

Product/Service Review: Musical U

Harness the Power of the Online Learning Community at Musical U



The internet and the world of iOS and Android apps are full of tools for musicians to learn about music theory and to practice ear training and sight-reading. One of the most popular and useful set of ear training programs available today is the suite of apps from [Easy Ear Training, Ltd.](#) This start-up's director, Christopher Sutton, has taken the concept of online musical training to the next level with the goal-oriented community at [Musical U](#).

From the site's "About" page:

Musical U is a website and community dedicated to helping you to become more musical. Created by leading music education provider Easy Ear Training, Musical U was built to address the most common and frustrating problems faced by musicians and help more people to realise their full musical potential.

Musical U is a combination of:

- The very best training resources developed and proven over the last 5 years at Easy Ear Training.
- A friendly, supportive community because trying to go it alone is one of the major stumbling blocks faced by musicians.
- Access to experts so that you can get personal help whenever you face a new question or challenge.

Whether you want to play by ear, improvise easily, create your own music, or sing confidently, Musical U is built to provide you with everything you need to become the musician you've always dreamed of being.

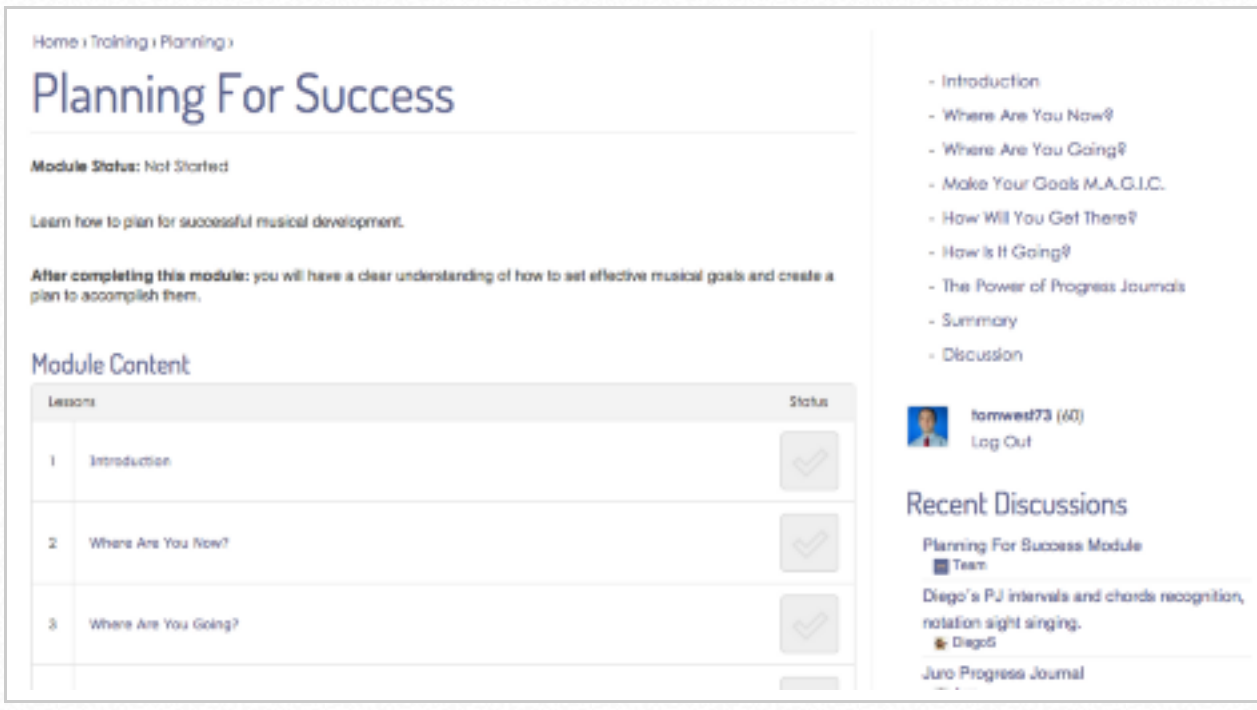
Musical U's target audience is primarily the amateur musician who is self-taught - someone who can play an instrument, write a song, or play in a jam session. As we will see, however, there is value for even experienced professional musicians such as myself within the resources and community.

Musical U Is a Learning Framework



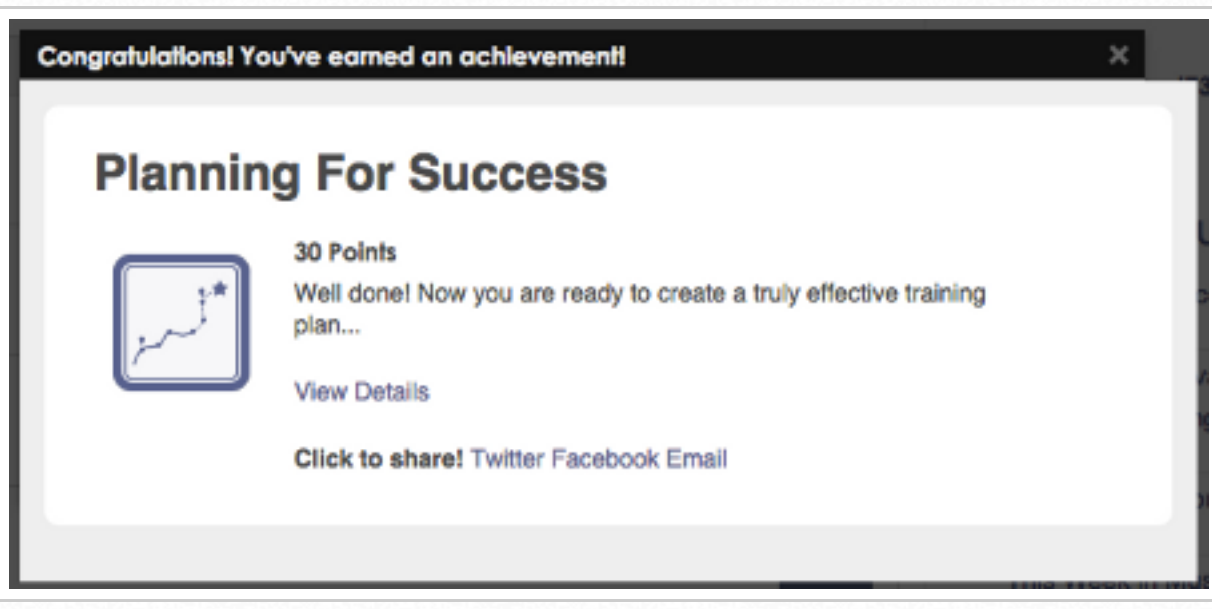
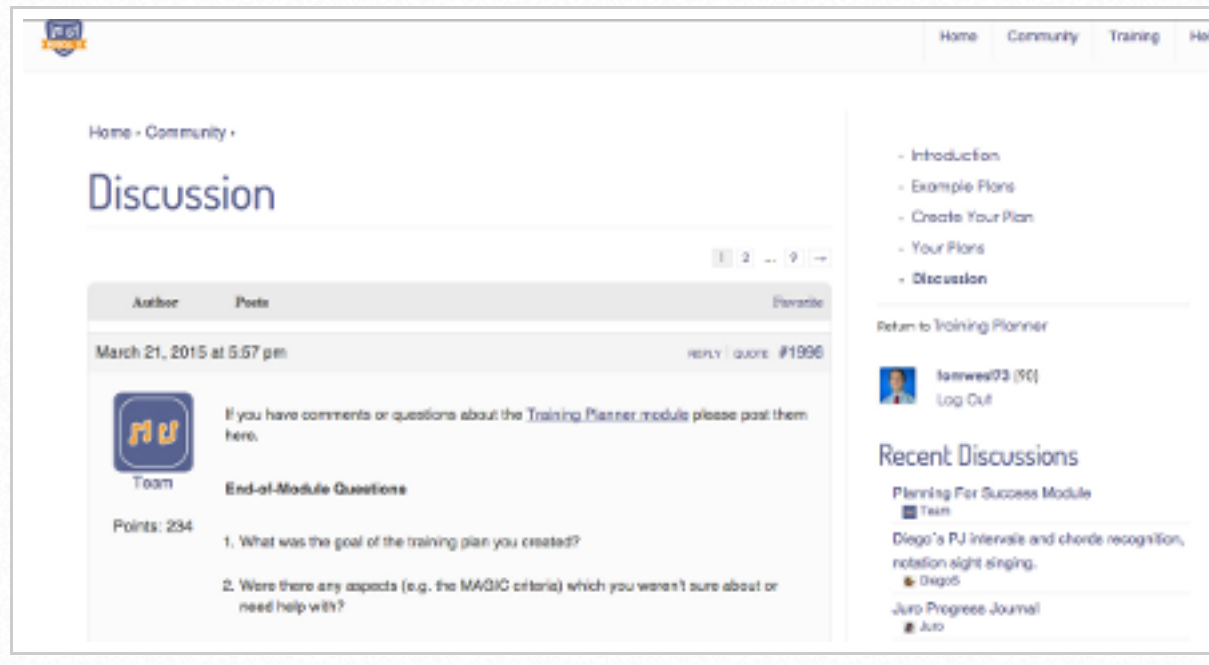
Musical U's structure for new members is designed for ease of use, with a 3-minute talking-head welcome video after successfully logging in. It is apparent immediately that an important part of the structure of Musical U is the online community, with recent discussions and activity displayed on the right in social media style, with easy access to your account information. Working your way through the introductory material takes about 15-20 minutes. Along the way, you get achievement awards for uploading a profile picture, making a post in the New Members thread in the community forum, take a quiz on how to create a successful music learning plan, and complete your first plan.

Additionally, Musical U offers a **Progress Journal**, allowing you to keep a running record of your efforts to reach your goals. This journal is perhaps the most valuable part of the site, as you can use it to record your progress on any music training efforts, both on the [Musical U](#) site and off.



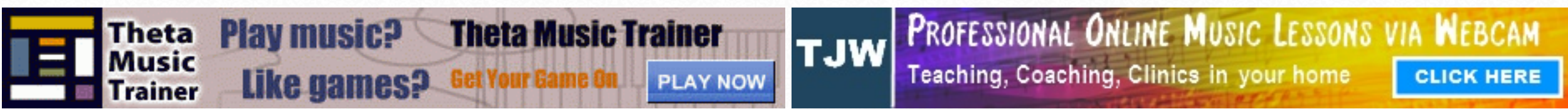
Musical U's instructional material is organized in modules, with an average of a half-dozen lessons each. The lesson interface is very user-friendly, with built-in assessments and an opportunity to ask questions or discuss the module in a dedicated community forum thread included at the end of each module. Each module ends with an achievement icon, which you can share on social media. As you unlock achievements, your progress is posted in the community activity feed, and the [Musical U](#) staff actually call attention to your work as you progress.

In addition to this structure, Musical U uses an email autoresponder to send you 6 introductory emails giving you a tour of all of the main features of the site, including how to ask for more help. With the staff and community support backing you up, the only thing from stopping you from improving your musical skills is your own engagement level.

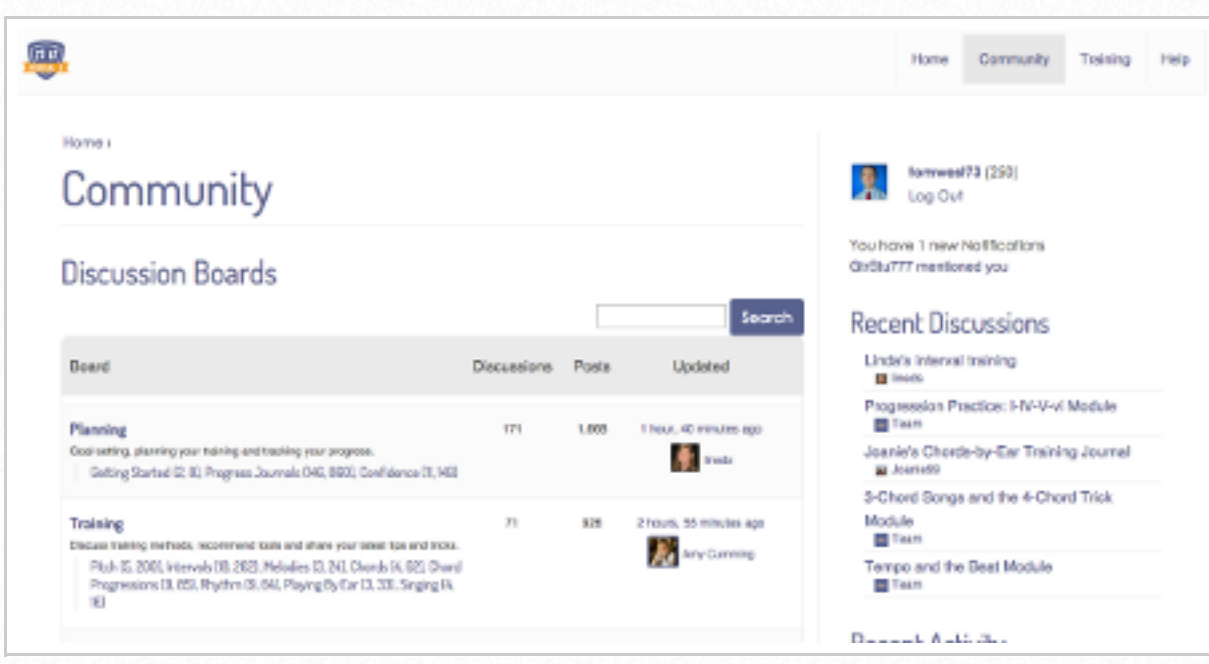


Musical U currently contains 9 training modules, including the introductory planning module. There are modules for developing relative pitch, identifying intervals, identifying scales (including pentatonic), identifying triads and triad inversions, identifying chord progressions commonly found in popular music, rhythmic identification of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth patterns (both aurally and in dictation), playing and transcribing by ear, and a module on singing, which includes solfege, pitch matching, and breath control. Each module has clearly defined instructional goals ("By the end of this module, you will be able to...") and several practice mini-modules.

I find these modules to be pedagogically sound, well-organized, and designed for the user to work at their own pace. These modules, combined with the staff and community support, are effective tools for an individualized music theory and ear training education.



Musical U Is a Support Network for Music Learning



Perhaps the most valuable part of the [Musical U](#) website is the powerful combination of the **Progress Journal** and the **Community Discussion Boards**. Musical U's experienced staff members are regularly involved, monitoring people's achievements, offering advice and coaching, and highlighting people's accomplishments. Adding a human factor to online learning is an important factor to motivating site users to stay active, and [Musical U](#) does this well. There are achievements to unlock for engagement, site users can friend one another, send private messages, and truly build an online relationship.

The Progress Journal is particularly valuable, as any musician at any level of expertise can make use of it and use it as a centerpiece for interacting with other musicians in the community. When you create a Progress Journal, it appears as a new thread under Community > Planning > Progress Journals, enabling

anyone in the community to read and comment on your goals, progress, and frustrations. It's like keeping a practice diary that other musicians get to read and help you with.

Musical U Has Potential for Growth and Possible Applications to Public Education

For the amateur, self-taught musician who is willing to invest in their music education (monthly site access starts at \$19.95 USD), [Musical U](#) provides a self-guided online learning system with the benefit of professional and community interactive support. The learning modules will be effective for most users (with new modules currently in development), and for those who struggle, the community and staff are ready to jump in and help.

[Musical U](#), whether through research or simply through hard work, incorporates some of the current best practices in online learning. The ability to customize learning objectives and operate in an asynchronous learning environment where the student works at their own pace produces the best results for the majority of students. This flexibility, coupled with the staff and community support, makes [Musical U](#) an effective way for musicians to enrich their understanding of music as an aural and performance art form.

Currently, American public education continues to reluctantly slog through a much needed renovation of their approaches and goals for the education of young minds. Music education as a profession is also attempting to get to the next level, spurred on by the new National Core Arts Standards, which include creation as a main goal. Public education is slowly but assuredly moving towards a Blended Learning model where experiences in a live classroom are supplemented by individualized, self-paced work online. Progressive music education programs in the United States are looking for ways to enable students at both the elementary and secondary levels to individually develop their own basic musicianship in order to encourage more creativity and personalized music-making.

The system in place at Musical U could potentially be modified to support a scholastic audience, providing a bit more structure for elementary and secondary students, particularly in the goal-setting and assessment areas of the site. The ability to interact with musicians from all over the world on topics like chords, scales, and melodies would be a real positive in most cases, but obviously would require careful monitoring by the [Musical U](#) staff and the students' music teachers. Director Christopher Sutton does not currently have plans to develop a pricing scheme for scholastic entities to incorporate the site into their online curricula, but the infrastructure to expand Musical U to include scholastic students, or perhaps to develop a separate site tailored to the needs of young musicians, is definitely already in place.

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