

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01

Listening

General comments

Section A

Although fewer candidates chose **Question 2** their answers were nearly all of a high standard. **Question 3** also attracted some good answers but the range of marks for the most popular question (**Question 1**) was very wide, with comparatively fewer really successful answers. This question attracted candidates who would prove to be insecure throughout the paper and there were some disappointingly low marks for it.

Close familiarity with the Prescribed Works is essential to this section of the paper: there is no reward for generalities unsubstantiated by reference to relevant examples in the music. On the whole, candidates were most secure when invited to give straight commentaries that follow the events in the music. Even when they know the music well they find it hard to select and describe specific examples, the first hurdle being to locate them in a recognisable way. Some candidates referred to CD timings: this was not acceptable, because no two recordings will be exactly the same. All the Prescribed Works in this section were in standard classical forms for which common shorthand terms could be used and more candidates should have been able to use these as reference points in their discussions.

Standards of expression: Examiners appreciate that many candidates were writing in their second language and full allowance is made for this - provided that the meaning is clear, odd spellings or awkward grammatical constructions need not be an issue. But all candidates (this applies equally to those for whom English is their first language) should learn, and be careful to spell correctly, the names of composers and the titles of their music.

Question 1

The principal difference – that Beethoven's orchestra was actually larger than Mozart's – was widely understood and some candidates contrasted the nature of the sound in vivid and sometimes subtle language. But only a few were able to list accurately how the 'larger/smaller' orchestras were made up. These were often the ones who were also able to explain the differences in sonority in terms of pitch-ranges, timbres and textures, although surprisingly few showed any awareness of doubling techniques or common *tutti* effects. Several candidates' answers were confined almost entirely to discussion of differences in dynamic markings (more appropriate to **Question 9**). Some wasted time and space on irrelevant, usually biographical, information.

Question 2

Candidates wrote very full and accurate accounts of Variation IV with a clear focus on the piano part and its relationship with the other instruments. More comparisons were made with Variations II and III than with any of the others. Although they generally wrote in less detail about their chosen comparison variations, several candidates convincingly sketched three distinct roles for the piano: as the bearer of the theme; as an accompaniment; as an active participant in a dialogue. The original song had clearly captured the imagination of many candidates but their attempts to relate specific moments in the variations to events in the song were irrelevant to the question.

Question 3

Most candidates chose the first movements of the two symphonies to illustrate their answers. Some distinguished well between symphonic and concerto practices. All were secure in their understanding of the basic outline and main principles of Sonata Form and some of the commentaries were impressively detailed.

Section B

There was a noticeable trend for candidates to refocus the questions so that they could write enthusiastically about aspects of the Core Works that they particularly enjoyed. While **Questions 5** and **6** were framed in a relatively open way, they were not invitations to 'say everything you know about' e.g. Penderecki's *Threnody*. Only a few candidates referred to other repertoire (in **Questions 5** and **6**): where they did, it always strengthened the communication of their understanding of the thrust of the question.

Question 4

Disappointingly few candidates answered this question and even fewer made any real attempt to address it wholeheartedly. Most answers were loosely-focused, or spent too much time explaining the other sections of the movement. Most had understood Owen's general meaning and were clearly very sympathetic to its 'message' but few were able to illustrate specific ways in which Britten's music interpreted it. Only two candidates made the obvious point that the setting is unmetered: none seemed to have understood the vocal lines as a type of recitative.

Question 5

Many candidates liked the idea of this question but, when it came to it, found that they could only speak about the Penderecki (though some managed to smuggle in references to both of the choral works). Although they gave very full, detailed accounts of the innovative techniques used, they found it hard to demonstrate how these contributed to the expression of 'aggression' or 'peacefulness' rather than simply 'suffering'. A wider range of listening and more reflection were necessary as preparation for such a question. A few candidates showed their awareness of the need to broaden the discussion with brief references to film scores, popular music or African traditional music but only a few were sufficiently developed to be wholly convincing.

Question 6

Many candidates took it for granted that, because they had chosen to talk about passages with evocative text, that the relevant points would be almost self-evident. While there was a great deal of appreciative descriptive writing, much of it avoided grappling directly with choral techniques. A few answers stood out, with clear explanations of the handling of metre, tonality, word-painting and fugal textures. One enlarged the scope of her answer, very successfully, by an equally analytical discussion of a traditional African choral piece.

Section C

It is a pity that candidates again appeared to be rushed at this point in the examination. Several answers began promisingly but rapidly tailed off into undeveloped generalities or even stopped abruptly.

Question 7

This was the least favoured of the questions in this section. Although candidates had some difficulty pinning down what 'classical' means in terms of Western traditions, most were very clear about its meaning in relation to African, Indian and Japanese traditions. Discussion of social and cultural context was often lacking.

Question 8

Most candidates understood well the principal features of Haydn's working life but many made wildly over-generalised comparisons between the realities of 'patronage' in the 18th century and current practices with recording contracts. A few had thought through the practical differences in terms of the range and level of skills needed in both situations.

Question 9

There was a clear division between those candidates who understood the term well and could illustrate its use by reference to a range of relevant examples and others who had only a vague idea of what it referred to. Some of the latter tried to discuss what they thought makes a piece of music 'dynamic', others strayed into explanations of articulation signs, tempo markings and performing instructions.

Question 10

A wide range of religious traditions was covered. Some answers were well-organised and gave a clear explanation of the occasions for music, distinguishing between sung texts and traditional instrumental usages. Most showed a sense of personal commitment but found it difficult to tease out the role of music in their own religion e.g. the narration of sacred texts and instruction of the people, expressions of worship or thankfulness, or an aid to reflection/meditation. Very few offered any musical examples at all.

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| <p>Paper 9703/02 Practical Musicianship</p> |
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General comments

The overall standard achieved by candidates in this Paper was good, with some outstanding performances and compositions produced. All candidates had prepared thoroughly for this component of the examination and many displayed genuine enjoyment in their work. Many Centres offered candidates the opportunity to work to their strengths with varied elements being submitted within individual Centres.

All candidates offered **Element 1** (Performance) and most performed to a creditable level. The majority of candidates presented repertoire which was appropriate to their technical skills and understanding and only very few, mainly singers, chose pieces which were for the moment, beyond their technical ability. The criteria for assessment look for accuracy, technical control, aural awareness and stylistic understanding and there is little to be gained from the performance of music which is too challenging for the individual concerned. Centres should also consider the genre of music chosen by candidates. Some singers gave excellent performances of two jazz songs, for example, only to be let down by their lack of technical expertise in a classical aria.

Candidates were skilfully accompanied where applicable and Centres had gone to considerable lengths to provide suitable venues for the performances.

The standard of spoken introductions was much improved this year with candidates showing real understanding of the music. Most gave short, but well focused, introductions, while others spoke in more depth. Preparation for this part of the examination is a valuable exercise in thinking in detail about the pieces.

All four options from **Element 2** were offered this year. Most candidates showed progress during the course and the majority of assessors made detailed comments about the interim and final assessments. Centres are reminded that recordings of all assessments should be submitted. A wide variety of ensembles were heard from trios and quartets to orchestra, bands and choirs. A number of pianists and guitarists demonstrated their accompanying skills, and improvisations ranged from those in a jazz style – both solo and ensemble – to one which displayed a wide range of cello techniques. The scope of experiences offered by Centres certainly brought out the best in candidates.

More candidates presented compositions for **Element 4** this year and a good overall standard was maintained across a variety of styles and genres. Assessors applied the assessment criteria accurately and completed the paperwork in an organised fashion. Most candidates produced clear, well written scores, some hand-written, some using notation software. Many were able to make live recordings of their compositions, while other submissions were computer generated. All were of a good standard and some recordings were outstanding.

While the bulk of compositions demonstrated a good level of understanding of techniques and instruments, there were some inconsistencies noted:

- Some compositions were too long for the amount of material they contained – excessive repetition is unlikely to improve the mark achieved
- Some candidates who worked at the computer and produced computer generated recordings, did not pay sufficient attention to the range and performing conventions of their chosen instruments. For example, some woodwind parts continued for many bars without pause for breath, the speed of some string parts would have required better than virtuosic players, and solo flute parts were asked to play chords.

The most successful compositions were those which were written for instruments with which the candidate was really familiar.

For the component as a whole, Centres are reminded of the need to ensure all paperwork (the working marksheets for each element, the summary sheet, the MS1 computer sheet) is enclosed with the submission. This is essential if Moderators are to be able correctly to interpret the marks awarded by Centre assessors.

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Paper 9703/03
Performing

General comments

All candidates were well prepared and performed to a pleasing standard. Most candidates seemed to have relished the opportunity to present an extended programme of music. All recitals were of an appropriate length. Some candidates performed in front of an audience and all were ably accompanied, where applicable. Much time had clearly been spent in preparation with accompanists, thus giving candidates a real opportunity to do their best in the examination.

Considerable thought had gone into choice of repertoire with all candidates selecting a suitable focus for their performance. Beethoven and Chopin featured among the romantic composers heard and there were a number of renditions of twentieth century popular songs. Greater attention had been placed on the link between the focus and the chosen repertoire than in previous examination sessions and Centres are to be commended for this.

Candidates are required to give a short, spoken introduction to their performance. This should describe the overall focus and show how it is reflected in each item. Some candidates had gained a real insight into the music through careful preparation of their introductions, while others merely listed the pieces they were about to perform. The content of the spoken introduction is assessed in **Section E** of the assessment criteria – Stylistic Understanding – and the full range of marks cannot be accessed if no detail about the music is given.

All CDs, DVDs, and videos were of good quality, were well packaged and most Centres submitted copies of the chosen repertoire as required.

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Paper 9703/04
Composing

General comments

This report is a response to composing submitted for examination; it aims also to give guidance to teachers who are preparing candidates for future examinations.

In general, composition portfolios were submitted in accordance with requirements and it was pleasing to see candidates with a particular interest in composition, rising to and enjoying the challenges this component provides.

Specific Comments

The range of musical language and styles represented in this year's submissions was encouraging. Candidates had understood the implications of a course that expects them to draw upon their own listening experiences as well as the extensive, in-depth study of works in connection with other components of the course. In commentaries accompanying the composition, candidates also referred to their experiences as performers in both a solo and ensemble capacity that had had significant impact on their work.

Materials

Whilst many candidates were able to shape initial ideas with apparent ease, for example: harmonic 'turn arounds', melodies with accompaniment, rhythmic bass lines, they were less able to continue with these materials and develop them in a systematic way. Openings were impressive but then failed to go on to sustain the interest of the listener. Some candidates replaced ideas with fresh ones almost as soon as they had been stated. In some work, the creation of a harmonic texture or figuration provided the sole, unrelieved content of a lengthy section of the work.

Use of Materials

Candidates demonstrated that they understood the principles of variation, particularly when applied to the use of instruments. They were able to transfer material to a different timbre or register or use rhythmic variation of harmonies in a number of different contexts. Many, however, were less confident to work organically with their ideas and truly develop and extend basic materials. Whilst the time honoured techniques of extension, diminution, augmentation etc. might be a useful starting point for experimenting with melodic growth, it is clear that such working may best be done as preliminary tasks before candidates embark upon their main project. The more opportunity a candidate has to make several attempts at the construction of a melodic theme following an introductory opening section, for example, the more likely it is that an idea of quality will emerge.

Structure

A significant number of candidates chose to adopt a programme which functioned either as a backdrop to the formulation of ideas or as a direct means of shaping a structure upon which to 'hang' their musical thoughts. One composition used the geographical and psychological association of journeys and childhood experiences as a prompt; another was more directly structured around 'The Seven Stages of Life'.

Many candidates found the composing of eight minutes of music something of a challenge. Some found success when they approached their compositions as a series of shorter, related 'movements'. Their pieces displayed sophistication and they handled the programmatic content in a commendably mature way. Similarly those candidates who sought to produce a through-composed piece were most successful when they understood the need for careful planning of how the 'building blocks' could be assembled and connected in a wider context. They also gave attention to the expressive shape of the piece as a whole, ensuring a convincing sense of movement toward a climax for example, or allowing for a gentle ebb and flow of tension and release as the work progressed.

Use of Medium and Texture

Candidates who restricted their forces to smaller ensembles were more successful than those who used a full orchestral line-up. In this regard, perhaps the use of Notation software, which so easily presents a ready-made orchestral or full band template, is too great a temptation to resist. Candidates should not, however, underestimate the skills of orchestration needed to handle such large forces and would in most cases need a great deal of teacher directed study with scores and recordings to fully understand how to work with more complex timbral combinations. Some candidates were successful at constructing ensemble textures, which were highly idiomatic but were less successful in exploiting the full potential of instruments as soloists within the wider context. This requires consideration, not only of the range of the instrument but also the particular characteristics often associated with that timbre. An oboe, for example, is commonly understood to be admirably suited to slow mournful melodies in the minor key, but it is also well within the grasp of players to reproduce neat rapid tonguing, characteristic of jaunty or even humorous rhythmic motifs and extended passages. A bass guitar can methodically map the lower contours of a keyboard part but it is also capable of a characterful part in its own right, taking the role of soloist at appropriate moments.

Notation and Presentation

Some scores were presented in hand written format, others used composition software; both are equally acceptable. Many submissions contained a good level of performance detail although occasionally important information such as an initial tempo marking or direction was completely missing. The function of phrasing and articulation seems to present difficulties to many candidates and again, some preliminary exercises might help develop candidates' awareness and understanding.

Some compositions were only partially notated. In such cases it is imperative that candidates explain fully in an accompanying commentary whether or not the 'improvised' part is in the hands of the composer. Candidates should aim to notate their work in a way that is consistent with the style of composition presented, giving as much detail as possible for performers at a future time who may wish to reproduce the work. It was disappointing when candidates were not able to present a performance of their pieces. This might have been for practical reasons but candidates should always bear in mind how much of value can be learned by working with 'live' instruments. Not only is it exciting to hear one's own composition performed but it is also a vital opportunity to appraise the work - a chance for the composer to amend and refine their ideas. Many a professional composer has hastily made changes for the better to their score, having benefited from hearing the work in rehearsal.

Some candidates produced recordings of live performances that communicated their ideas vividly and are to be commended for their conscientious approach. Several sequenced recordings submitted were not well balanced, had only approximations of the sounds they intended to represent and at best conveyed the composer's intentions in an unambiguous but rather bland way. Centres are reminded that as the recording is part of the assessment document, candidates should take responsibility for the oversight of its production at every step of the process.

Concluding Remarks

The Examiner has observed a pleasing measure of improvement in the quality of submissions this year. The difficulties candidates exhibit in terms of producing a musically satisfying structure with ideas that can be sustained within a musical presentation lasting a minimum of eight minutes, however, remains. The provision of shorter preliminary composing tasks that focus on particular skills and techniques would ultimately bear fruit and allow candidates to work in an efficient way once immersed in the main task. Such preliminary efforts are never wasted and indeed may hold the key to equipping candidates with the palette of skills required for extended composition at A Level.