

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01

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.

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<p>Paper 9703/02 Practical Musicianship</p>

General comments

There was a good standard of work produced for this Component with most candidates having prepared thoroughly for the various Elements. However, there were fewer outstanding performances and compositions than in previous sessions with some very able candidates not paying as much attention to detail as they might have done.

Almost all candidates offered **Element 1**. The majority of candidates presented appropriate repertoire that allowed them to perform to the best of their ability and which demonstrated their technical skill and understanding, thus enabling them to access the full range of assessment criteria. Singers and pianists predominated, but there were many able drummers, guitarists, string and wind players. Most Centres were able to provide appropriate accompanists and suitable venues, though a few candidates were disturbed by extraneous noise from both within and outside the performance room.

The standard of spoken introductions was, on the whole good, with candidates showing real understanding of the music. Most gave short, but well focused, introductions, while others spoke in more depth. However, a number of candidates gave no introduction, or merely named their pieces. The introduction puts the forthcoming programme of music into context for their audience and the Examiners, and its relevance and extent to which its context is reflected in the performance is assessed in **section E** of the assessment criteria.

Centres are reminded that the performance for Element 1 should be completed on a single occasion and that copies of the music performed should be enclosed with the submission.

For **Element 2**, the majority of candidates had worked hard on their two chosen disciplines and Centres had taken considerable trouble to produce detailed comments on the working marksheets, giving a clear insight into the reasoning behind how the marks had been awarded. Submissions were clearly documented and there were audio/video recordings of all three assessments for each discipline.

Where this did not occur, there were several problems:

- Working marksheets not submitted or not completed
- CDs with no track list, making it difficult to identify individual candidates
- Ensemble performances submitted only on audio CD, again making it impossible to distinguish the contribution of individuals
- Candidates who did not undertake two separate disciplines
- Candidates who submitted the same work for Element 1 and part of Element 2
- No evidence that three assessments had been completed over a period of time

There was only a small number of candidates for **Element 3**. This 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 and teachers should give 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. Actual repertoire should be chosen for the exercises. 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.

A number of candidates presented compositions for **Element 4** this year and a good overall standard was maintained across a variety of styles and genres. Most Centre assessors applied the assessment criteria accurately and completed the paperwork in an organised fashion. The majority of 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. Most 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
- Some compositions were written for large ensembles of which the candidate had little experience
- Some scores were incomplete and appeared not to have been checked before submission

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

Most Centres submitted all the necessary paperwork for the component as a whole. Centres are reminded of the need to ensure the working marksheets for each element, the summary sheet, and the MS1 computer sheet are completed and 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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<p>Paper 9703/03 Performing</p>

The majority of candidates had prepared thoroughly for this Paper and most achieved well, with some performances being of an exceptional standard. There was a large number of recitals in a popular idiom by singers, guitarists and drummers this session, contributing to the variety of music heard. Repertoire ranged from Bach and Handel to the music of Tin Pan Alley and the dance music of Spain, as well as songs by contemporary pop artists.

The majority of Centres provided competent accompanists and ensemble members for their candidates and almost all candidates were able to demonstrate rapport with their accompanist or ensemble members. Performance venues were, for the most part, suitable. A number of candidates performed to an audience and this often added to the atmosphere of the occasion.

Most candidates chose repertoire which was within their capability and showed their technical ability to good advantage. A few vocal candidates sang through their recital without really *performing* it. The ability to put the music over to the audience, even if the audience only consists of the Examiner, is a very important part of the performance. Assessment criterion E: Stylistic understanding is relevant here, as is criterion D: Aural awareness.

Almost all candidates worked within a clear focus in their recitals. This is a requirement of the Component. Many candidates chose to perform music by one composer, while others chose a genre or non-musical link such as 'love songs'.

The spoken introduction, with which each performance should begin, should outline the focus and show how each piece contributes to it. Some outstanding introductions were presented this session, with candidates showing real insight into the music. Others merely listed the pieces they were about to perform and some offered no introduction at all. The quality and relevance of the spoken introduction is assessed in Criterion E: Stylistic Understanding and the full mark range cannot be accessed if there is no introduction. It was again disappointing that some excellent performances lost marks in this way.

Centres presented their candidates' work on CDs or DVDs of high quality and most had taken care to ensure the candidate could be easily identified. The majority of Centres had packaged the work in a way that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork. Centres are reminded to include photocopies of the music performed and that submissions for different Components of the examination should be sent separately, as they are required by different Examiners.

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<p>Paper 9703/04 Composing</p>
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Report to Centres

This report contains comments and appropriate feedback on the work and assessment of candidates from this season's examination. It will focus on the positive achievement of candidates and provide guidance for the future preparation of candidates' work in composition.

Administration

Many Centres continue to exhibit best practice in the submission of composing folios for assessment. Some candidates take considerable care in the presentation of their work, approaching the task as a whole in which all aspects of the unit are important. Labelled CDs should be safely packaged but not inaccessible and always checked for their playability on conventional equipment. WAV / MIDI / MP3 formats must not be submitted.

General Comments

The syllabus requirement of the composing of a single piece, or group of related pieces lasting 8-12 minutes suggests that in this second year of study, candidates will be able to consolidate prior learning, understand the connections between their performing and listening / investigative studies and appreciate the substantial demands of this component. Whilst there is evidence of a pleasing improvement in the thoughtfulness with which candidates approach this component, there is, nevertheless, progress to be made for those aspiring to the higher marks and those less able candidates who want to secure a 'pass' mark. Centres are encouraged to consult Reports to Centres from previous years and note that the comments in this report will focus on ways in which candidates can 'aim higher'.

The range of this year's compositions reflected a broad array of imaginative options. Some examples from this year's submissions:

- Collections of short songs in a variety of styles showing popular, world and 'classical' influences
- Instrumental pieces that demonstrate a close familiarity with a particular performing style e.g. blues guitar
- Grammatically inspired compositions – the Oklahoma City bombing; weather, the natural world – wind, rivers, storm, rain ('Playing in the Rain', 'Abandoned Wind'); a famous art work (Picasso's 'Guernica')
- Cinematically influenced orchestral composing
- Suite – 6 movements written for 2 Flutes, 'Cello and Piano including Mazurka, Tango, Sicilienne and Hoe-down
- Minimalist composition

Materials

Candidates were frequently able to generate a range of ideas appropriate to their initial concept. Figurations and chord sequences can make an effective starting point, for example, but there was evidence that candidates did not give enough time to the generation of materials – the most successful candidates will spend considerable time shaping, re-shaping and producing more than one version of an idea. Materials form the foundational potential of the composition and their quality is of paramount importance. Candidates can be encouraged to evaluate the quality of their ideas using the assessment criteria 'clues'. 'Are my ideas effective?' 'What might I do to transform these ideas so that they could be described as 'inventive'? Similarly, candidates who recognise a sense of awkwardness in their ideas might study the way relevant composers shape *their* materials to greater advantage.

Candidates working to a 'programme' often included a useful commentary to explain the compositional interpretation of their given story / picture / concept. Similarly, those writing lyrics or using poems for their own songs went to great lengths to communicate their response to the stimuli behind their compositional intentions. A word of caution is issued to candidates that in laying out their detailed thoughts and feelings about a close relationship, for example, they can inadvertently lose sight of *musical* matters, which are the object of the assessment process.

Use of Materials and Structure

Materials – a rhythmic motif, a melodic shape, a textural device – need not be complex or extensive in themselves but can be extended and developed in a range of technical and intuitive ways. Successful candidates are those who thoughtfully consider the technical processes required for connecting, extending and providing a sense of contrast or unfolding interest to keep the listener engaged. Some candidates writing in a tonal idiom demonstrated considerable difficulty with modulation, a highly effective device for navigating the structural boundaries of a composition and for providing an effective means of contrast. Other candidates wrote pieces that were too long for the materials and simple repetition without any subtleties of transformation limited the range of marks they could access. Candidates who chose a structure with clearly defined sections or who gave themselves opportunities for contrast within a three-song format, for example, were often more successful than those who gave insufficient attention to the framework for their ideas. Credit is due to those who were able to maintain a sense of unity and 'connected-ness' throughout the overall composition.

Use of Medium and Texture

It was pleasing to see a full range of instrumental and vocal resources, including technologically generated timbres in candidates' choice of medium. Few candidates had the skills to manipulate a large instrumental grouping such as full Orchestra or Concert Band although they bravely took up the challenge. Those who confined their ideas to a small chamber group or a band line-up with which they were familiar fared rather better and were able to demonstrate the principle 'less is more' as they teased subtleties of textural combinations and variety from their chosen resources. Some candidates mistakenly tended to use all their resources all of the time, whilst those showing restraint and planning showed a maturing understanding of some of the issues of successful orchestration.

Notation and Presentation

Scores show an increasingly detailed approach to performance instructions and high standards of rhythmic and pitch representation. Candidates should take care that all their instructions are practical – bowing marks, for example, can look impressive on a score but may not make any sense at all upon closer scrutiny.

Whilst it is understood that many candidates are not able to access the performers they require for a 'live' realisation of their composition, it is important that vocal parts should be performed by singers whenever possible because sequenced recordings do not adequately convey the composer's intention for singers. For those candidates submitting a commentary for assessment rather than a score, Centres are reminded that this is an option intended for compositions such as electro-acoustic works that do not normally use staff notation. Popular song or jazz submissions should be notated as fully as possible. Above all, candidates should have the actual forces intended in their minds as they work and not the technological simulations of them. It is always disappointing to view work that has been compromised rather than enhanced by the use of technology.

Concluding Remarks

The level of aural familiarity with the work of others that candidates demonstrate in their own composing shows breadth and range. The majority who work in a tonal idiom should be mindful of the way in which their studies in other components can beneficially inform and contribute to convincing harmonic writing in their own compositions. Candidates need a great deal of encouragement to view their composing as 'work-in-progress' that will extend for the duration of the second year of their course; teachers have a crucial role to play in stimulating critical self-evaluation and persistence in revising, refining and perfecting candidates' creative work.

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Paper 9703/05
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.