

MUSIC

Paper 0410/02
Performing

Key Messages

In some Centres, ensemble opportunities need to be more carefully managed so that candidates continue to develop their skills and perform music at an appropriate level for their current ability.

General comments

Many of the performances, particularly the solos, were of an excellent or good standard. However, many of the issues that have been raised in the past remain.

Solos

Most solos were well suited to the candidates and allowed them to demonstrate their musical and technical skills. There were a small number of examples of candidates performing very simple, short pieces, which were still awarded high marks. A performance of such a piece cannot be awarded high marks in every category. Some Centres also had every candidate performing two solo pieces. This is not necessary if one solo and one ensemble piece meet the minimum time criterion of four minutes and is in fact unfortunate when a candidate performs a second, much weaker piece, which brings down their overall mark.

Ensembles

Some Centres provided excellent ensemble opportunities for candidates, who performed pieces well matched to their ability on their instrument. However, some Centres allow candidates to perform pieces which are not ensembles at all and marks had to be significantly reduced. For example, a piece in which a singer is accompanied by one or two other performers (e.g. drums and piano) is not a true ensemble for the singer. Another problem is where two performers play or sing in alternation (such as in the song *I Know Him So Well*) but rarely together, thereby not demonstrating ensemble skills. A candidate's part in an ensemble should also not be consistently doubled by another performer.

It is also necessary to remind some Centres once again that where an ensemble consists of more than one instrument or voice of the same type (e.g. a piano duet), it is impossible for the Moderator to know which performer is the candidate if no further information is provided by the Centre.

Assessment

As in previous years, some Centres included very useful comments supporting the marks awarded in the space provided on the working mark sheet. All Centres are asked to do this: it not only helps the Moderator, but also focuses the assessor on the skills that have been demonstrated, and should lead to more objective marking.

Although it is mentioned frequently in this report, there are still some Centres which use half marks; please only use whole numbers. Centres should also check the addition of marks carefully.

Presentation of coursework

Centres should note that it is expected that recordings will be submitted on audio CD, so that they can be played on domestic stereo equipment. Submission of DVDs/USB sticks etc. with their many different file formats makes moderating very difficult. Centres should also check the recording before submission to ensure that it is complete. A track listing is also useful as it means the Moderators are sure that they are listening to the performance of the right person.

There were again many Centres who submitted the coursework without any accompanying sheet music. It is a requirement of the syllabus that copies of the sheet music should be sent, with the sole exception of music which has been improvised. It is extremely difficult to moderate ensemble performances in particular when there is no sheet music to clearly show the candidate's part.

Centres are reminded that the performing and composing coursework must be sent in separate packages, and that a separate recording is needed for each.

MUSIC

Paper 0410/03
Composing

Key Messages

To gain marks in the highest band candidates should submit two contrasting compositions (either differing in style or written for different forces). The musical ideas should be the candidate's own (if a piece includes material borrowed from a pre-existing source, this should be kept to an absolute minimum). The pieces should be carefully structured and should demonstrate a developing command of appropriate compositional techniques. Both pieces should be fully and accurately notated (and carefully edited if produced through a computer notation program). A recording of both pieces should be provided (on CD if possible); whenever possible the recording should be of a live performance.

General Comments

There were some very good creative and inspired pieces which covered a wide range of attainment and ability. Some of these pieces used technology to create compositions which had a strong musical impact. Changes in atmosphere were achieved through effective planning of musical ideas and pieces were constructed within an appropriate framework.

It was clear that candidates had been given the opportunity to explore sound and be innovative. Good balance, aural perception and well-developed ideas produced compositions that were truly individual.

The vast majority of Centres submitted correct documentation that was clear and precise. Any issues were more to do with incorrect addition or transcription of marks.

Assessment

Generally the internal marking of compositions was quite lenient and this generosity was utmost where candidates were using a prearranged structural formula. It was often the case that marks in the upper end of the range were more generous than those lower down. Furthermore, there were instances where the marks awarded had no relation to the descriptors that are given in the Assessment Criteria. In addition, there were a few instances where the order of merit was incorrect and the Centre submission had to be remarked.

Compositions

There were many interesting and quite original pieces submitted by Centres which extended over a wide range of styles and genres. These pieces ranged from simple compositions for a single instrument to quite complex instrumental works. In many cases the pieces were well presented and related well to the specific key areas of the composing process. The most successful candidates were those who displayed a high level of creative ability through the development of coherent and well balanced pieces. Furthermore, such candidates produced contrasting pieces that displayed a secure understanding of the performing resources required and attention to detail.

Less successful pieces often had good initial ideas with imaginative stimuli which unfortunately were not exploited. Many good melodic ideas simply did not fit in with the harmonic structures/accompaniment. There were also some less musical examples which contained technical devices which did not come together to create a stylish, or even sometimes coherent piece of music.

The most popular candidate submission was small group pieces and here, there were some creative and interesting compositions. Classical wind/string ensembles of trio or quartets were very strong. Alternatively, popular/rock musicians gave a good mix of styles and genres to produce pieces that clearly demonstrated popular/rock musical structures and compositional techniques.

Overall, less successful compositions were characterised by there being insufficient attention paid to how the parts blended. Furthermore, candidates attempting to compose a piece for one instrument were less likely to be successful because of the limitations of timbre and texture.

The use of technology has many benefits and can assist the compositional process. However, there were a few examples where instrumental combinations would have been difficult to balance in a live performance. Further, in some instances, the instrumental writing would have created a near impossible performance on a conventional instrument. In the more experimental technology pieces, there were a number of very creative and appealing pieces and some Centres provided full and helpful details which clearly aided the moderation process. Nonetheless, there were other Centres that provided a short statement and no indication of what input the candidate actually had in the composing process and no indication of the software used. Here, moderation judgements had to be made on assumptions.

Compositions must all be recorded. In the majority of cases this was done, but a few Centres had to be asked to forward them.

Notation and Presentation

As in the previous year, most scores were computer generated. Some handwritten scores tended to be unclear at times and a few were barely adequate. It is important that the score accurately reflects the intentions of the candidate and closely resembles the music presented in the recording. A score can be in a format that is appropriate to the particular genre of music presented.

Most staff notated scores using the software Sibelius were generally consistent and articulate, however there were some that lacked performance details. Further, staff notated scores using other software, Cubase/Logic, were a little less consistent and often were not quantized or configured prior to printing. Scores that were a combination of tablature, graphic notation and written accounts sometimes lacked musical detail and seemed to have limited reference to the music presented in the recording. In these cases, candidates might have benefited from being given a template or guide that would have enabled them to detail the structure of their music more clearly.

Some candidates submitted graphic scores as the most appropriate method of notation. In these pieces it is important that a detailed commentary outlining the compositional process is given and that performance indicators such as written signs and symbols are clearly explained.

CDs

Centres are asked to ensure that the CDs submitted can be played on the type of CD player found in a normal domestic hi-fi system. CDs that rely on specific computer software (e.g. Windows Media Player or iTunes) must not be submitted. Also, DVD recordings must not be included.

Clear identification of a candidate's work is important. The presentation of recordings from some Centres was unclear. Centres are asked to ensure that each candidate is preceded by a spoken introduction giving the candidate's name, number and the title of the piece.

A correctly written track list on a separate piece of paper should also be provided.

Packaging of Work

Entries were easiest to handle when each candidate's work was placed in a folder or plastic wallet. The majority of Centres now present work in this way. However, a few Centres submitted all their compositions in a single ring binder, which was difficult to handle and re-package.

Several CD cases were damaged due to inadequate packaging. Care should be taken to ensure that CDs are wrapped well so they survive the journey in the post.

Final Comment

The candidates from all ranges of ability were able to produce compositions that clearly demonstrated an organised approach to composition. Some of these compositions were without doubt of a very high standard and it is a credit to Centres that such good practice is taking place.