

COURSE SYNOPSIS

Diploma in Songwriting and Production (DSP)

Module 1 – Fundamentals of Music Theory (5 credits)

Students will be taught a strong foundation of music theory and harmonic concepts derived from classical and contemporary teachings. Some of the topics covered include scale and mode construction, rhythms and time signatures, key signatures, intervals, chord construction, and the principles of harmonic progressions.

Module 2 – Introduction to Music Technology (5 credits)

This module will cover an overview of current technology in relation to music. It provides students with a fundamental understanding of the principles and theories of sound, as well as Pro Tools, the industry standard digital audio workstation for recording and digital audio production. Through a series of lecture sessions and in-class demonstration, students will be taught topics such as frequency response, bit depth and sample rate, understanding different audio file formats and basic signal flow.

Module 3 – Musicianship and Aural I (4 credits)

Students will also train their ears and improve on their musicality and musicianship through the Solfege, sight-singing and rhythmic exercises covered in this module.

Module 4 – Keyboard Skills I (5 credits)

This module will equip students with fundamental keyboard skills. Using a range of pop songs, students will learn to construct, read and play triads and 7th chords.

Module 5 – Songwriting I: Crafting a Song (8 credits)

This module provides an introduction to the craft of songwriting, focusing on structure, rhythm, melody and the importance of repetition. Through song analysis and in-class examples, students will learn how to carefully combine all the fundamental elements of a pop song.

Module 6 – MIDI Systems for Music Production (5 credits)

This module explores the industry standard Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) specification and its application in music production. Through in-class demonstration and hands-on exercises done at individual computer-based workstations, students will learn how to set up and troubleshoot a MIDI workstation and use sequencing as well as loops to create a music arrangement.

Module 7 – Keyboard Skills II (5 credits)

In this module, students will learn how to employ various comping patterns and voice-leading in the right hand and play simple bass lines in the left hand while singing the melody of the song.

Module 8 – Songwriting II: Writing Pop Hits (10 credits)

This module teaches the students numerous tools and techniques of writing a 'hit' song, covering both melodic and harmonic concepts that underlie thousands of hit songs. Each week, a new technique will be taught and students will apply the technique taught to write an original song as their weekly assignment. They will then present their songs to the class the following week to receive critique by the instructor and their peers on how to improve on their writing and songs.

Module 9 – Pop Music Arranging (10 credits)

This module introduces the students to the range of techniques that they can utilize to arrange for a variety of pop music styles, including but not limited to Rock, R&B and Dance. Through step-by-step lessons and the analysis of commercial hit arrangements, students will conceptualise and learn how to arrange for different instruments, combining them through layering and sequencing, to finally create a commercial sound.

Module 10 – Guitar Skills (5 credits)

In order to be a versatile songwriter, it is important to be able to write songs using both the keyboard and guitar. This module teaches and prepares students to be able to read and play basic chords, strumming patterns and simple major scales on the guitar. Through hands-on training, this module aims to get students to be comfortable playing the guitar and eventually writing songs on the guitar.

Module 11 – Vocal Techniques (5 credits)

An introduction to vocal techniques, this module is specially designed for singer-songwriters and aims to teach students the fundamental elements of singing using current pop songs: control, intonation, diction, tone quality and phrasing. Warm-up exercises and singing in Solfege will also be covered in this module.

Module 12 – Songwriting III: Writing for TV and Film (8 credits)

This project-based module teaches students the approaches and concepts to writing for television, film and visual media using real-world examples in class. Topics include spotting approaches, harmonic considerations, applying sound effects and scoring techniques.

Module 13 – Songwriting IV: Vocal Writing (8 credits)

This module provides an introduction to writing and arranging for voices. Students will be taught basic writing techniques such as closed and open voicings, voice-leading, vocal ranges and writing counter-melodies, with a focus on arranging for backing vocals, choir and A Cappella groups.

Module 14 – Music Production Techniques (10 credits)

This module deals with the creative and technical aspects of music production, equipping students with the skills to get the most out of musicians, artistes and recording sessions. Through the use of reference songs, students will understand the different stages of production, production values and how to achieve certain sounds in the studio. This module also explores the relationship between producer and engineer, and how to attain a balanced and successful partnership in the studio.

Module 15 – Introduction to Music Business (6 credits)

This module provides students with an essential overview of the contemporary music industry, and how it is constantly evolving due to recent significant developments, most notably technological advancements and the internet. Students will also gain an awareness of how they can achieve success for themselves and their songs as an independent artist, using the range of tools and accessible platforms available today.

Module 16 – Professional Development (6 credits)

This module guides students in their development as reflective and capable individuals in their desired fields by equipping them with essential practical and industry-relevant skill sets. Students are also encouraged to take concrete steps to develop themselves professionally through internal and external projects and training workshops. Selected students will also be given the opportunity to intern with the School's industry links.

Module 17 – Collaborative Project (15 credits)

In this module, students will be given individual instruction and guidance as they prepare and progress through their final portfolio of a 3-song production album with students from other disciplines. It encourages them to utilise and further develop upon all the skills and techniques that they had picked up earlier in the academic year, and provides them with the opportunity to kick-start their professional careers in the music industry.