

XBMC tutorial – how to set up XBMC to play music files downloaded from Pristine Classical.

## INTRODUCTION

### About XBMC

XBMC is an open source media player, designed to work across a wide range of platforms, including Windows; Mac OSX and Linux. It actually began life on the Xbox gaming system. XBMC is one of the few media players which can play almost every format of audio and video file you can think of – and a whole lot more you've never heard of. It's designed for use on a TV screen at a distance and is therefore ideal for use on a wide variety of platforms. It can scan and index your music and video files and is an ideal choice to run at the heart of a compute-based audio and video system.

### XBMC – an open source system

XBMC is open source – it's free and it's under constant development by teams of enthusiasts and programmers based all around the world. This means that at any point in its development there's a fully-functioning and totally stable version of XBMC which you can download and install, but if you wish to keep up with updates as they come along you can often find nightly updates available to the system – not always 100% tested, so beware. If in doubt stick to the current main release from [XBMC.org](http://XBMC.org).

This tutorial – getting started for audio replay only

Whilst XBMC will play back all your video files and control your computer's DVD player, as well as playing back your audio CDs, this tutorial is designed as a simple start-up guide for setting up XBMC to play back downloaded music files, such as the FLAC and MP3 files available here at Pristine Classical. You'll find similar principles apply to video replay, and you'll soon be setting up XBMC to show your local weather forecast or log onto the likes of YouTube for video streaming, but for now these are beyond the remit of this article – there's a huge amount of help and assistance available both in the XBMC user guide (a Wikipedia-style document available from their website) as well as at the XBMC forums.

## THE TUTORIAL

### 1 – Download and install XBMC

Connect to <http://xbmc.org> and download the software – simply select the operating system that suits your computer – for most people this means either Windows or Mac. Once you've saved it on your computer, double-click to install the software and follow the on-screen instructions.

### 2 – Run XBMC for the first time

Start up XBMC and you'll find yourself at the main page. On the left of the screen you'll find a series of main headings, including Videos, Weather, Pictures and Music. Use the arrow keys and Return or your mouse to select Music.

The screen will now move into the Music section. The first time you start XBMC you'll need to tell it where your audio files are located on your computer: Click on **Add Source** and a file browser

window will open. Select **Browse** and navigate to your main music folder – in my case I have a master folder called “Audio”, within which are hundreds of sub-folders divided into genres, composers, works, artists etc., and in this case I simply select the main Audio folder; XBMC will scan all the subfolders if you ask it to.

You can give this folder a new name for use within XBMC if you wish, otherwise just click OK and it'll be added to the list of Music folders – set up more if you have music in multiple locations such as different hard drives.

#### 1a – Play music directly from its stored location

Although XMBC's library scanning and searching facility results in a far more streamlined and powerful playback system, you can at this stage play recordings directly from their folders on your hard drive – a single click on a named folder as set up above will open it and display the audio files within. Indeed, if you have long MP3 files or similar with associated cue files XBMC will read the cues and display individual tracks in this mode. Simply point and click on a track title to start playback. However, there is a far more powerful tool at your disposal for finding and playing your music collection, as we shall see.

#### 2 – Scan the music folder

Once back at the main Music menu, right-click on your newly added folder and select **Scan item to library**. XBMC will now get to work checking all your music files, identifying artists and works, and creating an onboard library which will greatly aid your selection and searching – it's ideal for very large libraries as well as more modest collections, going online if necessary to find artwork, biographies and more. In short, a couple of quick clicks and XBMC will create for you an entire annotated and cross-referenced catalogue of your entire music collection.

#### 3 – Using Library mode

Once your music files have been scanned you can still navigate into the music directly by clicking on your main audio folder and opening subfolders, just as if you were using your computer's file system, as we have already seen.

However, far more powerful is the Library mode: If you press the left arrow button on your keyboard or roll the mouse pointer over to the left hand side of the screen you'll see a library menu open up. Here you can toggle Library mode on and off and begin a text-based search – depending on how your system is configured a range of other options may also be available here, but for now we'll stick to these.

#### 4 – Simple search

If you click on the search box on the left hand menu you can type straight into it (a double-click or return opens a search box with virtual keyboard for mouse-only operation). Typing into the search box immediately starts the operation - XBMC searches on three possible parameters: Album title, Artist name and Track title, and displays the results in that order. These are all pieces of text information called ID3 Meta-data, or more simply tags, embedded into your music files when they are created (and you can update or alter them if you need to using special tagging software).

Say for example you type in the word Symphony. After a second or two a list will appear on the right hand side of your screen listing all the albums with the word Symphony in the title – e.g. Beethoven Symphony No. 9; A Faust Symphony etc. Next you'll see artists with the word Symphony in them, eg. London Symphony Orchestra; Toscanini, NBC Symphony Orchestra etc. Finally a list of tracks with the word Symphony in the title, e.g. BEETHOVEN Symphony 1 - 1st mvt; MOZART Jupiter Symphony, 3rd mov. etc.

If you click on a track it will begin playing immediately, and when it's finished it'll move onto the next track automatically with no gap.

If you click on an album title XBMC will open the album and list the tracks, ready for playback.

If you click on an artist XBMC will open a list of all albums on which that artist appears – click on these and the tracks on that album on which your artist appears will be displayed – again, click to begin playback.

## 5 – More ways to browse and access your collection

XBMC can do a lot more than simply offer a text-based searching system. At the root of the music system lies a series of options to access your music whilst in Library mode (if you close the system down in library mode you'll start up again in the same mode – I tend to stay in Library mode all the time); Right click on your list of tracks or search results and a sub-menu pops up: choose the Go to Root option and you'll see what's on offer.

XBMC can list all the artists, albums, tracks, genres and so on in your collection. It automatically builds up lists of most recently played and most recently added music for quick access, and it charts your preferences to produce Top 100 lists of both tracks and albums. All of these choices are on offer from the root menu, and of course you can always run a text search as before from this screen.

In fact, once in Library mode, the root menu is your start point when you begin an XBMC session and select Music. It's designed to be powerful yet intuitive, and wherever you are you can return to it with a right-click.

I hope this short article has given you a few useful pointers for getting started in XBMC. I've kept it as a text-based guide because updates to XBMC may change the visual interface slightly, though the underlying system remains the same (in fact, you can change the entire look and feel of the system to suit you using the skinning feature, but this is a whole different subject!). If you click below you can download a PDF version of this text – I suggest you print this off and have it to hand when you first start using XBMC to help you find your way around.

Beyond music you'll find similar principles of searching and navigation underpinning the video replay and library system. You'll also find many other powerful and potentially useful options available to you should you wish to use them. XBMC is a vast and powerful system which is well worth getting to know. Master it and you'll not want to return to the likes of iTunes or Windows Media Player for listening to music or watching films. Best of all it's entirely non-commercial – it's not designed to try and sell you anything and it's not designed to try to push (or lock) you into using a particular system or set of proprietary file types.

And if you don't like it? Simply uninstall it and it's gone, and it didn't cost you a penny to try it out!