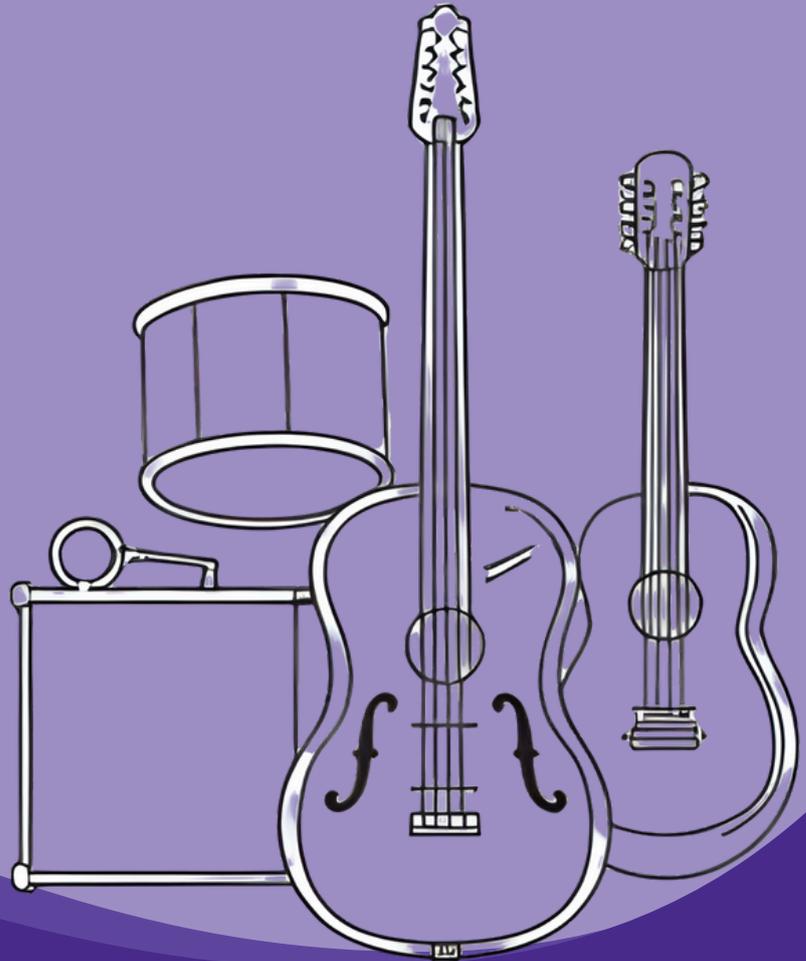


Saffron Hall's Grade-a-thon

Learn, Contribute, Inspire



Contents

- Introduction
- How it works, the commitment, and timeline
- Supporting your learning
- Fundraising

Introduction

Welcome to the first ever Saffron Hall & Saffron Walden Symphony Orchestra Grade-a-thon – an inspiring and inclusive initiative inviting people aged over 18 to learn a musical instrument from scratch and work towards taking their Grade 1 exam in summer 2026.

This project is part of our wider ambition to promote the gift of music. Whether you've always wanted to play, haven't touched an instrument since school, or simply love a challenge, this is your chance to learn something new while raising funds to support Saffron Hall's community music programmes.

Alongside you every step of the way will be:

- **Saffron Music Trust**, supporting your learning journey with resources, guidance and events
- **Saffron Walden Symphony Orchestra**, our artistic partners who will be helping with demonstrations, mentoring opportunities and the chance to attend concerts and events.

We are excited to see what you achieve!

How it works

The challenge is to work towards and complete a Grade 1 music exam (ABRSM) in just a few months.

We are looking for individuals, groups, families and workplace teams who are willing to share the highs and lows of their journey to a Grade 1 music certificate and inspire the musicians and music-lovers of the future.

If you can do all this and get your friends, family or colleagues to sponsor your efforts, your contribution will generate much-needed funds for Saffron Music Trust. Sponsorship is optional but encouraged. Saffron Music Trust delivers quality, live music experiences to engage and inspire young people across Essex.

Our Grade-a-thon aims to be a sociable, motivating and rewarding experience – as well as a fantastic way to fundraise for a great cause. As long as you haven't already passed grade exams in the musical instrument you choose, anyone over 18 can take part.

The commitment

We believe ABRSM Practical exams are especially great for a Grade-a-thon as they are taken face-to-face and assess all-round musical knowledge and skills as well as your ability to perform.

In Spring 2026, once you confirm your commitment to taking an exam in the summer, we will book an ABRSM examiner to assess everyone taking part in the Grade-a-thon at Saffron Hall/Saffron Walden County High School. The aim is for exams to take place in **early June** so we can celebrate with our SWSO friends at their summer concert. This means you will need to confirm your commitment to taking an exam by **mid-April** at the latest.

An ABRSM Practical exam entrance fee is typically **£59**. We will ask you to pay this for your exam, if possible. Please let us know if paying this fee is a challenge as we may be able to assist with costs. We will make arrangements for someone to play an accompaniment during your exam where required. Exam candidates should expect to have one **20 minute** rehearsal at **Saffron Hall/Saffron Walden County High School** with the accompanist a week or so before the exam. You can also bring your own accompanist should you wish.

ABRSM and Saffron Music Trust aim to support learners with specific needs. ABRSM requires candidates with specific needs to notify ABRSM at least **28 days** before the exam and may require supporting evidence. ABRSM's policy is available at <https://www.abrsm.org/en-gb/about-our-exams/specific-needs>. If you have specific needs, please let us know so we can do our best to accommodate you.

Grade-a-thon Challenge Timeline

JANUARY

Sat 17 Jan from 9.30-13.30 - Grade-a-thon Open Day, Saffron Hall

FEBRUARY

Mon 2 Feb at 5pm - Deadline for joining

Sun 8 Feb - Opportunity for a social event before SWSO film music concert

Opportunities for shared learning & online check-ins

MARCH

Learn, practise & fundraise (optional but encouraged)

Opportunities for shared learning & online check-ins

APRIL

More learning and practising!

Mon 13 Apr at 9am - Deadline for committing to an exam

Sat 25 Apr all day - Opportunity for a social event as part as Saffron Hall's Chamber Music Day

Learn, learn, learn!

MAY

Sun 3 May - Opportunity for a social event before SWSO concert at 3pm

Just keep learning!

JUNE

Take exam & celebrate!

w/c 1 Jun - Rehearse pieces with accompanist

w/c 8 Jun - Exams, subject to ABRSM availability

Sun 14 Jun - Celebrate before SWSO concert at 3pm

Results are typically released within a week of the exam but can take up to 28 days to arrive

Supporting your learning

Working towards a music exam gives learners a clear roadmap across a range of musical skills that support learning to play well. An exam also provides a set of clear, achievable goals with a deadline, a performance experience with an accompanist (as required) and individual feedback from an examiner, plus a certificate at the end to prove all your hard work paid off. What a thing to celebrate!

Come to the Grade-a-thon Open Day!

Saturday 17 January, 9:30am to 1:30pm at Saffron Hall
Consider your musical options, try out different instruments to learn.

Find out more about music exams and learning strategies.

Discuss choosing your musical challenge.

Meet others taking part.

Prepare to practice.

Sign up to start your learning journey.

Participants are free to use these suggestions as they wish and recommend others

Instrumental Rental and Purchase

Duxford Saturday Workshop <https://duxfordsaturdayworkshop.org.uk/>

De Rosa Music, Saffron Walden and Bishops Stortford

<https://derosamusic.co.uk/>

Woodwind and Reed, Cambridge <https://www.wwr.co.uk/>

Instrumental Purchase and Accessories

Local charity shops

[Gear4Music](#)

[Thomann UK](#)

[Amazon](#)

Printed Music

Second hand - Oxfam Bookshop, King Street, Saffron Walden

[Musicroom.com](#) and [Amazon](#)

Learning Locally

Saffron Directory -

<https://www.saffrondirectory.co.uk/directory/244/music-teaching-and-tutors/>

Independent Society of Musicians directory of music professionals

– <https://musicdirectory.ism.org/CDirectoryAdvancedSearch.aspx>

Duxford Saturday Workshop -

<https://duxfordsaturdayworkshop.org.uk/>

ABRSM

- **Find a life with music -** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGFjplZEqb0>
- **Recordings of pieces in the syllabus to support your learning -** <https://orcd.co/abrsmsounds>
- **Technical Skills - scales and arpeggios -** eg Grade 1 piano scales https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5u1czBTThk&list=PL_b-

- **Sight-reading** - learning how to play a short unseen piece - eg how to tackle learning to sight-read in bass clef
<https://youtu.be/MdjJc9WXKhk?si=VGJLI335ocJXMDrR>
- **Ear Training** - four short tasks to test musical awareness <https://www.emusicmaestro.com/auraltests/free/abrsms/test/grade1/1A>
- **Exams** - <https://www.abrsm.org/en-gb/about-our-exams> and <https://www.abrsm.org/en-gb/practical-grades>

ONLINE

Music Theory to GCSE - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/subjects/zwxhfg8>

Music Theory - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLG-VLx-3C3oknhQ4JC5xrFZ7FK5Lg8nM>

APPS

There are various apps available for free or with in-app purchase options. E.g. ABRSM Aural Trainer app. Visit your app store and search ABRSM.

Along your journey there will be various opportunities to engage with musicians and music professionals online and potentially, in person. We will keep you up to date via email with any activities we are able to offer or share.

FUNDRAISING

All funds raised from the Grade-a-thon will go towards enabling young people across Essex to access quality live music experiences and music education opportunities delivered by Saffron Music Trust. Your learning will inspire and enable the musicians of the future!

To make your fundraising as simple as possible we have partnered with GivenGain, a not-for-profit online giving platform. This also ensures that Gift Aid is collected on all eligible donations raised.

To set up your own page within the Saffron Hall Grade-a-thon Campaign follow the instructions below. You can see your own total and that of the campaign as a whole. You can also share updates and thank you messages with your supporters. Please encourage friends, family and colleagues to support your efforts.

If you prefer not to collect sponsorship online, you can do so in cash or bank transfer and pay it directly to the Saffron Music Trust account where it will be added to the Grade-a-thon funds. We may ask you and your sponsors to complete a Gift Aid declaration to ensure Gift Aid can be collected.

A few ideas to boost your fundraising include:

- **Unboxing Day:** video your first opening of your chosen instrument and your very first attempts to get a sound out of it. Everyone will see it might not be as easy as they think!
- **Practice progress:** Keep your supporters engaged with a weekly video diary of how your learning is progressing
- **First skills:** Track your progress with weekly aims such as your first notes, first scale, first phrase from one of your pieces
- **Name that tune:** If one of your exam pieces is a well-known tune invite your supporters to take part in a 'name that tune' challenge by donating to make their guess
- **Practice-for-Pledges:** Help your donors to encourage you to practice by sponsoring your practice sessions rather than your overall participation

- **Playing pairs:** learn a duet with your teacher, a friend or someone else taking part in the Gradeathon and share a video or recording of how this progresses until you perfect it
- **Scale-a-thon:** you'll need to get good at those scales for your exam so why not make it part of your fundraising incentive for donors to sponsor you per scale you master and thank them with a recording of them
- **Musical forfeits:** ask donors to challenge you to something fun e.g. to learn Twinkle Twinkle Little Star or Happy Birthday in time for their birthday, or to play blindfolded
- **Grade One Recital:** Give friends and family a little concert of your exam pieces (great practice for performing!) and ask for donations for them to attend

Bank details for any sponsorship not collected via GivenGain are:

Account Name: Saffron Music Trust

Bank: Lloyds Bank

Sort Code: 30-97-24

Account Number: 51525760

Reference: Gradeathon

Saffron Music Trust is a registered charity, number 1153685

Useful Links

Sign up form:

<https://forms.gle/d2J9bmCRL7TZzKddA>

Link to fundraising page:

<https://www.givengain.com/cc/saffronhall-gradeathon>

Thank you so much for joining us for our Grade-a-thon, we're so excited to see your progress!