Yes, There Really Is an App for That

The incredible growth in the use of tablets and smartphones in schools has provided many new ways for teachers to enrich and expand their classroom materials, while also making the logistics of running a program much more efficient. We spoke to several experts to get their opinions on how best to use these devices in the music classroom—and to get some suggestions about applications.

Educational Tools

Spiros Xydas, instrumental music instructor at Baker Middle School in Troy, Michigan, used a set of iPads to create a special before-school iPad band as an extension of his existing program. A video of a recent public performance by the ensemble is available at vimeo.com/43682932. Xydas saw the iPad group as a way to kindle additional interest in his music program and expand on topics he was already teaching. The “cool factor” of using the iPads helped him to boost public awareness of his music classes, increasing their popularity and participation as well as allowing him to get students actively involved in composing their own music.

To Xydas, using the iPad is about both advocacy and educational relevance. He says that in today’s climate, “to keep kids active in the program, you have to design experiences that are relevant to them. When properly used, technology can help you do that.” With his large ensembles and other classes, he keeps a strong focus on topics such as composition and music theory, and various iPad apps help his students in these subjects as well. Using the online Noteflight music notation system, Xydas can have students work at school on composition projects with their iPads during the day and then continue working on the same projects in the evening via their own computers or other devices.

Logistical Tools

Jed Smart, band director at Tuscaloosa High School in Northport, Alabama, uses the iPad for more administrative purposes: to provide access to his gradebook, attendance, fingering charts, and other useful apps. Going one step farther, he has integrated the iPad into his classroom’s audio/video system. Using an Apple TV box, he wirelessly transmits anything on his screen directly to a video projector or flat-screen TV (see sidebar for more details). He uses this not only for sharing information with students but also for tuning, recording rehearsals, and doing performance evaluations.

Smart addresses the confusion over which apps to use by saying that “there are literally thousands available in the
App Essentials
While no one can say that any single app is perfect for every teacher, there are several general app categories—each containing dozens of apps—with which educators should familiarize themselves. Consider these suggestions (all for iOS) when filling out your must-have app list.

GRADEBOOKS AND LOGISTICS:
SmartMusic Inbox—Access, listen to, and grade student assignments from the comfort of your iPad. Free.
Attendance—A well-designed app that lets you take attendance quickly and easily on your iPad. Allows you to email missing students and has many other functions. $4.99.
Gradebook Pro—A full-featured gradebook app for teachers without a district-wide solution. $9.99.

TUNERS:
iStroboSoft—Thanks to the folks at Peterson, the granddaddy of strobeoscopic tuners is now a mobile iOS app. $9.99.
Tonal Energy Tuner—Arguably the most advanced multifunction tuning application available. Great for teaching pitch accuracy on wind instruments. $3.99.

DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATIONS:
GarageBand—The classic Mac software brought to the iPad. For ease and simplicity, this is arguably the best. $4.99.
Music Studio—A multitrack recording app with more options and power than GarageBand. A free Lite version is also available. $14.99.

FINGERINGS:
Finger—The highest-rated fingering app in the store, it includes fingerings for all traditional concert band instruments, including lesser-used ones such as English horn and brass instruments pitched in non-standard keys. $7.99.
Finger Strings—The same app, but for string instruments. $5.99.
Instruments In Reach Basic—A clean, easy-to-read fingering chart with entries for most concert band instruments, $2.99.

THEORY AND EAR TRAINING:
Tenuto—A useful drill-and-practice music theory app. $3.99.

COMPOSITION:
Notion—Arguably the best dedicated music notation app for iPad. $6.99.
Noteflight (via Safari browser)—The online Noteflight music notation system works very well on the iPad. Free, but a subscription to the service offers more features.

iReal b—A quick and professional way to create and practice chord charts and jazz improv. Allows you to practice with your creations as well as save and email them as PDF files. $7.99.

ALTERNATIVE INSTRUMENTS:
Seline Ultimate—A multifunctional musical instrument for iPad with multiple voices and capabilities. $0.99.
ProKeys—An electronic piano app. $0.99.
Drum Meister Grand—A drum set on your iPad. $1.99.

METRONOMES:
Visual Metronome—A simple, easy-to-read metronome app that is great for large group use. $1.99.
Subdivide Metronome—A full-featured metronome with subdivisions and Airplay wireless support. $4.99.

PRESENTATION:
Prezi Viewer—View and display presentations created with the free online Prezi software. Free.
Doceri—Connect remotely to your desktop or laptop computer so you can use and annotate over Windows and Mac programs, complete with audio and video support. Essentially a handheld electronic whiteboard. App free, desktop program $30.

MÚLTIPLE USE:
APS MusicMaster Pro—A Swiss army knife of music education apps. Includes a metronome, tuner, sheet music viewer, fingering charts, audio recorder, timer/stopwatch, music terms, instrument/vocal ranges, and transpositions. $9.99.

Are there apps you’ve discovered for your music classes? Share them on the NAFME forums (musiced.nafme.org/forums)!