

MUSIC

Paper 9703/03
Performing

General comments

The majority of candidates had prepared thoroughly for this component and most achieved well, with some renditions being of an exceptional standard. There was a larger number of performances in a popular idiom by both singers and guitarists than has been the case in previous sessions and this contributed to the variety of music heard.

Most candidates chose repertoire which was within their capabilities and showed their technical ability to good advantage. A number of vocalists selected songs which did not lie comfortably in their range, and while some performed transposed versions, others struggled to reach the extremes of the register. Care should be taken to ensure that each candidate is able to demonstrate his or her strengths and attention should be paid to this matter when the programme is selected.

For component 3, candidates are required to base their performance around a focus. In some cases candidates had clearly considered this aspect of the syllabus in great detail and had explored the music they were performing in depth. For others, it was very difficult to establish any genuine link between the pieces performed other than the fact that they were all performed on the same instrument.

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 disappointing that some excellent performances lost marks in this way.

Most Centres presented their candidates' work on CDs or DVDs of high quality and all had taken care to ensure the candidate could be readily identified. The majority of Centres had packaged the work in a manner that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork. Centres are reminded that submissions for different components of the examination should be sent separately as they are required by different Examiners.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/04
Composing

General comments

This report is a response to composing work submitted for examination; it aims also to give guidance to teachers who are preparing candidates for future examinations. Previous reports to Centres contain further valuable advice that continues to be relevant to teachers and candidates. This session's submissions were presented in accordance with the syllabus requirements although the number of candidates choosing to work on a substantial composition remains relatively few.

Specific Comments

Some candidates who submitted an Investigation and Report in Component 5 that was related to their composing work reaped clear benefits from this cross-fertilisation. Other candidates, who provided a brief summary of relevant information in the form of a commentary for the examiner, were able to throw light on thought processes that may not have been clear from the music alone. This was particularly the case for those candidates adopting a programme for their composing ideas and was helpful to examiners. Whilst the inclusion of a commentary is not a requirement, candidates are encouraged to provide brief notes if it is felt necessary to provide important information about the composing process.

Materials

It was pleasing to observe a range of styles and genres feeding into the ideas that candidates presented. Candidates successfully employed classical structures and ideas as well as exploring more contemporary idioms including ideas from world music influences. Some displayed a real flair for melodic shaping or effective harmonic sequences. Few candidates, however, gave sufficient consideration of the possibility of *contrasting* ideas, which may indeed be vital in a composition of broader dimensions. Whilst the basic materials gave some indication of aural familiarity with other music, the range of listening feeding into the composition process was not always in evidence. The syllabus provides guidance about how candidates can learn a great deal that is relevant to composing, from their studies in Component 1, including the exploration of wider repertoire in **Section B**: many candidates seemed only to have skimmed the surface of the rich potential to be found there. Teachers are to be encouraged to make evident the connections and possibilities for candidates, in the works they study.

Use of Materials

The majority of candidates were capable of presenting their ideas in a format that would have been entirely satisfactory for a short piece of 3-4 minutes duration. As in previous years, however, examiners found that simple repetition was the main device used to extend the music to the required minimum length of 8 minutes. Many candidates seemed to have little knowledge of the standard techniques for extending and developing their musical materials. Standard techniques such as augmentation, diminution, modulation, extension and fragmentation, for example, might usefully be flagged up in the works of established composers by teachers, so that candidates are able to employ them in their own work. Encouraging candidates to wrestle with such processes in the early stages of the development of their ideas is always time well spent.

Structure

Some candidates had a secure grasp of the need for the larger architectural dimensions to be carefully planned but failed to provide sufficient levels of contrast for the structures they adopted. A two bar chord sequence, for example, can successfully be used as the basis for a significant proportion of a vocal composition by means of textural and instrumental variation but without a diversion to a contrasting idea, however brief, the composition will struggle to retain the listener's attention as it reaches the required eight minutes.

Some candidates adopted a pre-existing framework such as theme and variation through which to represent their ideas. This is an entirely satisfactory approach yet still requires invention within the structure to give the formula a stamp of individuality from the composer.

Use of Medium and Texture

Compositions ranged from writing for a single instrument, usually piano, to some unusual combinations of instruments representing a range of musical traditions. In all cases, the key to success for candidates lay in their understanding of the full potential of instruments and their ability to write idiomatically for them. It was pleasing to see imagination and secure technical understanding demonstrated in the presentation of textures when instruments were used in combination.

Notation and Presentation

Many candidates failed to give proportionate attention to the notation of their compositions. In some cases there were inaccuracies on an elementary level such as rhythmic notation or the failure to use of appropriate note heads in drum notation to accurately inform the performer what is required. Very few candidates gave sufficient attention to more detailed performance indications such as dynamics, articulation marks for wind players, pedalling, phrasing, tempo markings etc. Candidates might usefully study pieces from their own performing repertoire, solo and ensemble, to observe the important role such markings have in securing an accurate interpretation of the composer's requirements.

Recordings were presented in a variety of formats; those with some 'live' element were often more convincing in their communication. Candidates submitting entirely sequenced recordings of conventional instruments often made demands on performers that would not have been possible under live performing circumstances. Candidates could usefully be encouraged to use performing and recording of their ideas as a diagnostic tool for the self-evaluation of their work.

Concluding Remarks

Whilst there has been a pleasing range of compositional ideas presented for examination, it is disappointing that candidates have lost opportunities to gain more credit for their work because of a lack of precision in notational presentation or a failure to develop ideas sufficiently. Candidates should be encouraged to be skilful, analytical and intelligent listeners and performers in such a way that the connections bear fruit in their own creative work.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/05

Investigation and Report

Three aspects of the Investigation were key to the very wide range of achievement in this session's Reports. These were:

- the strength of the link between the topic and Component 3 or 4
- the clarity of the focus
- the availability of appropriate resources

The strongest candidates had been well supported by their Centres in each of these respects.

Link: the syllabus requires that an explicit link be established between the Investigation and the other A level Component for which candidates are preparing. Most candidates pursued a topic that had some bearing on one or more items in their Performing programme, a few explored repertoire relevant to their Composing folio. Some of the most successful Reports were those that compared two or more recorded interpretations of a substantial work which candidates were preparing to perform themselves in their examination. Others were those of candidates whose programme was to consist entirely of music in a style or genre for which they had long had enthusiasm ('Soul'). They were already knowledgeable and thoroughly familiar with a wide range of repertoire on which they could draw for examples.

The link should be explained at the beginning of the Report. The Notes for Guidance make this clear. Many candidates left it to the Examiners to deduce, or referred to it only incidentally at a late stage in their text. The fourth of the Assessment Criteria (D: Demonstration of the link with Component 3 or 4 and substantiation of judgements) takes note of it, judging whether it is 'convincing', 'adequate', 'tenuous' or 'weak'. Candidates who made no link and also offered no support for their 'judgements' in the form of reference to specific examples scored poorly in this respect.

The strength of the link usually had a critical bearing on the direction and thrust of the focus.

Focus: several candidates found it difficult to go beyond reproducing dictionary definitions (often several of them in succession, betraying a poor level of understanding through repetition or careless proofreading that was blind to blatant circularity); some gave a whistle-stop tour of a broad sweep of history derived from unscholarly sources (the 'Baroque', 'Opera', the 'Flute'), whose superficiality betrayed a weak grasp of the subject matter; a few allowed themselves to be diverted by something (pseudo-science, or psycho-social speculation) that had caught their attention but was not directly relevant, either to their title or the scope of this Component.

The candidates who had a clear idea at the outset of the scope and thrust of their Investigation, and who had started work on it early enough, generally produced more overall convincing and coherent presentations (see the last of the Assessment Criteria, E). Where definitions and wide background context were necessary, these had been addressed in the early stages of the Investigation and thoroughly assimilated to the point where knowledgeable references to them could be made, providing a frame for close examination of musical examples. The ability to select what was directly relevant and to prune mere narrative was one of the features that distinguished the most successful Reports. Those who got no further than definitions and second-hand views without going on to apply what they were discovering in the music for themselves seemed often to have started too late. Their findings represented little more than note-taking that should have formed part of their preliminary exploration of the topic. In this form it had little value as evidence of learning and musical understanding. Some of these appeared to be the fruit of a few hours' work searching the Internet.

Resources: while there are many reputable Internet sites from which valuable insights can be drawn, only a few candidates had accessed really reliable, specialist ones. Many reproduced views from Wikipedia, often *verbatim*, without questioning their authority, or treating them as possible starting-points and going on to explore their validity for themselves. The best Reports came from candidates who had put effort – mental and practical – into seeking out books (and, in some cases, scholarly articles) which would help them deepen their understanding of their topic and show them how to identify the significant aspects of the music they were listening to. They were also candidates who had obtained sufficient CDs to broaden their listening and furnish them with plenty of potential examples from which to select telling extracts.

All three of the above aspects, of course, arise at the beginning of the Investigation and at a point where advice and actual guidance from teachers may make all the difference between a worthwhile outcome and a mere going-through-the-motions. While direct teacher intervention at the later stages is not appropriate, this is not a Component from which teachers should exclude themselves. It is obviously essential to ensure that candidates will be able to access adequate resources to pursue their planned focus and to assist them in making this possible. But many otherwise well-directed candidates faltered at the stage where they needed to analyse the music and to produce examples to support their judgements. This was because they lacked a secure foundation, both in relevant aspects of music history and in analytic techniques. There is no reason why a concurrent taught course cannot be aimed at equipping candidates with the knowledge and skills that will help them carry out this part of their Investigation more effectively. It could also play a valuable part in helping candidates seek out and understand more worthwhile reference books. Only a very small handful of candidates had made any use of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Pocket reference books and Rough Guides by themselves are not adequate: they may help to get candidates started but, if they are to be 'stretched' during their Investigations, then learning to handle more specialist texts will be part of that process.

Presentation: most Centres had ensured that their candidates included some sort of bibliography. Fewer were precise about discography, and some candidates were sloppy in this respect. Musical examples had been transferred to a single CD which was enclosed with the text in a variety of ways (the most secure were those where an unprotected CD had been taped to the Report, but the resulting stickiness of the CDs was problematic!). It was unfortunate when this care was not also reflected in some candidates' cross-referencing: tracks were sometimes not identified, or misidentified. Where candidates had included a numbered list of tracks with their Bibliography, Examiners found this very helpful.

A number of candidates began very promisingly, demonstrating a good grasp of their material and a sense of direction, but then ended very suddenly. Some referred to tracks and other musical examples that were not there, their final paragraphs becoming rather confused. Here again, oversight and support in the form of regular checks on progress against a firm timetable might have helped candidates to score more highly against all the Assessment Criteria. Nonetheless, the majority had clearly learned much of value about something that interested them and this should be a legitimate source of satisfaction to them.