

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01

Listening

Key Messages

- Read the question carefully
- Illustrate points by reference to specific musical examples
- Do not repeat material used in one answer in another.

General

The spread of marks reflected a very wide ability range. At the top end candidates showed a mature understanding gained by close listening and hard work. Most had derived a great deal from some, if not all, the music they had encountered during the course.

In answering their questions, significant number of candidates needed to have read and probed what they were asked to do more carefully: some wrote about the wrong piece of music or gave the question a slant that it had not implied in order to reproduce what they had prepared. Others, perhaps over-enthusiastically, got the thrust of the question slightly skewed e.g. the many (otherwise knowledgeable) answers to question 1 which consisted almost wholly of commentaries on two separate sets of variations, without defining the process of identifying common techniques. By contrast, few candidates actually met the requirements of question 3, choosing to discuss not so much 'aspects of the music that are typical of the genre' but aspects that were typical of the classical style in general.

Handwriting: while Examiners are generously disposed towards candidates whose first language is not English and will take time to understand exactly what a candidate intends, the same approach should not be assumed towards almost illegible handwriting. If it proves impossible to decipher a word, or if the grammar of a sentence actually says the opposite of what the candidate may have intended, the candidate cannot be credited for what might have been a valid point in their mind.

Section A

On the whole there was a secure level of familiarity with the music of the Prescribed Works and most candidates were able to write fluently about it.

- 1 This was by far the most popular question in the section. A few candidates gave a vague definition, named two works and left it at that, but most had understood that explanation and illustration would be required. Some were not aware of a distinction between 'varying' and 'developing' and used the terms interchangeably. Although many were able to introduce or close their discussion by listing a number of techniques used by the composers they had studied, few traced these in a systematic way. Most candidates offered their evidence in the shape of commentaries variation by variation. The question could have been answered more succinctly by listing (as some candidates did) variation techniques and then referring briefly, by way of illustration, to specific variations rather than all of them. Only the most able succeeded in making relevant comparisons. A few very impressive answers showed a well-developed and perceptive understanding of compositional processes.

- 2 Most candidates who answered this question showed an appreciation of the character of the two pieces. Some focused almost entirely on mood, often in a rather circular way and without succeeding in pinning down what contributed to this. Some of the best answers began by identifying tempo (both slow), muted strings and lyricism. Many were able to refer to a 'conversation' or 'dialogue' (or even 'trading') between clarinet and violin in the Mozart and some contrasted this with the relationship between the orchestra as principal carrier of the main theme in the Beethoven and the solo violin's descanting or embellishing role. The best answers offered a succinct comparison of the two structures, including comparing the 'closed' ending of the Mozart with the 'open'-endedness (a reference to the transitional link) of the Beethoven movement. Here again, there were some outstandingly purposeful, clear and very full answers that succeeded in identifying all the principal significant similarities and differences between the two movements.
- 3 Relatively few candidates chose this question. Many knew that the third movement is a Menuet and Trio and that this derived from a baroque dance but the Menuet was several times likened anachronistically to a waltz - an 'oom-pah-pah' accompaniment was suggested. Most described the processes of repetition but, although 'structure' was often referred to, few were really clear in their minds or their answers about the form. The contrasts of instrumentation and texture between the Menuet and Trio were usually described quite clearly. Some candidates attached too much importance to dynamics. Although this was a very compact, straightforward movement to describe very few candidates actually wrote a 'detailed commentary' – answers were frequently patchy and disjointed.

Section B

In general candidates had coped extremely well with the large body of music that made up the Core Works. The 'theme' seemed to have appealed and most responded to the expressiveness of all three pieces with enthusiasm.

- 4 There was generally a good level of familiarity with, and appreciation of, the music. A handful of impressively-detailed answers described and discussed a wide range of examples of different techniques of word-painting. Most candidates at least mentioned it and tried to explain two or three examples, but these often lacked convincing detail and/or an adequate understanding of how each effect was achieved. Many candidates also tried to illustrate other factors that affected the 'mood' of the music such as mode, speed, accompanying instruments and dynamics. A few focused solely on instrumentation, having not understood that part of the question which specified 'the music for soloists'. Dynamics and rubato (also mentioned) are principally effects of performance, aspects of interpretation, rather than direct contributions to the composer's interpretation of the text and were not really relevant.
- 5 The small number of answers to this question were disappointing. Although most candidates had understood the principle of a song cycle, and were able to summarise the story of *Die schöne Müllerin* intelligibly, few chose valid comparator pieces and even fewer made any sustained effort to discuss them. Several ingenious comparisons were suggested with *Dido and Aeneas*. Other answers discussed musicals but rarely managed to cite any relevant features. The most convincing discussions were those that identified examples of the concept album or of pop 'opera' (such as *American Idol*) but few of these were examined in an illuminating way.
- 6 Most of the answers referred to at least one of the Core Works as one of the examples and some confined themselves (legitimately) to these, but there was actually a little more evidence than in previous sessions that examples from wider repertoire had been studied. The relevance of these other examples was very variable. Films offered good potential in discussions of the contribution that background music can make to heightening the emotional impact of visual scenes and dialogue (but candidates needed to be careful not to repeat points made here if they also answered question 9). Accounts of songs were mostly weak: in the first place because the parallels with a stage portrayal of death could not be convincingly made and, secondly, because the focus was more often on the lyrics than on the musical expression of them.

Roughly a third of the candidates chose this question: the spread of marks was wide, from 1 to 33. A few outstanding answers showed a mature appreciation of how music and drama can work together, coupled with a well-developed understanding of musical processes which were clearly described in vivid, accurate detail using appropriate musical terms.

Section C

On the whole, answers to questions in this section showed an improvement on previous sessions. They were more focused, more coherently-expressed and, in many cases, well-illustrated by references to music.

- 7 It was surprising that so few candidates chose this question, as it was one for which all candidates should have been well-prepared.

Most answers explained something about the 'patronage system' which influenced Haydn's working life and contrasted this with the freer but less secure climate in which Schubert lived. Some showed an understanding of how political, economic, social and cultural factors changed in the 50 years that separated these two composers but the opening phrase of the question - 'musical life in Vienna' - was rarely addressed head on.

- 8 The question raised issues which a great many candidates found interesting. They were all, of course, able to answer from their own experience of studying the Core Works in **Section B**. It was by far the most popular question in this section and, generally, was answered well. Most candidates addressed both aspects of the question, many drawing convincing distinctions between 'understanding' and 'appreciation'. Several identified the potential limitations of translations, some showing a mature understanding of ways in which the innate qualities of a particular language might directly influence the way it is set to music. The best answers were those that managed to introduce and discuss specific examples convincingly.

- 9 Although the question did not specify that examples must be given, the best answers were those that were able either to refer to specific films (as well as operas from the Core Works) or could explain in detail what techniques might be used to achieve specific effects. Some candidates clouded their answers by not making clear when they referred to 'music' in an opera that they had in mind the role of the orchestra. Most explained the principal difference, often described in terms such as 'background' (in films) and 'integral' (in opera and musicals), and understood the ability of music to express or heighten emotion/mood. Some perceptive answers explained the power of music to foreshadow what was about to happen, or to 'say' things that were not explicit in the dialogue (if any). *Otello* was cited in this respect, but there were also some particularly good accounts of similar roles for music in film, e.g. in Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

- 10 A satisfactory distinction between the two terms eluded the very few candidates who attempted this question. Examples were bravely cited in ways that implied some understanding but most of the time the relationship was simply asserted as 'beat and rhythm'. Only one candidate explained a relevant example successfully – a demonstration of the effect of augmentation and diminution.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/02

Practical Musicianship

Key messages

- In Elements 1 and 2 candidates should choose a range of repertoire appropriate to their ability
- Exercises submitted for Element 3 should be based on actual music, which should be identified by composer/tradition
- Each composition for Element 4 should be composed for two or more instruments/voices

General comments

There was a good overall standard of work submitted for this component with some outstanding examples of performing and composing. It was evident that most Centres had considered which elements would be appropriate to individual candidates and this enabled them to demonstrate the highest possible level of skills.

Element 1 was offered by almost all candidates. Pianists and vocalists predominated, but the full range of orchestral and popular music instruments, as well as regional instruments, such as the erhu, was also heard. The majority of candidates performed solo, or with piano accompaniment. A number of vocalists, electric and bass guitarists and drummers performed to appropriate, well-produced, backing tracks. This enabled candidates to present a performance with full instrumentation and facilitated their ability to demonstrate their stylistic understanding. Backing tracks must not include the candidate's part. Some guitarists and drummers, however, presented just their own part from a popular song without the vocal or other instrumental lines. This takes the music completely out of context and is inappropriate. Similarly, any piece which is intended to be accompanied should include the accompaniment – this may be a piano, or other reduction. Use of a backing track could be considered in such cases where live musicians are not available.

Most candidates presented a range of music suited to their capabilities, though some attempted repertoire which was both too difficult for them and of which they demonstrated little understanding. This element requires candidates to include a range of styles and most had clearly given careful thought to this aspect of their programme.

The standard of spoken introductions was, on the whole, good, with candidates showing real understanding of the music. Inclusion of a spoken introduction is a requirement for Element 1 and, without it, candidates cannot access the full range of marks in **Section E** of the assessment criteria.

Performing venues were, for the most part, appropriate, though extraneous noise from within and outside the room was sometimes evident. Every effort should be made to ensure that all candidates have a suitable environment in which to perform.

Almost all candidates who offered **Element 2** were able to demonstrate skills in two disciplines as required. Care should be taken to ensure that the repertoire chosen gives candidates an opportunity to develop and extend their skills appropriate to their own ability. Centres should also ensure that the work submitted for the two disciplines, and the nature of activities undertaken, are sufficiently different from each other.

Documentation was completed effectively by most Centre assessors. Detailed comments on all three assessments for each discipline showed how marks had been awarded and enabled Moderators to make their assessment with clear understanding of Centre intentions. Most CD/DVD recordings were well documented. Centres are reminded that DVDs are essential for ensemble performance and that individual candidates should be clearly identified.

Only a small number of candidates prepared **Element 3** and the work presented was of a good standard. This element requires candidates to submit a set of six to eight exercises demonstrating understanding of techniques in an established tradition. The work should be dated and presented in chronological order

together with a clear outline of the course undertaken – this is particularly important where the tradition studied is not western tonal harmony. The candidate's level of progress should also be shown. The exercises must be based on actual music by named composers or identified as traditional, or by region, if from folk or indigenous sources. Candidates are not expected to present full texture without any given material and at least one part should be given throughout. The course should give candidates an opportunity to develop their understanding of ONE established tradition. Whatever the chosen tradition, the work submitted should be carefully notated and marks should be awarded for the accuracy of the notation.

There were some outstanding compositions presented for **Element 4** and almost all candidates selected genres and instrumentation with which they were fully familiar. The contrasting nature of the two pieces enabled candidates to demonstrate a range of invention and composing technique in writing for at least two instruments/voices. Scores were, generally, accurately produced with appropriate detail enabling the full range of marks to be accessed. Submission of a written commentary giving details of the composition process is an acceptable alternative to a score for this component and some candidates found this a more suitable way to demonstrate their intentions. A number of candidates were able to submit live recordings of their compositions, while others presented well-edited sequenced versions. Some created very successful renditions by playing one part live over a synthesised recording of the remaining parts.

Most Centres submitted all the necessary paperwork for the component as a whole and provided CD/DVD recordings of good quality. Centres are advised to check CD/DVDs very carefully before they are despatched ensuring that all relevant items are included and that each complete track/file plays correctly.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/03
Performing

Key messages

- The recorded balance between candidate and accompaniment/backing track should be checked prior to the performance
- Content of CDs/DVDs should be verified before submission

General comments

There was a pleasing level of work submitted for this component with all candidates performing to at least a good standard. Candidates had made appropriate choices of repertoire ensuring that they were able to demonstrate the range of skills required by this component. A range of music was chosen with candidate focus including Mozart opera, post punk and new wave music, Debussy *Children's Corner Suite*, jazz standards, and Baroque sonatas.

The best spoken introductions gave details of the chosen style and specific examples of how this was reflected in each of the pieces performed. Care should be taken to ensure that introductions focus on the music as some vocalists merely related the content/mood of the lyrics and thus could not be credited for their understanding of the music itself.

Centres provided competent accompanists and suitable venues for the performance to take place. Backing tracks were used to good effect where appropriate live musicians were not available. There were, however, some instances where the lack of balance between candidate and backing track/accompanist was detrimental to the overall performance. It is advisable to record a short excerpt and listen to it back to ensure that the *recorded* balance is appropriate before the examination performance begins.

A few candidates, particularly, but not exclusively, electric guitarists, performed their individual part solo, without the inclusion of the other vocal/instrumental parts needed to make the piece complete. This takes the music out of context and prevents the candidate from fully demonstrating stylistic understanding of their chosen repertoire.

Most Centres presented their candidates' work on CDs or DVDs of good quality and all had taken care to ensure that individual candidates could be readily identified. There were some instances where the submitted recordings were incomplete or contained duplicate material – careful checking is essential. On a few DVD recordings, candidates' fingers/instruments were obscured by their music stand, so this should be taken into account when positioning the camera.

The majority of Centres submitted the work in a manner that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork as well as copies of the music to be performed.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/04
Composing

Report to Centres

This report has as its focus the positive achievement of candidates who submitted portfolios of composition for the May/June 2012 session. In addition, comments relating to the nature of the work and its assessment will enable Centres to prepare candidates effectively in the future.

Administration

The majority of Centres/candidates presented their work with care and attention to detail in the labelling of CDs and written materials; this allows ease of access for Examiners and enables a clear demonstration by candidates of the skills and knowledge acquired whilst working on this component

Centres are reminded that CD presentation of recordings should always be playable on conventional hi-fi rather than a disc of AIFF files, for example, playable only on a computer. Any discs that are dependent on specific software cannot be universally accessed on computers. Occasionally faulty discs were supplied. It is always essential to check the recordings before they are dispatched with portfolios.

General Comments

Examiners saw a wider variety of submissions in regard to the choice of Medium. Whilst the majority of candidates enjoy working with traditional western acoustic instruments, several submissions included consideration of genuine electronic or mixed media approaches; in addition the use of indigenous instruments and styles was also welcome and frequently enabled candidates to compose with a sense of familiarity and security in their instrumental choices.

Materials

The initial responses of candidates to the task set - with the potential for many personal choices regarding style and structure as well as medium – lead to the shaping of a range of Materials within a variety of frameworks.

Some indication of the range of successful submissions is outlined:

- Compositions with a strong 'world music' influence such as Latin American
- Composing for a single harmonic instrument, often piano, following a programmatic outline
- Extended compositions for instrumental combinations in which electric guitar and drum kit feature strongly
- Music with a strong rock, jazz or popular ballad influence
- Collections of songs
- Music stimulated by story telling
- Music formulated as a response to a cinematic fantasy or computer game stimulus

Use of Materials and Structure

Those candidates who had chosen to allocate time to shaping several contrasting ideas fared well. The length of composition required demands well-formed ideas with the potential for extension, development and/or transition. In particular, successful outcomes were observed when the melodies or rhythmic ideas, for example, were particularly suited to the tempi and the instruments chosen, displaying an understanding of the idiomatic qualities as well as the more unusual possibilities for using instruments or voices.

Candidates must be clear about their choice of harmonic language. Candidates who were not naturally disposed towards jazz idioms, for example, were able to gain considerable credit if they had taken time to absorb the vocabulary required and were able to demonstrate confidence in the handling of language. Candidates whose harmonic constructions lacked consistency or integrity fared less well in assessment.

For those whose choice of language was tonality, a demonstration of understanding of the importance and function of modulation was essential for a piece of 8 minutes' duration. A piano piece in three movements that showed attention to themes and textures, for example, but nevertheless remained in C minor throughout, scored less well than if a broader palette had been demonstrated including the techniques required to move from one pitch area to another. For those candidates working in a minimalist style, the gradual transformations and attention to a range of subtle changes in pitch, rhythm, timbral and textural matters, reaped positive rewards.

Some candidates explained that their ideas had been influenced by film or computer game visuals. These were sometimes less successful when candidates had not given real consideration to whether the music was able to exist independently for a listener with no access to the intended visuals. Successful cinematic compositions were those where the candidate ensured detailed musical working and an understanding that presentation of a 'stand alone' score, independent of the intended visuals was important in order to maximise marks under the assessment criteria.

Candidates who submitted a composition in several movements or sections, or who submitted a group of songs were often able to demonstrate an understanding of the balance of contrast and continuity within an overall structure. The conscious breaking down of an 8-minute piece into workable sections, especially when submitting a single work, was a successful strategy to employ.

Use of Medium and Texture

Those candidates using computer programmes to compose and work with their ideas were in the majority but real success was evident in those candidates whose skills of 'inner ear' function were demonstrated alongside technological aptitude. This is particularly important where candidates who are writing for acoustic instruments need to understand the idiomatic potential of instruments, not simply in terms of pitch range, for example, but with regard to practicalities of bowing, breathing and the sonic implications of combinations of timbres. Candidates who could 'hear in their head' demonstrably produced ideas and work of greater insight and sophistication.

Some compositions successfully combined electronic forces with acoustic ones, giving attention to the balance and creative potential of this use of medium.

Successful candidates choosing to work with large orchestral forces were those who had studied techniques of orchestration and understood the issues of texture and balance in the combining of different groups of instruments.

Notation and Presentation

Candidates took care with the presentation of composing ideas in scores written using software or by hand. The level of accuracy in notation was generally good with regard to pitch and rhythm but as in previous years, candidates were less meticulous in performance detail such as bowing, phrasing, articulation and tempi marks.

Those candidates able to present recordings using live elements, particularly in songs, showed a commitment and determination that was credit-worthy. A non-edited sequenced recording can convey relatively little of the expressive aspects of the composer's intention. Candidates, who do not have the resources to produce a 'live' recording, nevertheless gained considerable credit where recordings were edited with regard to producing as musical an outcome as possible.

Concluding Remarks

It has been encouraging to witness the work of candidates who have embraced the creative challenges and possibilities in this composing unit and the general level of engagement is a credit to Centres and candidates alike.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/05

Investigation and Report

Key messages

- Reading needs to be assimilated and understood; the music to which the reading refers needs to be listened to at first-hand.
- Judgements about the music should be supported by precise reference to musical examples.

General comments

Many Reports benefited from being accompanied by CDs of appropriate examples. One, in particular, was made up of a considerable number of carefully-selected extracts that successfully demonstrated all the significant aspects of the development of the genre discussed. The extracts were brief – not complete pieces – but designed to be exactly long enough to make their point, and efficiently cross-referenced to the relevant place in the text. Candidates who also gave precise timing references to the significant events in their CDs of extracts strengthened the force of their evidence considerably.

On the other hand, there were a number of assiduously-researched submissions which showed plenty of reading but little listening. Some Reports were, effectively, little more than a synthesis of this reading. There was little convincing evidence that the information had been assimilated. Candidates need to be warned against reproducing accounts of pieces of music, or of composers' characteristics, from printed or website sources without themselves then seeking out examples of the music, listening, understanding and earning the right to quote these observations supported by their own personal understanding. Some candidates had enclosed their own rough notes made as they read. These threw useful light on the extent to which sources had been understood and the knowledge then applied to the listening.

Candidates are required to demonstrate a link with their other component, Performing or Composing. As has been noted in earlier sessions, those whose link is with a composition have often listened more perceptively and closely to a far wider range of appropriate repertoire than whose link is with their recital. In general, these candidates also demonstrated more mature analytic skills and a better grasp of technical language.

If the link was with a recital programme then it needs to be stressed yet again that it should have been interpreted as a springboard for an enquiry into a specific aspect that was explored both widely and in depth. Several of the Reports devoted too much space to superficial commentaries on the pieces that had been performed. Others gave thumbnail sketches of the history of large genres or whole styles – these were usually too broad for candidates to be able to demonstrate close personal familiarity with a sufficient range of the relevant repertoire. For the process of 'investigation' to have been worthwhile it should be felt by the candidate to have had an impact on their understanding and interpretation.

Presentation: practice with regard to acknowledgements was variable. Some candidates were well-acquainted with scholarly conventions and used them skilfully. A small number of candidates gave no bibliography or discography at all. It was helpful to the Examiners when pages were numbered.