasonable to ask a pupil to wear one. You may wish to wear one yourself – probably you should or the pupil will perceive hypocrisy!
- ✓ There should be hand sanitiser available in your teaching room. It would be good practice to be seen using it as the pupil enters. This will remind him or her to use it regularly too.



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3. Contaminated surfaces

- ❑ Rooms in daily use do need to be regularly cleaned. That includes vertical surfaces as well as horizontal ones.
- ✓ There should be surface cleaner and a clean cloth available in your room. Use it between pupils!
- ✓ The school should be able to assure you that an enhanced daily cleaning regime is in use for your room.
- ✓ If there is a rubbish bin in your room, it should be emptied daily. Make sure it has a clean liner when you arrive.
- ✓ If you are teaching brass, a “puppy pad” for the spit valve is a good idea (but must be safely disposed – wear disposable gloves!)
- ✓ Make sure your room is empty of all non-essentials when you leave or enter it. Instrument cases etc. should not be left lying about in practice rooms.

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4. **Airborne transmission** (The dreaded aerosols!)

- ✓ A room with no windows is a definite no. It would be entirely reasonable to refuse to teach in one. Ventilation is key.
- ✓ Teach with doors and windows open if you can. (Admittedly increasingly difficult in winter or if you teach a noisy instrument!) Fans may make things worse if they blow air in the wrong direction.
- ✓ Better than a fan would be a complete air change between pupils. This can be achieved through timetabling. Allowing rooms to lie fallow for one lesson space between each pupil would be safest practice.
- ✓ Shortening lesson times will also help.
- ✓ Masks do help, particularly with forwardly projected air. (They do not entirely prevent sideways air unless extremely well fitting)
- ✓ Do not work face to face. Always aim for side to side positioning.
- ✓ Talking generates aerosols as well as playing, so avoid unnecessary talk and talk quietly. (Loud talking generates a lot more aerosols)

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5. Personal Vulnerability

- ❑ A difficult one, but I've placed it above things like bell covers or instrument bags.
- Obviously this is a personal decision and I'd expect school managements to be understanding.
- We do know that risk increases significantly with age and underlying health conditions.
- The young people I know seem to have got the idea that they are a safe category and they may underestimate the risk to their teachers.
- ✓ Having said that, I've been teaching singing to two boys ever since I was allowed to go into their homes. I've followed all the rules I've just given you and I haven't got sick.

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Final word to the Colorado-Boulder Study

- ❑ This is still the most comprehensive study relevant to instrumental tuition.
- Adjuncts such as clarinet bags are not my area of expertise.
- They are another risk reducing control measure.
- But they can hardly be conducive to easy playing or teaching
- ✓ My sense is that Colorado-Boulder leans more towards precaution than known risk.

