

iReal Pro – a resource for music teachers

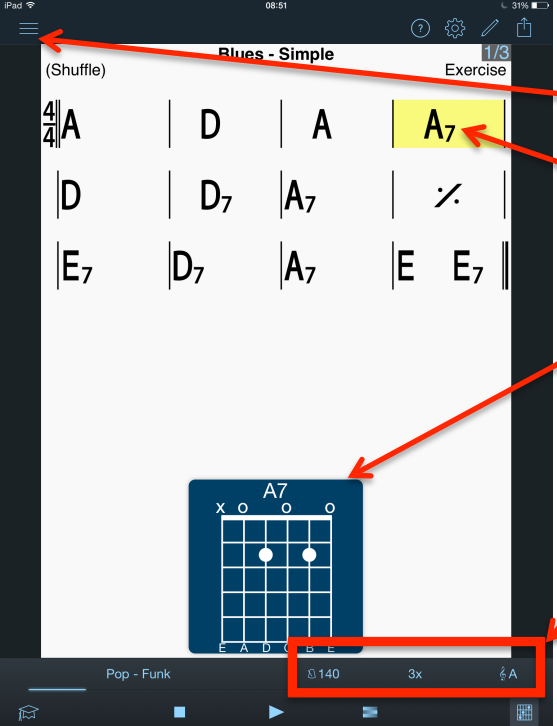
iReal Pro is a music application for iOS or Android devices. Upload a chord sequence to the display and a 'virtual band' will play the song in a key, tempo and style of your choice.

More information here: <https://irealpro.com>

In this resource, we show how **iReal Pro** 'works' – covering the essential functionality of the app. We then go on to consider how teachers might use this resource with their students, by suggesting a range of activities. These activities are not intended to be prescriptive: they can be used flexibly. These can be adapted or modified so that many will be appropriate for students from upper KS2 - KS4 and in some SEND situations.

The Interface

The diagram below explains the basic functions:



The screenshot shows the iReal Pro app interface on a tablet. The main display shows a chord progression for a song titled "Blues - Simple" in 4/4 time. The chords are: A, D, A, A7, D, D7, A7, E7, D7, A7, E, E7. The A7 chord is highlighted in yellow. A guitar fretboard diagram for A7 is shown below the chords. At the bottom, there is a control bar with a play button, a tempo of 140, a repeat of 3x, and a key signature of A. Annotations with red arrows point to various features:

- Tap the MENU icon to access the song library.
- Chords are highlighted as the song plays
- Option to display guitar/ukulele/keyboard chords or standard notation [tap icon at bottom right of screen to change display type]
- Change tempo/repeats/key here

The Activities

Creating and playing song backings

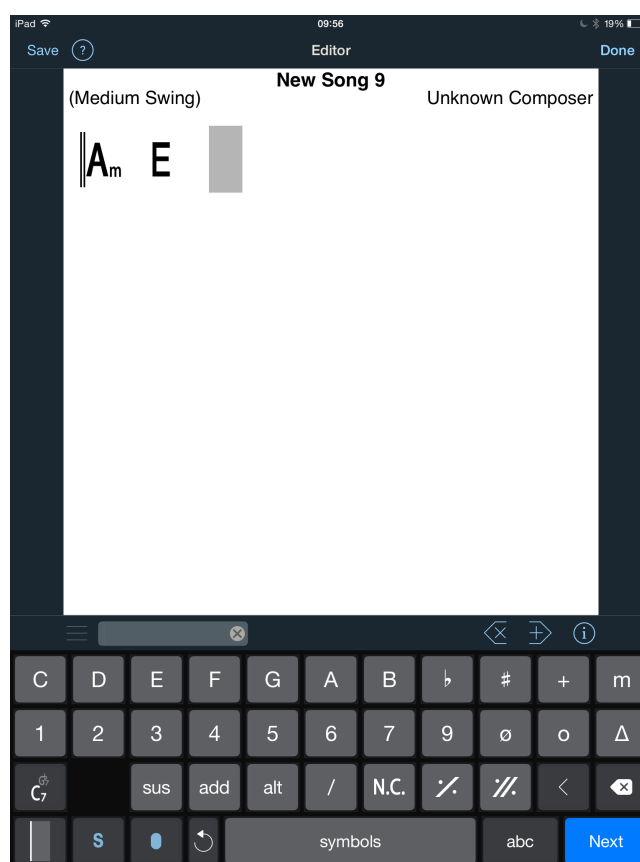
Teachers or students can find chord charts for well known songs which can be uploaded directly from the user group forum www.irealb.com/forums . Alternatively, the chords for a given song can be typed directly into a new song and saved to the Library.

To do this, click on the pencil icon at top right of screen. A blank canvas appears along with a custom 'QWERTY' keyboard so you can begin typing your sequence.

You will notice the keyboard has been specially configured for typing in chord symbols. The built in tutorials give further guidance on creating chord charts.

Of course, students can also use this for creating original songs.

Once the song has been saved, it can be played back and used as an accompaniment for rehearsing and performing.



Working with different styles

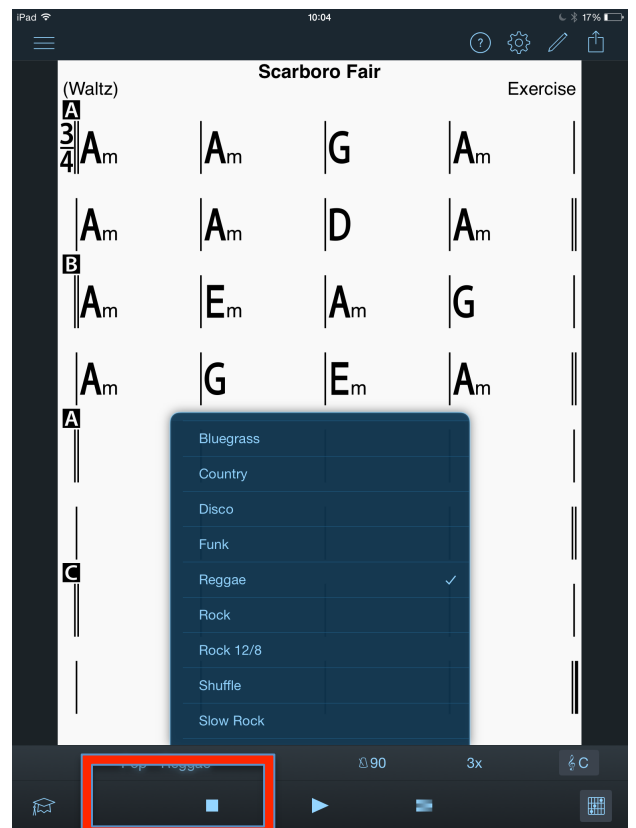
The screenshot shows the chord sequence for a classroom favourite – the folksong Scarborough Fair.

iReal Pro gives us the option to play the song back in a variety of styles

Simply tap on the style selector [highlighted in the red rectangle] to bring up a menu of available styles.

This can be a useful aid in learning about the musical features of different popular music styles and teachers can devise listening tests to work with these.

Also very useful for students wanting to work on a popular song in a different style of their choice. In this example, the students in this example are preparing to give this well known folksong a reggae treatment!

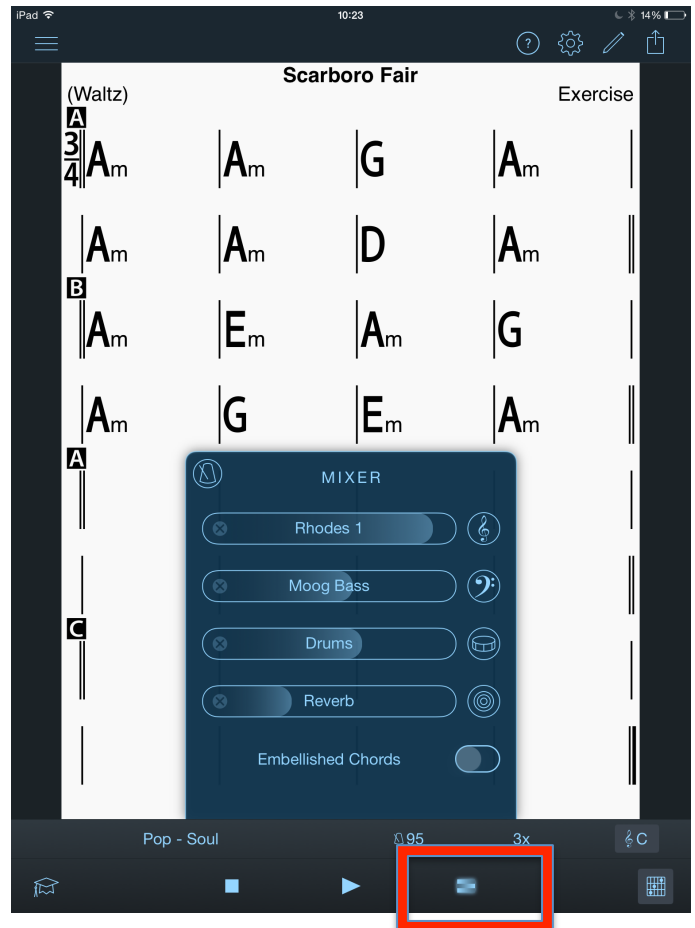


Whole class instrumental learning

This is a great app for supporting instrumental tuition, whether it is whole class, small group or self directed learning. Users simply put in a sequence of chords they are learning and set to play back at an appropriate tempo and style. Display the chords [as described above] and strum or vamp along as the display scrolls.

More advanced players might want to go further and emulate the playing styles and rhythms of specific instruments within the backing. Access the mixer controls [tap on icon shown in red box] to adjust volume levels so that an instrument in the band can be clearly heard.

This picture shows the instruments used in the style 'Pop – Soul'. Different styles will feature different instrument combinations.



Singers... and songwriting

Budding singer songwriters will find **iReal Pro** a real help in creating their songs. They can create custom backings for their songs in a variety of styles. Some may prefer to create the backing first and then begin working on the lyrics. Others will start with the words and then set about creating an accompaniment. Ideal for those who prefer working on their own – especially those who cannot vamp along a backing on guitar or piano.

Alternatively, this can be a good way to create a 'demo tape' which can be taken along to a band rehearsal.

Chord charts can be exported for printing and the backings can be saved as audio or midi files.

Developing instrumental skills

Use some of the backings in the library or create bespoke chord progressions to support working on scales and chord playing. Sections of the backing can be looped so that students can focus on working on the 'tricky' sections. The tempo can gradually be increased as playing facility improves. And of course the chart can be transposed to other keys for extended work.

Those working in jazz idioms will find **iReal Pro** particularly useful for developing improvisational skills.

Creating teaching resources

Teachers can easily prepare lesson resources to support work on a whole range of classroom activity. Here are some possibilities.

- Create backings for improvisation and melody writing assignments
- Listening tests. For example play the backing for a standard song [such as Scarborough Fair] in two different styles and ask students to compare and contrast
- Chord writing exercises using diatonic harmonies
- Create effective backings for set works for rehearsal/performance
- Export to midi so that parts can be printed using notation software
- Export to wav and import into a sequencer programme for further musical exploration. E.g. recording a vocal or instrumental solo over the top