

GCSE

Music

42701 Listening to and Appraising Music
Report on the Examination

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42701: Listening to and Appraising Music

This year's examination again featured twelve questions and eighteen excerpts covering the three Strands of Learning: the Western Classical Tradition, Popular Music of the 20th and 21st Centuries and World Music (focusing on music from Africa, India and the Caribbean). In keeping with the format of this examination, excerpts were generally short and had only a few questions related to each.

Question 1 is designed to be a relatively straight forward introduction to the paper and, overall, this was reflected in the marks gained, with over 90% of students recognising 12-bar blues (1 (a)) and the guitar (1 (c)). 1 (b) was also well-answered, though some students wrote 'keyboard' to a question which asked them to name the keyboard instrument. The triplet in 1 (d) and the identification of the rhythm in 1 (e) both saw over 50% success, while nearly 95% gained one or two marks in 1 (f).

'Call and response' was correctly identified by over 90% for 2 (a) but, rather surprisingly, the identification of the soprano voice was achieved by just less than 50%. Both questions relating to the Indian music (Excerpt B) were well answered, the most common error being to put 'banjo' or 'guitar' rather than 'sitar'.

Many students appear to be unfamiliar with 'rubato', the correct answer for 3 (a) and, although many did identify the texture as mainly monophonic, with single line melody and solo also being accepted, many seemed simply to write any term associated with texture or, indeed, quite a few which were not. On the other hand, the fact that all instruments were from the woodwind family was successfully spotted. Recognition of the bass voice in 3 (d) was mainly successful as was identifying the male voice choir. Relatively few realised that there were three beats in a bar or correctly counted the number of bars sung by the choir. The cadence was identified quite well, though 'imperfect' and 'plagal' were also popular, as were some terms not connected at all with cadences. It should be noted that, when the question asks the student to 'Name the cadence', this is precisely what will be marked, rather than Roman numerals.

Recognition of the rhythm in 'Downtown' was disappointingly answered, although 4 (b) saw a very high success rate. The interval on 'Downtown' was also incorrectly identified by most. As a matter of examination technique, it should be noted that, where there is only one mark available for the answer, a single piece of information suffices: adding more increases the chances of invalidating the answer. Dynamic changes were well spotted for 4 (d), while more than two thirds of the students recognised the correct form in 4 (e).

Question 5 was well answered by most students, with the slight exception of 5 (a) – the melodic shape, recognised by just over 50%.

Question 6 featured the music of Hamish MacCunn and probably his best known composition 'Land of the Mountain and the Flood'. Many correctly placed all four notes here but, if this was not achieved, it seemed to be that only one was right. It is vitally important that students write very neatly for this question, making sure that there can be no doubt as to whether their notes are on lines or in spaces. As usual with questions focusing on dynamics, 6 (c) was well answered. Similarly, many students recognised one of the many changes heard in the final playing within this excerpt, with most going for the addition of brass instruments, simply more instruments or the fact that it was louder.

Question 7 featured two examples of African music. However, many students seemed to think that the first was Indian and this obviously affected their answer to 7 (a). Virtually all scored one or more marks in 7 (b.) The time signature and rhythm of the second excerpt were correctly identified by many.

Question 8 was not answered well overall, though the majority did score some marks. The main problems were a lack of focus on the elements listed, with students seemingly just jotting down random observations. Metre, timbre, tonality and texture featured high amongst answers, but none of these was a required area. A few seemed to misunderstand the instruction to refer to 'at least two' of the elements and took it to mean they should write **only** about two elements. The majority of marks came from 'repetition' and 'sequence' in the melody section and also correct comments in terms of the dynamics. Many also heard the perfect cadence at the end and a few the earlier interrupted cadence.

Question 9 (a) asked for the cadence at the end of the passage indicated by the given rhythm. As it ended on the dominant, it had to be 'imperfect', though all other cadences were offered plus some terms which were unrelated. It should be noted, that terms such as 'final' or 'unfinished' are not acceptable. The two types of melodic movement asked about in 9 (b) saw most students achieving one or both of the marks available and the form – ABA – was also recognised by many, as was the tonality.

The cello playing the countermelody in Katie Melua's 'Closest Thing to Crazy' was not well identified: the majority of students heard a string instrument but put violin, without taking into account either its tone quality or its subsequent range. The other two parts of 10 (a) were much better answered. Over 50% identified the correct speed and a similar number the other time signature. Whether or not it was because this is quite a sad song, relatively few heard this as being in the major key.

Arthur Wood's 'Barwick Green', more commonly known as the theme music for the radio programme, 'The Archers', provided the musical excerpt for question 11. Its compound time signature caught out the vast majority and more work needs to be done here to enable students to recognise this type of beat. The form – $A^1A^2B A^3$ – was very well spotted and most gained one of the two marks available for 11 (c). The final perfect cadence appeared to have been fairly straightforward for students

Question 12 consisted of two excerpts, the first being Caribbean music, featuring the steel drums or steel pans: this was spotted by about three-quarters of the entry, though it is a slightly worrying trend that quite a few students simply put 'keyboard' as their answer to many questions about timbre. While it is true that modern keyboards can emulate the sounds of many instruments, it will always be the acoustic versions which will be the focus of listening questions. The fact that this music was in the major key was easily recognised by many.

The final excerpt was from Adele's 'Someone like you'. It was very well answered, with the exceptions of 12 (g) and 12 (h). In the former case, many students lost the mark by incorrectly qualifying the interval of a third as 'major'. If only one mark is available for the answer, only one piece of information is required, in this case 'third'. Obviously, if the student wrote 'minor third', this was credited as it was the correct answer. With the latter, questions about texture are often not well answered. In this case, the melody was independent of the piano patterns underneath and, therefore, 'melody and accompaniment' was the correct answer ('homophonic' being reserved for

the type of texture where there is a melody and the accompaniment moves rhythmically in step with it).

Overall, the paper was tackled well by all students with exceptionally few questions left blank: it is always better to offer an answer, ensuring it is within the focus of the question, as a guess might merit a mark whereas a blank space definitely won't. As in previous years, recognition of timbre and texture, including the vocabulary relating to texture, are often shown to be weak areas. Cadence recognition, while answered reasonably well where it is a perfect cadence, is much less well answered in other instances. Finally, while the recognition of metre when there are two or four beats in a bar is answered excellently, students are less sure with other time signatures, whether triple or compound time, and would benefit from more practice here.

In general terms, some students need more help to remember the vocabulary associated with each of the Elements of Music which make up the Areas of Study for this specification and are, therefore, the focus of all listening questions.

There was much to praise in responses to this paper and far fewer instances where it was extremely difficult to decipher hand-writing, though the use of a sharp pencil is to be recommended for questions where missing notes are to be inserted.

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