

Music Technology in Education

Our Music in Technology in Education conference is available to stream until 15 January. *MT* tech correspondent **Tim Hallas** walks us through what's on offer

Since lockdown began in March, online meetings have become second nature, but online conferences were something that I hadn't done before, so I engaged with *MT*'s venture with eager anticipation of experiencing something new.

The conference was originally planned for June and was intended to be a one-day, face-to-face event with participants choosing between different breakout sessions after a keynote presentation. However, due to moving online, every session was available to all participants and the event was instead held over four days. So, in mid-October, around 250 online delegates logged onto a webinar platform for the inaugural Music Technology in Education conference.

Monday

The conference opened on the Monday evening with a keynote presentation from some bloke called Tim Hallas. In the keynote I discussed what music technology can actually be. Because the term gets used to cover such a wide variety of things, I used the time to explore different definitions of the term. The idea of the session was to set the week up nicely, to cover a little bit of everything to ensure that delegates knew what the rest of the week might involve. I have written about this in my column previously, but the key points were that music technology can be:

- Teaching music with technology (using equipment to teach basic music concepts such as composition)
- Teaching music technology (recording, engineering, mixing etc.)
- Teaching technology with music (using music as a gateway to other skills such as computer science)

The rest of Monday was rounded out with a presentation from Bradley Smith of Leicester-Shire Music Education Hub, who talked about how their hub provides music technology and DJ sessions for schools as part of their provision. Bradley has created an excellent scheme of work and an amazing set of resources, some of which he made available to delegates during this session.

Tuesday

The second day of the conference began with the ever-engaging Phil Heeley talking through some of the resources he's been using for teaching music technology remotely. This was based around the free Bandlab platform, which includes everything one might need for a remote music tech workshop.

The standout session from Tuesday was David Guinane's session about music technology on a budget. He teaches at a state-school that, along with every other school in the country, is vastly underfunded, so he has a wealth of experience of finding great resources for little or no money. Guinane presented multiple platforms for different types of music making that need to be covered in the classroom. The key pieces of technology he looked at were:

- MuseScore for score writing – this is open source, which means that it is constantly updated and totally free.
- SoundCloud/BandLab – these are both online DAWs and suitable for recording and producing music without creating a score. Basic versions of both are free but some features are only available behind a paywall.

Amazingly, he had managed to find time to create a website with links to all of these resources featured in the session and this was made available to delegates afterwards.

Tuesday concluded with a session from Dr Sam Aaron in which he explored coding as a method for music making. He explained that notation is a code in its own right, and that computer code isn't any more complex than music notation once the language is understood. Sam created the open-source software Sonic Pi as a platform for teaching coding with music and he made some amazing music with the software during the session – it's worth watching simply to see Sam do his thing!

Wednesday

The third day began with a very important session to me. As someone who teaches entirely music technology, the gender balance is still massively skewed in one direction and it's something I'm passionately trying to change – but it's tough! Wednesday's first session was entitled Women in Music and featured four industry professionals from all stages of production. Kate Rounding (development director for technology in music education), Amy Dickens (technology developer), Katie Tavini (mastering

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KATIE TAVINI

engineer) and Rita Campbell (session vocalist and song writer) discussed a wide range of topics including their individual backgrounds and their different routes into the industry. The session was an absolutely fascinating hour and highlighted the passion that these professionals have for the industry and the technology that they use. My particular favourite moment was when Kate (the chair) asked the panel what their favourite piece of equipment is at the moment. This was possibly the geekiest question of the week and I do love a geeky question! This session was inspirational, and is my pick of the week for the session that everybody should go back and watch.

This session was followed by another important session from Drake Music. For those of you that don't know, Drake do amazing work to make music accessible to all including those with additional needs. Drake use a large amount of technology in their work and this session explored some of the work that they have been doing with SEND students and the technology that they use to help them achieve it. The session features lots of beautifully shot videos of young people making music with technology.

Wednesday concluded with a session about music technology in primary schools. This session was led by Chris Pietrek and explored his own product, which is aimed at the primary market. It is a simplified sequencer but comes with schemes of work and lesson plans and helps students develop their core musical knowledge while using technology.

Thursday

The final sessions of the week kicked off with some explorations of the most technical aspects of our subject. In the first case, trying to cut through some of the commonly used jargon, Alex Markham led a session exploring the digital audio workstation (DAW). Although based around his preferred platform of Cubase, the session was quite agnostic and contained useful information that was applicable to a wide range of DAWs. Andy Grinham then led a session that contained lots of

flashy images of beautifully designed workspaces. However, he was at pains to point out that we shouldn't worry too much about those images and should focus on the underlying concepts of good studio design, before talking us through how to embed them appropriately in schools.

The final session of the week was given by Austen Smart from Future DJs and explored their DJing schemes of work and their lessons and workshops. Future DJs have developed an excellent curriculum around DJ skills in classrooms and any teacher that is interested in offering this as an option for students who can't easily access traditional music making should definitely watch this session for inspiration. DJ skills are an option for all the GCSE syllabuses, so access to these skills could easily be expanded into a wider range of classrooms.

Summary

The four days of sessions provide an excellent source of CPD and inspiration for teachers. It is an easy route to access music technology for non-specialists and also contains enough meat for more experienced practitioners. I recommend that you start with these four sessions:

- What is Music Tech Anyway?
- Music Tech on a Budget
- Women in Music Tech
- DJing & Production

These sessions will give you an overview of the key topics that were covered in the week and then you can explore other sessions that interest you. My thanks go to all of the presenters and delegates for a fascinating week. Here's to the next one in 2021! **MT**

The conference sessions are all available to watch on-demand. The registration fee of £99.00 + VAT (£118.80) will give you access to the recordings for all of the sessions until 15 January 2021.

www.musictechconference.co.uk

▲ *'An absolutely fascinating hour':*

The Women in Music Tech session features four industry professionals including mastering engineer Katie Tavini (pictured)