

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

Listening

General comments

Candidates had been carefully prepared in their study of the Prescribed and Core Works for **Sections A** and **B** and were able to write well and relevantly about them. Although there was more evidence this session that candidates had studied a wider range of music, they were still less confident and detailed in their references to it, which showed through in many **Section C** answers. Nonetheless, really weak overall performances were very rare and there was a pleasing increase in the proportion of high-scoring candidates.

Section A

- 1 This was by far the most popular question in this Section and candidates generally structured their answer in an orderly way, variation by variation. Most were able to say which instrument played the theme in each variation and many had understood the difference between homophony and polyphony and were able to identify the use of both. The best answers were also able to discuss the effect on timbre of changes in pitch. Some recognised the role of the viola as bass in Variation III. There were two recurring misunderstandings: **(i)** about 'keys', the most common being that the movement began in C major (the key of the whole quartet, not of this movement which is in G) - this information was not, in any case, crucial to a discussion of texture; **(ii)** about Haydn's notated ornaments, i.e. that their use was part of the 'texture'.
- 2 There was a widespread conception that the orchestra for Beethoven's slow movement was much bigger than Mozart's. This may well have been true, in terms of numbers of performers, in recordings that candidates had heard, but the only difference in scoring was the presence of an additional flute and two clarinets in the woodwind section (details which were never mentioned). The frequent reference to the use of 'percussion' suggested that the focus was not always clearly on the second movements. Many of the points made were, indeed, generic to the concertos as a whole and could not be substantiated by convincing references to the second movement. Several candidates thought the Mozart movement was in 3/4 time – perhaps a mishearing of the triplet accompaniment? Very few made any reference to the link to the third movement in Beethoven's concerto.

In a few answers the comparisons were set out in a tabulated form, using the headings suggested in the question, to show in parallel columns how each composer handled them. This helped candidates order their thoughts without inhibiting them from describing relevant details and writing expressively. Few candidates appreciated the song-like character of the Mozart movement or could contrast this with the more instrumental conception of the Beethoven. Recognisable accounts of structure were rare. Some candidates asserted a difference of approach in terms of Classical and Romantic styles – the very best of them were able to exemplify this.

- 3 Only a small number of candidates chose this question and, although none of the answers was truly weak, the level of response was generally disappointing. The Schubert symphony offered the most accessible examples, particularly its first movement where both the conventional model and possible deviations from it could be explained, but answers that cited this were often far too general to be convincing. The first movements of the Mozart and Beethoven concertos required a reference to the principle of a repeated exposition: without this understanding it became almost impossible to demonstrate any typical recapitulation features later in the movement.

Section B

It became clear that the 'Core Works' had been studied almost as thoroughly as the 'Prescribed Works': many answers (to **Questions 4 and 6**) gave very detailed commentaries on the Penderecki piece. It was pleasing to note the widespread high level of appreciation expressed for these pieces. Rigorous 'analysis', however, though it is a useful tool for helping candidates map their way around these works, is not the principal focus of this Section. If candidates use the Core Works as their examples they are expected to be able to range more widely across them, to have an overall grasp of what they are about, and to be able to discuss them more discursively, ideally, also, in relation to wider repertoire.

- 4 This was by far the most popular question, which attracted some very good answers. A pleasing proportion of candidates had studied a range, albeit small, of very different repertoire and a wide variety of music (from Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Holst to international and regional popular music) was referred to. Many, however, focused almost the whole of their attention on the Penderecki, describing in great detail all the string techniques employed in the *Threnody*. The more perceptive answers recognised that their interpretations were only personal possibilities, others were too concrete in associating individual sounds with very specific images.

A few candidates also tried to discuss music for voices on the grounds that they, too, are 'instruments', a potentially valid standpoint but not as usually demonstrated in these answers.

- 5 Only a handful of candidates chose this question. Most answers showed a broad understanding of what the question asked for and were able to describe more or less what happens in each section of the movement. Few, however, were able to distinguish clearly and accurately between the different vocal roles and support their points with references to convincing details.
- 6 Several candidates reflected on a wide range of historical and geographical contexts, including some who wrote pertinently from first-hand experience of oppression. Many answers expressed thoughtful, sometimes mature, views but only those who also took care to discuss the music of their examples (not just cite titles or gloss the lyrics) fully met the Assessment Criteria. Familiarity with a wide range of popular song was evident, though some candidates turned to the Penderecki for their principal example.

Section C

Questions 8 and 9 were the most popular, with very few candidates choosing **Question 7**.

- 7 The general line of development was understood and some pertinent comparisons were made between early pianos and harpsichords but solid information was scarce. Only one candidate was able to be precise about comparative pitch ranges and construction.
- 8 The question asked for an 'explanation', which many answers failed to supply. Although an understanding was often implied by the way examples were described, many candidates gave the impression that they thought it was simply a way of expressing 'how you feel'. Most were careful to refer to two contrasting traditions, often the concertos of Mozart and Beethoven that had been studied and jazz or rock. The best answers were able to make a distinction between the nature of improvisation in a classical cadenza and that in a blues solo, some even going on to suggest what is most effective and appropriate in each genre. One candidate identified the improvisatory element in figured bass. A few showed some awareness of the Indian classical tradition.
- 9 Candidates were able to answer knowledgeably about current access to music from their own experience. Although most attempted to contrast this with the eighteenth century, very few were clear about issues such as patronage or printing. The large role of record label companies in promoting bands was understood, but how this affects the kinds of music produced was rarely discussed. A commonly-expressed view was that, unlike eighteenth-century musicians, composers and performers are now entirely 'free' to perform what they like: in crude terms, aristocratic patronage was seen as a bad thing, record company contracts as wholly benign. Few candidates were able to support these views by reference to actual instances.

- 10 The standard of the answers to this question was generally disappointing. Most candidates answered in terms of how the performer 'feels' about the music 'on the day'. A few referred to the need to understand stylistic conventions but this point was never developed or convincingly exemplified. The issue of 'authenticity' was never mentioned. Some answered the question from the standpoint of composers 'interpreting' a programme or text. The best, and most musically-informed, discussions were ones about 'cover' versions.

MUSIC

Paper 8663/06

Investigation and Report

The overall standard of the Reports in this session was rather disappointing: the evidence that candidates had undertaken sustained musical Investigation was weak. This component accounts for 25% of the total marks for the A Level 9703 award, and 50% for the AS 8663: the amount of work done (crudely, the time given to it) and the application of more highly-developed musical skills should equal that in each of the other components.

Candidates for the A Level are required to show a link with the Performing or Composing component they are also taking. No-one failed to make their link clear but too many interpreted it as an occasion for simply a more extended programme note or for an account of preparation for the Recital and/or difficulties encountered. A much more rigorous form of musical investigation is required, one that extends the candidate's knowledge and understanding, and develops their listening and analytic skills. That this is possible was demonstrated by one candidate who showed highly-developed aural and analytic perception in relation to close examination of his performance pieces in commentaries, that were both tightly focused and detailed as well as informed by an impressively wide understanding of a great deal of other relevant repertoire. A handful of candidates who had extended their listening by seeking out two or three recordings of their pieces could have learned more by comparing relevant aspects of these interpretations.

Some candidates had, indeed, understood that their recital or composition was the starting-point for the investigation, not its sole focus, and welcomed the opportunity to explore their repertoire more widely: some focused on one of the composers, others on a genre. In the case of the first, the right approach was sometimes let down by insufficiently-developed analytic skills. When advising candidates about choice of topic and appropriate methodology for investigating it, perhaps teachers should also consider what additional skills they might need to acquire, or how far their existing ones need to be strengthened if they are to carry off the work successfully. Although the component is one that calls for independent study this does not preclude whole-class courses to develop aural and analytic skills being taught alongside.

Other candidates, who had chosen to take a wider 'historical' view, or wanted to discuss a more socio-cultural aspect of their repertoire, had perhaps overlooked the extent to which listening skills figure in the Assessment Criteria. Particularly in the case of popular song or 'musicals' topics, there was a tendency to focus too much on the meaning of lyrics. Several Reports included no audio examples at all: perhaps candidates had assumed that the Examiners of this component would be marking it at the same time as their recital? This is not the case and the Report should be able to stand and be judged on its merits alone. Although some candidates went to a great deal of trouble to incorporate and cross-reference their carefully chosen examples, others casually directed their Examiner to youtube clips: the report should be self-sufficient and include within itself all necessary musical examples, audio or MS. If audio examples are recorded onto a CD, they need to be carefully referenced within the body of the text (and, preferably, accessible via ordinary stereo playback facilities, not PC only). It would also be helpful if the pages could be numbered.

