

MUSIC

<p>Paper 9703/03 Performing</p>

General comments

All candidates for this Paper performed to a creditable standard and most had prepared thoroughly for the examination. There were some exceptional interpretations of music from both mainstream Western repertoire of the twentieth century and from more popular traditions.

On the whole, candidates chose suitable repertoire for their chosen focus and performed a programme of the required length, giving them ample opportunity to display a full range of instrumental/vocal techniques. Most performed music within their capabilities, though some did not score as well as they might have done had they chosen slightly less demanding repertoire which would have given them the opportunity really to *perform*. Centres are reminded that candidates should not repeat pieces offered in Component 2.

For Component 3 candidates should perform music based around a focus. This year the chosen focus ranged from the music of a particular composer to Love Songs and how bass guitar music has developed in the last fifty years. Candidates must think carefully in advance about their focus and ensure they do not just string together pieces which lack any connection.

Candidates are required to begin their programme with a brief oral introduction. Again the standard of these oral introductions varied greatly from totally absent to excellent. The best introductions gave a real insight into the music and why it had been chosen. The introduction is assessed in Assessment Criterion E – Stylistic Understanding, and the full mark range cannot be accessed here if there is no introduction. Candidates should set their chosen focus in context and show awareness of how it is demonstrated in each of the pieces performed.

Centres had provided capable accompanists who had prepared thoroughly with their candidates. Care should be taken with the positioning of microphones to ensure that the candidate's part can be clearly heard above the accompaniment.

The majority of submissions had been prepared by Centres with great attention to detail: Audio Tapes, CDs, DVDs and Videos were correctly labelled and well packaged. A running order of items presented should be included, especially when several candidates are recorded on the same CD – it is essential that the Examiner can correctly identify each candidate. Centres should also note that the submission for component 3 (Performing) should be recorded separately from that for Component 4 (Composing) as it is required by different Examiners.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/04
Composing

General comments

This report is both a response to composing work submitted for the above examination but is also intended to give guidance to teachers who are preparing candidates for future examinations.

Candidates had clearly been encouraged by their teachers to explore a wide range of musical language and techniques through their composing studies. In general, they have met with a pleasing degree of success and the range of work presented was impressive.

Presentation of folios for examination was neat and organised, which greatly assisted the examination process. Although CD or tape cases were labelled, the discs or tapes themselves seldom were. In order to avoid the possibility of confusion in this regard, Centres are asked to ensure that clear identification details are provided.

Comments on specific questions

There was encouraging evidence that Centres had responded well to syllabus guidance and candidates made valuable connections between listening, performing and analytical work in other components. The influence of Schubert's variation technique, for example, was clear in a set of Theme and Variations. The concept of 'Picturing Music' (a topic for future candidates in Component 1) had also played an important role in the work of several candidates.

Materials

Candidates explored a range of materials from popular idioms to electronic, experimental ideas. A number of candidates chose to work within a traditional harmonic framework; they approached the composing work with enthusiasm and vigour. Candidates drew on the music of other times (Gregorian Chant) or other cultures (Latin America/Maori) and in several cases, a 'programme' strongly informed the shaping of ideas. Whilst candidates focused on melodic and harmonic materials, there was a dearth of rhythmic ideas in general. Candidates should not overlook the possibility of working in less common time signatures, of changing time signatures within a piece or of exploring the musical possibilities of the manipulation and interaction of rhythmic ideas.

Use of Materials

Candidates sometimes found it difficult to extend their initial ideas. Analysis of the composing techniques of others is invaluable here and candidates should be encouraged to apply what they know to their own composing.

Candidates who use tonality as their primary language should be guided by their knowledge and understanding as well as by their ear when making decisions. Too often, a chord progression may have an air of 'randomness', or may lose momentum at a crucial point in the harmonic flow towards a significant structural landmark. Some candidates were very successful in their use of 'added harmony' and were able to write in a convincing way. Candidates might usefully explore the possibilities within modulation or contrasting 'tonal centres' in order to extend and expand their initial ideas.

Structure

Although there are occasions when candidates will choose a 'self-imposed' structure, such as Theme and Variation, candidates nevertheless need to engage with the idea of planning to achieve a viable structure. On the small scale this may be adopting motifs or chord sequences of a certain length and balancing them against units of a similar design. It may mean the concentration, reduction and augmentation of rhythmic units or the inversion of motivic cells so as to build up larger structures from small units. Candidates seemed more secure with the balance between repetition and contrast on the large scale.

Candidates were often successful in producing effective harmonies and textures in a minimalist style but relied too much on block repetition. An examination of models by Glass and Reich would help candidates to understand the principles involved in order to enable motifs to 'evolve'.

Some candidates addressed the issue of an extended piece of composing by submitting a single composition with two or three distinct movements or sections. This is a valid option.

In Theme and Variation, some variations were more successful than others. Candidates seemed almost obliged to go through the 'standard options' and submit all their work, however, they should exercise rigour and discard or re-work those ideas that do not come up to the standards of their best variations.

Given the requirement to compose a piece of between 8 and 12 minutes, some candidates who wanted to submit a traditional 'pop' song, discovered that the materials suitable for a typical 3 minute song, could not easily be extended without considerable additional invention. The suitability of this genre is entirely valid but candidates should look to those models that help them understand the techniques of extension, particularly in the use of instrumental bridge passages and episodes of new material.

Use of Medium and Texture

Candidates were particularly successful when they applied their in-depth knowledge as performers in order to compose convincingly. There is a dilemma in composing for particular players, with a view to an eventual live performance, particularly if a wide range of ability has to be represented. Some string quartets contained thoroughly idiomatic writing for violin, but the simpler writing for viola or cello; this was a reflection of performing ability rather than of uneven composing judgements.

In choral composing it was pleasing to observe a secure understanding of the principles of voice leading within parts. Sequenced choral representations can be disappointing even for the most accomplished writing and to perform even a short section of a piece can be a real encouragement to young composers; nevertheless, the standard of choral writing in general was excellent.

Candidates were able to demonstrate the ability to use instrumental colour appropriately and with understanding; some Latin percussion and guitar writing was both technically skilful and musically imaginative.

In response to composing submissions, the following points are pertinent:

- 1 Some woodwind writing was more appropriate to the range of a descant recorder, rather than using the full potential of a particular woodwind colour.
- 2 Candidates might consider using the additional techniques that many instruments possess – decorative ornamentation in woodwind, pizzicato and double stopping in string writing as well as the possibility of colour variation: *col legno*, *senza vibrato* etc.
- 3 Candidates were often able to present inventive opening textures; they were able to move the melody between instrumental voices but did not always consider the possibility of moving to other contrapuntal textures, for example, to give variety.
- 4 Candidates who chose to write for a smaller group of voices or instruments were generally more successful than those writing for a full, modern symphony orchestra. They were able to focus on particular orchestration techniques to good effect.

Notation and Presentation

Many candidates caught the spirit of the syllabus well by making every effort to present a final recording that was expressive and as musical as possible with the resources available. For some, this meant editing a sequenced version carefully so as to lessen the over-mechanical effects of computer software. Some compositions combined live and sequenced elements whilst others were recordings of live performances, occasionally in a concert situation.

It was pleasing to note that candidates were making a real effort to notate their ideas, particularly when it was clear that they were more used to working in an aural/improvisatory context. Candidates notating guitar parts were able to supply both rhythm and pitch when using tablature.

Although the majority of scores were written using some form of computer software, one hand written score was accurate and legible with copious performance detail, meriting a high mark.

Common score omissions included the provision of an initial tempo/expression indicator – a metronome marking alone conveys only the minimum of a composer's intention in this regard. Candidates were not always certain of the distinction between generalised phrase markings, specific phrase marks, and slurs and more detailed articulation marks.

Centres are reminded that when a commentary is provided rather than a score, it is particularly important to give a full and detailed account of the processes involved, for example, in producing an electronic piece or in a piece in which samples have been used.

Concluding remarks

Centres are to be congratulated for the guidance given to candidates, particularly in regard to the exploration of a range of ideas/styles/medium/language/traditions. Although there was some difficulty for a minority of candidates in developing and extending materials, most were able to do so with clear evidence that they had learned much by analytical study of the compositions of others.

Whilst inspired invention was observed in some submissions, candidates who were able to demonstrate successful crafting were able to achieve equally well.

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<p>Paper 9703/05 Investigation and Report</p>

General comments

Most Centres had a good grasp of what this component required and their candidates had worked well over a sufficiently sustained period of time for worthwhile learning to have taken place. Candidates had had access to an adequate range of suitable resources and some showed a well-developed ability to assimilate reading of a scholarly standard.

The range of music investigated was wide, reflecting the diverse instruments and repertoire presented in performances (Component 3). Only one candidate linked the Investigation to Component 4. Most links were sensible and explicitly explained in the candidate's introduction: a few were tenuous or unconvincing or unexplained. This was just one of the aspects of candidates' reports that would have benefited from closer supervision by teachers. While the judgement about how much advice to give each candidate individually, or even whether to intervene if a direction or approach seems unfruitful, is a delicate one, some continuing oversight is necessary. At the very least, teachers should ensure that the candidate explains the link between the Investigation and the relevant practical Component clearly, lays out a full bibliography and discography using standard conventions, and refers correctly to sources throughout the text using footnotes. Indeed, there were some cases where a judicious question asked of the candidate, seeking clarification of what was meant by a phrase or word, might have avoided confusion or irrelevance.

The syllabus as a whole offers a considerable degree of flexibility for Centres to devise courses that suit their resources and expertise well to candidates' abilities and interests. To be successful in this component, candidates need to develop depth of understanding: a few ranged too widely, covering too many facets of their topic, to be able to demonstrate this; some others were laudably ambitious in what they set out to discover but lacked sufficient foundation either of musico-historical background or of analytic technique to be able to bring off successfully all that they had hoped to achieve. While what candidates present in their reports must be the fruit of independent learning, many also need to continue to develop their aural skills, analytic techniques and historical understanding in a simultaneous, supportive, structured course.

The following, more specific points, are grouped according to the headings used for the Assessment Criteria.

Aural perception

Most candidates had listened closely to an adequate range of relevant music. A few, who had chosen to concentrate on an analytic aspect of a major piece in their Recital, would have benefited from listening to other examples (of music by the same composer, or of the same genre or style) to offer points of comparison. Some had acquired suitable recorded examples (sometimes all on just one CD), which were then offered as aural 'evidence' to support a descriptive text but without any comment that flagged specific significant features.

Contextual understanding

Most candidates had read enough to be able to provide some relevant background to the music that was their principal focus. In some cases the reading had not been sufficiently assimilated for candidates to be able to distil the salient points and express them in their own language. In two of the best reports (both on aspects of popular music) contextual understanding was intrinsic to the whole Investigation, not simply introductory or ancillary to the main discussion.

Analytic/investigative techniques and technical vocabulary

Not every candidate had yet developed appropriate analytic techniques to be able to get to the heart of their chosen music. Sometimes it was a matter of uncertainty over keys and key relationships, sometimes an overly superficial understanding of the principles of Sonata Form or of variation techniques, sometimes not even knowing where to start. Some reports were over-reliant on bar-counting, summarised in pie charts, to demonstrate relationships between different sections of a movement or occurrences of a particular chord. It is particularly in this area that a taught course, building on and extending the work done in **Section A** of Component 1 might be a useful form of support for candidates.

Demonstration of link with Component 3 or 4 and substantiation of judgements

In several cases it was clear that the Investigation had thrown helpful light on aspects of the music to be performed in the Recital – a study of Impressionism informed understanding of a Debussy piece, and an attempt to place Martinu in the context of 20th century experimental styles led the candidate to explore closely the language of his Cello Sonata. Some candidates failed to state what the link was between their Investigation and another Component – it was left to Examiners to deduce. The best reports were exemplary in substantiating their judgements: no generalisation was made without supportive reference to the music, usually accompanied by transcribed or photocopied extracts. Less confident reports tended to provide audio examples that were too long, in which any specific relevance to points in the text was left to Examiners to discover. This often betrayed an insecure grasp of the subject matter and an over-reliance on CD liner notes.

Communication of findings and acknowledgements

Presentation was generally very good. Most reports were tidy, expressed in clear, careful language and adequately referenced. All included a bibliography and discography, some more detailed and informative than others. Candidates should be encouraged to use standard conventions that identify texts, CDs and websites as fully as possible. Although many candidates incorporated footnotes to identify a source, it was sometimes not clear exactly what part of their text derived it. Candidates need a great deal more help to avoid unconscious plagiarism, be it quoting directly *verbatim* without quotation marks, or paraphrasing too closely.