



GCSE

Music

42701 Listening to and Appraising Music
Report on the Examination

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42701: Listening to and Appraising Music

The 2015 paper produced a wide range of responses and marks: some questions were exceptionally well answered but, unfortunately, the results continue to show a widespread lack of understanding of texture and a limited ability to recognise timbre. Additionally, unless the cadence is a Perfect one, most students seem to struggle: in fact, 'Perfect Cadence' seems to be the default answer for most such questions.

This year's paper also highlighted the fact that the majority of students do not understand how to insert phrase marks.

There were several instances where students need to be more aware of the correlation between the mark available for a question and the amount of information required within its answer. For example, many lose marks on questions about intervals simply by giving too much information and cancelling out a potentially correct answer. An example of this was Question 10 (e): only one mark was available for the answer and, therefore, only one piece of information was needed. The answer was 'third'. In this instance, 'minor third' was also correct, but no other qualification of 'third', such as 'major third' could gain students the mark.

However, there was also much to praise this year and, in particular, the strength of answers to Question 6, featuring two versions of 'String of Pearls'. Here, virtually 50% of students gained at least 6 marks out of the available 8, with nearly 30% gaining full marks, with many perceptive comments. Only one per cent of the students failed to gain any marks at all on this question.

A noticeable and disappointing trend overall this year has been the general increase in the number of questions which have not been attempted, i.e. simply left blank. It is always better to put something in that might be linked to the question and, possibly, gain credit than put nothing.

Responses in more detail

The opening question, based on '(I would walk) 500 miles' by The Proclaimers proved a little more problematic for some students than was anticipated: whilst many scored one or both marks on 1 (a), the Imperfect Cadence answer required for 1 (b) caught out over half the entry. 1 (c) turned out to be really testing, with just over 10% choosing its form correctly. The time signature, on the other hand, was extremely well answered while 1 (e) seemed also to be challenging.

Question 2 focussed on African music but many forfeited the mark in 2 (a) by giving too vague an answer (such as merely 'African drum(s)'). 2 (b) was a multi-choice style of question, students having to listen for two of the five options: more than a third got both correct while 60% picked up one mark. Over 80% identified 'call and response' for 2 (c) while, for 2 (d), virtually the same percentages were achieved as for 2 (b). Recognition of men's voices within this excerpt was exceptionally well done, with nearly 95% of the answers correct, with only 1 (d), the 4/4 time signature, and Question 7 (a), strings, being in the same area of success.

Solo instrumental recognition was the focus of Questions 3 (b), 4 (c) and 11 (a). The first and third of these – (French) horn and bassoon respectively – were not answered particularly well, but 4 (c) was better: though few actually identified the marimba, the decision to allow "xylophone" meant that a lot more gained credit here.

Along similar lines, Question 5 (e) sought recognition of the orchestra and Question 8 (c) the soprano voice: in each case, the success rate was about 60%. Although many wrote “orchestra”, the answer was invalidated by the addition of “string”, ‘wind and brass’ or similar. It was, therefore, another example of students giving more information than was needed for just the one mark available.

As well as Question 1 (b), Questions 9 (c) and 10 (f) focussed on cadences: no doubt because the latter was a Perfect Cadence, it was successfully answered by 70% of the students. On the other hand, the cadences in Question 9 (c) were plagal and then imperfect: fewer than 10% gained both marks with a further 40% recognising one of them.

The most successfully answered questions were 1 (d) – the time signature, 2 (e) – men’s voices, and 7 (a) – strings, where over 90% of students gained the mark. The least successful were 1 (c), as already mentioned, 9 (b), the use of the pentatonic scale in ‘Men of Harlech’, the melody and accompaniment texture of 5 (a) and 8 (b) and, weakest of all, recognition of the (tonic) pedal for 10 (d). This question also saw a very high percentage of students simply not attempting to answer it.

There is invariably success where the time signature is 4/4 but noticeably less so for any other situation, though the 3/4 of the Sibelius extract was recognised by three quarters of the students. Although this time signature was also allowed for the Dukas excerpt (Question 11), only just over a third of students gained a mark here, with only a very small minority correctly naming the true time signature of 9/8 (although, admittedly, this **is** beyond the normal GCSE expectation and meant the inclusion of further options within the Mark Scheme.) It was noticeable this year that more answers did not offer an accepted version of a time signature: the simplest way, when writing the response, is simply to place one number above the other; the clearest alternative is to write the time signature basically as a fraction, i.e. 4/4 or 3/4. More answers presented merely a single number or two consecutive numbers, as in, for example, 44: neither of these is acceptable.

Intervals were the focus of Questions 7 (c), 10 (b) and 10 (e): such questions are not answered well, partly, as explained earlier, because students tend to qualify their answer instead of just giving a single fact where there is only one mark to be gained. Fewer than 4% of students gained both marks in 7 (c) (third and octave) although 25% gained one mark. About 26% recognised the octave for 10 (b) while 18% correctly identified the third at 10 (e). Notable in two of these answers was the relatively high percentage of students not attempting any answer at all: for 7 (c), over 15% offered no suggestion at all while over 11% failed to respond to 10 (e).

Of those questions dealing with some aspect of melodic movement or decoration, the answer to 4 (b) was ‘triadic’, correctly chosen by just over 30% of students, for 5 (b), it was ‘diatonic’, recognised by just over a third, while for 9 (c) it was ‘pentatonic’, spotted by just over 13% and obviously catching students somewhat unawares. 11 (d) was concerned with the ornament played by the clarinets, the answer being ‘trill’: just over 37% of students used the correct term, a few confusing it with a ‘mordent’, while many answers had little to do with any melodic ornament and nearly 17% of students offered no answer at all. Question 8 (a) tackled melodic movement through a multi-choice format, the answers being ‘glissando’ and ‘mordent’: just over 20% of students recognising both while a further 60% identified one of them.

Melodic shape was also at the heart of Question 3 (a), with four possible outlines of the melody being offered: the correct one was the last – D – and just over 40% ticked this option. For Question 5 (c), attention switched to the movement of the bass part with four descriptions offered. Again, the correct choice was the final one, D, with just over 50% of students choosing this.

For Question 4 (e), students had to fill in the missing notes. This year, the task was placed within a piece of Caribbean music and it was hoped that students would recognise that the missing notes started where the given music had ended, that is on G, and ended on F#, the same note as was used for the continuation of the melody in the given part. Just under 20% were completely successful here while over two thirds gained one or more marks, with very few not attempting the question on this occasion.

While it has already been commented upon that students do not answer questions on texture well, Question 7 (g), the excerpt from 'Ubi caritas' by Paul Mealar, saw over 40% of students identify 'homophonic'. Though not wanting to take anything away from their success, it has to be mentioned that this is a 'mainstay' response but that many other answers simply have nothing at all to do with texture.

An alternative way of approaching the question of texture is to ask how many voices or instruments can be heard and this was used at 7 (e), the opening of Paul Mealar's "Ubi caritas", where just two voices could be heard.

The extended response featured two versions of 'String of Pearls', one by Glenn Miller, the other by Jools Holland. The success of students overall in answering this question has been mentioned already and was extremely encouraging. While some students presented their answers as continuous prose, many simply put the five headings – Dynamics, Rhythm, Metre, Texture and Structure – and made one or more points under each heading, repeating the process for the second excerpt. This simple and logical approach undoubtedly helped with the organisation and focus of answers, though it did not prevent some students writing at length about the roles of different instruments, even though neither 'Timbre' nor 'Use of instruments' was included in the list. Students must, however, ensure that they do not contradict themselves in the course of their answers by giving alternatives such as 'homophonic' and 'polyphonic' without any qualification which might make such answers plausible.

Only Question 3 (d) asked for the use of an Italian term to describe the tempo of an excerpt: this was the Sibelius. While a range of possible answers was allowed (it was never envisaged that students would give Sibelius's own marking of 'Un pochettino largamente'), a third of students gained the mark, though many gave terms which were either not in Italian or were nothing to do with tempo at all.

Recognition of a rhythmic pattern from a choice of four featured as Question 4 (a) and 12 (d): over 40% opted correctly in the former while almost 60% ended the paper by gaining the mark.

Students were asked to identify tonality on three occasions, in Questions 3 (e), 4 (d) and 11 (e). Here, the default answer seems to be 'major' but, unfortunately, this was not the case for two of the excerpts, with the Caribbean piece, 'El embrillón' and Dukas' 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' both being in minor keys.

It was expected that Question 10 (a) would be answered successfully by virtually everybody: there are only three possible answers to the question 'What happens to the dynamics during the instrumental introduction?' When there is only one mark available, these are:

- They get quieter
- They get louder
- They stay the same

Further ways of making these points were allowed and, given the loud start to the music, the first answer was the correct one. Almost 85% identified this but it had been hoped that this would have been even higher. Some lost the mark by simply writing too much rather than looking at the number of marks available and giving just the one fact.

Some students, as is always the case, crossed out their first and correct response to replace it with an incorrect one: it was noticeable that there were more revisions which lost a mark than gained one. However, in all cases, it is vital that students make clear which answer is to be marked, including where boxes have to be ticked or words circled and the student changes his / her mind. Leaving two possible answers where there is only one mark available will mean that none will be awarded.

It was apparent that the wide range of musical styles kept the interest of virtually all students until the end of the paper, with many scoring right up until the very last question.

While there are obviously areas which need additional attention when preparing students for this paper, many students are obviously well-practised in the techniques needed and are well-versed in relevant examination techniques.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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