



## **General Certificate of Education**

**MUSIC 1271**

**MUSC3**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

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## MUSC3

It will be no surprise to teachers to report that the level of achievement in MUSC3 was very high and the flexibility of the six options in the new Specification allowed candidates to excel in different areas according to their ability. Solo performance combined with either ensemble performance or solo performance on a second instrument were by far the most popular options, but the new option of performing using music technology produced some very interesting and well produced work. The high standard of work offered by many candidates made the process of moderation a pleasure.

It was pleasing to see teachers awarding marks which were in agreement with the standard expected and most were backed up by very detailed and helpful comments. Teachers are reminded that comments are essential, as information justifying the mark awarded is invaluable to the moderator.

### Acoustic Performances

In choosing repertoire for performance, teachers and candidates are reminded that they should refer to the requirements of the Specification and to the Assessment Criteria. The *Level of Demand* was judged well by teachers assessing candidates' performances, but centres should counsel their students against offering pieces rated in excess of Grade 5 unless they are totally in control of the performance. Some candidates offered their current grade examination pieces which were often well above the standard required for AS, but where these performances were insecure the candidates' interests would have been better served by offering a lower standard piece. One or two marks may have been sacrificed under *Level of Demand* but higher marks could have been accessed in other areas such as *Accuracy* and *Interpretation*.

The Specification requires that each performance should *last 5 – 8 minutes*. This applies to each acoustic option, for example a candidate whose two options are solo performing and ensemble performing needs to submit 5 – 8 minutes of solo music and 5 – 8 minutes of ensemble music. Within each option this can be made up of several pieces or a single longer piece. Shorter performances will compromise the *Level of Demand* mark: less than 4 minutes of music could not access the top band and less than 3 minutes could score a maximum of 2 marks. Marks may also be lost in other areas of the Assessment Criteria, as very short performances may not contain sufficient substance for candidates to demonstrate the qualities required for the higher mark bands.

It is vital that the teacher's assessment of *communication* is supported by comments to justify the marks awarded since it is the teacher who has experienced the live performance. Moderators were guided by the *communication* mark awarded by the centre, unless the recording prompted serious concerns about the marking.

The following additional observations on the application of the Assessment Criteria may be helpful for the future:

- occasional slips which do not affect fluency do not necessarily make the top band for *accuracy* inaccessible
- in assessing *interpretation*, technical control including intonation and articulation should be considered but care should be taken not to penalise a candidate under two different headings for the same slips

## Solo Performances

There were many excellent and very enjoyable performances involving a wide range of instruments and styles. Programmes were chosen well and often displayed styles and techniques which allowed candidates to clearly show their strengths. It was good to see a balanced mix of classical and popular. Singers' programmes often started with Purcell or Bach and finished with Lloyd Webber and Weill. Rock School pieces figured strongly and there was some excellent use of improvisation backed up by a helpful lead sheet.

Some candidates offered pieces on two different instruments within a single solo option: while this does not contravene the Specification, careful thought should be given to whether it is really in the candidate's best interests, especially if the performance is not as confident on both instruments. There were also some examples of self-accompanied vocal performances. These are normally marked holistically, and in cases where the standard differs between the two parts teachers should consider carefully whether this type of performance will gain the best possible marks.

## Performing on a second instrument

This raised some interesting issues about what constitutes a 'second instrument'. Violin and piano, flute and percussion etc. are obviously fine, but what about more closely-related instruments? Here is a list of possible combinations that would be acceptable as two solo options:

- Saxophone and clarinet
- Different sizes of instruments (clarinets, recorders etc)
- Flute and piccolo
- Electric and acoustic guitars
- Piano and keyboard or organ
- Violin and viola
- Tuned and un-tuned percussion

However, candidates should show different techniques and different types of repertoire on the two instruments chosen. If in doubt, please contact your Coursework Adviser.

Unfortunately there were instances of candidates playing exactly the same instrument for their second solo performance as they had played for the first. This is not permitted by the Specification and credit could not be given for both performances in these circumstances.

The repertoire offered was, again, very varied and displayed a wealth of experience and talent. Much of it was of a classical genre but there were also some excellent jazz and popular music performances with a good sense of style and use of appropriate performing conventions.

## Ensemble Performances

There was a great variety of combinations of instruments and styles: the most popular were rock and jazz/big band ensembles but there were also some excellent string and wind ensembles performing a wide variety of music from Bach to Lutoslawski.

There were some cases where the *nature* of an ensemble, in terms of what is required by the Specification, appeared to have been misunderstood. The Specification states that an ensemble performance should normally involve *three or more players*. Some duet combinations

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are, however, acceptable such as piano duets. A solo instrument accompanied by a piano is not an ensemble.

Care should be taken to ensure that the candidate's role within the ensemble is readily identifiable. Some big band music does not lend itself to this: very often the candidate's part is doubled by other players or the candidate is not playing for significant periods of time. Doubling should be avoided as much as possible. It can be a particular problem with singers offering repertoire taken from musicals, where the accompaniment often doubles throughout, and is typical of certain other styles. Moderators had to determine the extent to which the performers relied on the support of the doubling. Singers can also present another problem; some songs, often from musicals (such as *Music of the Night*), are really two separate solos because the two voices actually only sing as an ensemble for a short period. Coursework Advisers will be happy to give guidance on these matters and on specific repertoire.

A word of caution is necessary here about using backing tracks. Whilst this is allowed, it does raise issues as to how the candidate responds to the ensemble when one part is fixed and it will, therefore, have a bearing on the *sense of ensemble* mark. There must also be sufficient live performers.

It is acceptable for large groups to have a conductor.

While the *Sense of Ensemble* can be assessed from the recording, the teacher is best placed to assess the candidate's contribution to the success of the ensemble. Therefore, the teacher's comments are important for the moderator's consideration of the mark awarded.

Please ensure that it is clear on the Candidate Record Form **which part the candidate is playing** and that the candidate's part is clear on the recording.

### Performing using Music Technology

Only a small number of candidates submitted work for this option but the standard was very good with some performances of excellent quality. More candidates chose Option 2 and there was a good level of understanding of the medium. Centres are reminded that the technology options, like the acoustic options, are concerned with *Interpreting Musical Ideas*, in answer to Assessment Objective 1. As such the work submitted should be a performance rather than purely a technical exercise.

Here are a few points to bear in mind:

- Candidates must produce a guide recording of the original if no score is produced.
- A written commentary is vital, especially for Option 1, so that the moderator has as much information as possible about the process, equipment used and decisions made.
- The requirement for a performance to last 5 – 8 minutes refers to acoustic performances only. 32 bars is the minimum length for the technology performances but the performance should have a sense of wholeness and a conclusion rather than just finishing abruptly.
- In Technology 1, there needs to be a live performance but not necessarily by the candidate. Candidates are assessed on their ability to use the technology efficiently and effectively and on their judgements in the use of the live performance.
- In Technology 2 the submission must include the **candidate's** initial recording as well as the final mix.
- In Technology 2 the candidate may be one of the performers but does not have to be.

## **Administration**

Centres were generally very helpful with their administration and recordings were of a good quality. Please refer to the following checklist of material to send to your moderator:

- A signed Candidate Record Form for each candidate. Please make sure that the CRFs are completed correctly, indicating which performance options have been submitted.
- A recording of each candidate's performances – either on individual CDs or on a composite CD. Please make sure that the tracks are clearly identified on the CRF and that for composite CDs a track list is included.
- A photocopy of all the music being played – it helps to have one copy per candidate even if, say, two are singing a vocal duet.
- Both yellow and pink copies of the Centre Mark Sheet (CMS).
- A Centre Declaration Sheet.

More detailed information is provided in the Notes for Guidance which are on the AQA website.

## **In Conclusion**

This unit carries 40% of the marks available at AS, and it was very good to see such a range of performances at a very high standard. There is enough flexibility within the Specification to allow for a variety of combinations and options, and candidates were able to display their strengths. Teachers are reminded that their Coursework Adviser will be happy to provide advice on this unit.

## **Mark Range and Award of Grades**

Grade Boundaries and Cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA website.