

GCSE

Music

42701 Listening to and Appraising Music
Report on the Examination

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42701 Listening to and Appraising Music

This examination is designed to test the ability of candidates to recognise a range of musical features, techniques and devices within the five Areas of Study (AoS):

AoS1 Rhythm & Metre
AoS2 Harmony & Tonality
AoS3 Texture & Melody
AoS4 Timbre & Dynamics
AoS5 Structure & Form

All questions are based on short excerpts of music from the three Strands of Learning: the Western Classical Tradition, Popular Music of the 20th and 21st Centuries and World Music (music from Africa, India and the Caribbean.)

This year's paper followed the now-established format of a mixture of question types, including multiple-choice questions, short questions worth one or two marks and more open-ended questions, where the candidate is asked to write about specific aspects of the music. Unfortunately some candidates lost marks simply because they did not follow the instructions in the question. For example, if the question requires one answer to be selected from several options, the response will be invalidated if more than one answer is selected. And where a question requiring a more extended response asks for comments on specified elements of music, marks will not be given for writing about other aspects.

In general, the areas that students found most difficult continued to be recognition of cadences, texture, harmonic devices and individual instrumental timbre.

Question 1 was a relatively straightforward opening to the examination and the majority of candidates did well in the questions on both excerpts (Steeleye Span and John Barry).

Most candidates found **Question 2** (Beethoven) more challenging. The question about melodic movement required recognition that the relevant passage was based on the notes of a chord, as well as an understanding of terms such as scalar, conjunct and triadic (which are among those given in the specification). The pitch of the opening melody should have helped candidates to recognise that it was played by the cellos, and the final question was an example of the need to concentrate on the particular aspects asked for, in this case rhythm and melody.

The Dusty Springfield excerpt used for **Question 3**, in common with many popular songs, was based on three chords but many candidates had difficulty in recognising this. A significant minority seem to have thought that the question was asking for the number of chord *changes*. Recognition of the interval of an octave played by the trumpet proved extremely problematic for many candidates, with over 10% not attempting it; a best guess is always better than leaving a blank. The questions on form, tonality and selecting the correct instrumental melody were answered much more successfully.

Question 4 (Harry Belafonte) opened with a rhythm to complete, and nearly all candidates scored one or more marks, with the overwhelming majority gaining three or more. Cadence and chord recognition were not as well done but the form of the excerpt was correctly identified by most of the entry.

In answering **Question 5**, on excerpts by Franck and Mozart, tonality was correctly identified by most but, again, selecting the best description of the melodic movement was done less well. Many candidates could not identify the pedal in the second excerpt; and when finding the note of a scale some seemed to assume that a scale could only be C major.

Question 6 required more extended writing about the two excerpts (Copland and ELP). Virtually all candidates gained at least one of the 6 marks and a significant majority achieved at least 3. Here it was important to focus on at least two of the elements named in the question. Many candidates chose to answer under headings, using two or more of the given elements and making their points succinctly. This approach was often very successful. Some chose to divide the space on the page vertically into two columns, one for each of the excerpts: this helped them to organise their answers and show clearly points of similarity and difference.

The use of two lively popular songs (by Dire Straits and Gerry & the Pacemakers) for **Question 7** perhaps gave candidates a musical “lift” at virtually the mid-point of the examination, and most of the questions here were answered successfully by most candidates. On this occasion the majority recognised the opening instrument in the first excerpt, as well as the tonality. The approach to chord recognition in this question did not require the use of either a Roman numeral or a designation such as (in this case) *subdominant*, although these were acceptable answers; it tested the ability to hear that the chord was a fourth higher (or a fifth lower) than the given chord. In the melodic dictation question, all four notes moved stepwise and the first note to be added was at the same pitch as the preceding note. Candidates who recognised this were able to make a good start, but then often descended by step without relating the notes they had written to the next note given on the skeleton score.

Question 8 (Grieg) was well answered, with many candidates scoring all or nearly all of the marks available.

In **Question 9** many found it difficult to identify the interval in the melody, although a significant minority succeeded in doing so. The interval was a falling octave between the second and third melody notes. The remaining questions on this excerpt of Indian music were answered more successfully, with over half recognising the sitar as the melody instrument and, encouragingly, the *acciaccatura* as the ornament.

In **Question 10** the number of chords in the Pink Floyd excerpt was recognised far more successfully than in Question 3, perhaps because this question was restricted to the opening four lines. However, many candidates were unable to identify correctly the chord used in the last line of the excerpt, although recognition that this was a major chord or the dominant (with or without the 7th) would have been sufficient to gain the mark. The interval of a second was not recognised by the majority; it may help students who think the interval is wider to try inserting “missing” pitches using stepwise movement. Almost all candidates were able to name the instrument at the end of the first excerpt, no doubt helped by the fact that it was a guitar.

Many candidates did not identify the syncopation at the beginning of the Led Zeppelin excerpt, but most recognised that it was twelve-bar blues.

Question 11 featured music by two of the composers whose centenaries fall this year. Very few candidates recognised the use of octaves in the Britten excerpt, with many incorrectly describing the texture as monophonic. The questions about dynamics and the cadence were answered well by the majority but only a minority were able to give the time signature, as many missed the basic

subdivision of the beat into three. All three questions on the excerpt from Verdi's Requiem elicited correct answers from the majority.

The two excerpts used in **Question 12** were from *Show Boat*. Most candidates gained some marks here, but it was disappointing that fewer than half achieved half the available marks. Often credit could not be given because the candidates wrote about dynamics or other elements that were not in the question, or because they gave only a simple list of instruments instead of showing an appreciation of how instruments were used. For example, they could have pointed out either the trombone *glissando* in the first excerpt or the harp *glissando* in the second. In questions of this type it is vital that candidates read the question carefully and respond to it, rather than merely writing down everything they can hear. Marks could have been gained by referring to any of the characteristics listed in the mark scheme and to any other valid points that were relevant to the question.

In most cases, candidates wrote rather more successfully about the second excerpt (*O' Man River*) than about the first, perhaps because (with fewer lyrics) there was less temptation to point out what could readily be observed from the text.

Many candidates set out their answers to this question under headings and, as in Question 6, this often led to good answers which were expressed simply, concisely and clearly. The use of a list or bullet point approach is quite acceptable (note that the information on the front of the question paper states that full sentences are not required).

General comments

There were a few examples where handwriting made it extremely difficult for the examiner to decipher the candidate's answer, and in some cases the candidate's interests might have been better served by the use of capital letters.

Where a candidate has had a change of mind about an answer (especially where the question is multiple choice), it is vital that the "wrong" answer is clearly deleted, so that the examiner is in no doubt about the candidate's intended response. Similarly, rough or preparatory work should be clearly crossed out if a candidate does not wish the examiner to take it into consideration.

The CD of music excerpts for this examination lasts for very slightly less than one hour. Pauses and repeats are included. However, teachers and examinations officers are reminded that, as stated on the front of the paper, 3 minutes' reading time must be allowed before starting the CD. This reading time is not included in the CD. The Teachers' Notes containing information about the conduct of the examination are provided in advance; they do not change significantly from year to year, and next year they will be made available earlier than in the recent past.

Some impressively high marks were achieved in this examination. It was obvious that many candidates had been extremely well-prepared, having experienced a wide range of music from each of the three Strands of Learning.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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