



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Music

MUSC4

(Specification 2270)

Unit 4: Music in Context

Report on the Examination

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MUSC4 MUSIC IN CONTEXT

General

The Unit 4 examination always produces a good range of responses and candidates achieve a correspondingly varied range of marks.

The format remains as follows: 40% of the marks are allocated to Section A, a listening test based on unfamiliar excerpts of music; this is followed by an essay question on the chosen set work in Section B (30% of the total marks) and an essay on the chosen Area of Study in Section C (also 30%). This year's CD of music excerpts lasted a little less than 45 minutes, after which candidates had about 90 minutes to write their two essays.

The essay questions in Sections B and C give candidates the opportunity to write about music they have studied. This was the last examination in which the Section B questions were on Mahler's 4th and Vaughan Williams' 5th symphonies; next year the questions will be on the new set works. For Section C teachers are able to choose the Area of Study, and works from within it, which they hope their students will enjoy, and many students showed huge enthusiasm in their essays for the chosen music. (It is only the set works, and not the Areas of Study, that are changing for 2013.)

In the examination some candidates found difficulty in time management, writing too much on the set work, for instance, and leaving insufficient time for Section C. Teachers are advised of the need to practise 'timed essays' when preparing for these sections of the examination. It is perfectly acceptable to answer the question from Section C before the set work question, and this may well enable candidates to maximise their strengths; a significant number chose to do this.

Section A

The knowledge which can be expected to be tested in this section is described on page 19 of the Specification, of which the most up-to-date version (Version 2.4) is on the AQA website. (In the printed copy, Version 2, this is on page 20.) Teachers and students are advised to read this section carefully in order to be familiar with what may be asked.

It is worth repeating the advice given last year: more marks are available in Section A than for the questions on either the set work or the Area of Study. It is therefore essential for the achievement of high marks that candidates undertake regular practice in listening skills. It is also well worth looking at past papers to identify the different approaches which are best suited to each type of question contained in this section.

The marks gained in Section A were often in contrast to those gained in Sections B and C. It was common for candidates with good marks in Section A to score poorly in Sections B and C or vice versa. Possible explanations are that candidates with a good aural sense might only sketchily have studied set works and topics, or those who had worked extremely hard at the essay topics might well have been weaker aurally.

Question 1

There were two short excerpts here: part of the *Floral Dance*, and the opening of a Chopin *Ballade*. Many candidates scored 9 or 10 marks here. Questions at this level obviously need to be more challenging than those found at AS; hence question 1(h) "Suggest a suitable time signature" expected identification of the compound time of this music. The modulation question was also more complex: many candidates chose D minor here whereas in fact the music moved to A minor before reaching a cadence in C major.

Question 2

This question, which used music from *Murder on the Orient Express* by Richard Rodney Bennett, was answered fairly successfully by most candidates. There were 2 marks for question 2(a), indicating that there were two things to say about the chord: dominant **and** 7th were required to gain both marks. 2(c) asked for the statement which *best* described the tonality - inferring that some judgement must be exercised in determining which description was most apt. Whilst there were many correct responses to 2(d) and 2(f), *note of anticipation* and *portamento* were common incorrect choices in 2(d).

Question 3

The excerpt for this question was part of *In Native Worth* from *The Creation* by Haydn. A large number of candidates found this question difficult, with some failing to gain any marks at all. Identification of chords and cadences and melodic dictation are essential skills which continue to need regular practice.

Knowledge of basic harmony is a huge help; for example, the answer to question 3(b) was the chord Ic, which as part of a cadential 6/4 progression is basic knowledge required at A2. Whilst the melodic dictation in 3(c) seemed to be done better overall this year it was still an enormous problem for many. In fact it was fairly straightforward and there was a lot of helpful information on the score; the last note in bar 14 was C (given an octave higher in the immediately preceding violin melody), and the dictation rose by step from that starting point before falling to B at the end of bar 15. The repeat in bar 19 might have been a help. Some candidates made the melody go down at first instead of up.

At the end of the excerpt, in bars 28-29, the music had simply modulated to the dominant, so G or *dominant* and *perfect* were the correct answers for 3(e).

Question 4

This question, like question 3, discriminated well. The music was from *Romeo and Juliet* by Prokofiev. Many candidates identified the correct notes of the scale required for question 4(a) but some only underlined one note. 4(b) and 4(c) asked about the **melody** and so comments about the accompaniment or the dynamic scheme received no credit. Similarly 4(d) asked about **harmony**.

Section B

The set works will change for 2013, when candidates must answer questions on Symphony No.5 by Shostakovich or Symphony No.1 by Elgar. Many of the comments in this report will be equally applicable to the new works. It is vital that candidates remember that **analytical detail** is required in this section, focussing on the musical elements. Discussion of harmony/tonality - identification of keys and chords - was particularly weak this year.

Occasionally in this section, or in Section C of the paper, a candidate writes the number of one question at the beginning of their answer but it is evident to the examiner that they have answered the other. Examiners will credit the 'best fit' answer in this situation so that candidates are not disadvantaged by what may be a simple mistake.

The Mark Bands used for this section are published in the mark scheme, but below is a description of the sort of responses which might be characteristic of each band:

Band 1

Answers in this band are very weak. At the bottom of the band there may be as little as half a page of writing with a few 'remembered' facts which may or may not be relevant to the question. Three or four facts may take the work more than half-way up the band but there will still be no evidence of understanding.

Band 2

Answers in this band will have some content and relevance and there may be the beginnings of understanding. Typically candidates here may write about what can be seen on the page - the visual aspect - rather than the effect it creates - the aural aspect. An accurate description of the score, however good, should not gain more than half marks.

Band 3

Answers in this band will be stronger on content and now must contain evidence of aural awareness as well as a good range of facts; the candidate understands the music rather than just 'knowing' it. The essay should answer the question. Answers may lack detail and/or some important aspects may have gone unnoticed.

Band 4

The very good answers in this band are usually obvious: the candidate understands the music and comments perceptively. The essay will answer the question fully. There may be still more to say - missing features of the music or a lack of full detail - which will be reflected in the mark.

This year, over half the entry chose the Mahler symphony. **Questions 5** (Mahler) and **7** (Vaughan Williams), which asked for concentration on specific sections of the works, were the more popular questions. For questions of this sort the best approach is often to go through the relevant section(s) chronologically, but it is important that equally detailed attention is given to *the whole of the passage(s)* specified in the question. Many candidates wrote in great detail about the early part of these passages, leaving insufficient time to complete the task. As last year, some of the weaker answers tended to be descriptive, writing about what the candidate *saw* on the page, as opposed to what is *heard*. It is essential to be aware that if only the *visual* aspects of the work are described then the answer can only achieve up to half marks.

Centres are again reminded that candidates should not copy out musical quotations from the score in their answers on the set works. They will have taken an unmarked score into the examination, so this is an unnecessary and time-consuming exercise. Accurate bar numbers or rehearsal numbers would have been sufficient to identify the location of musical features. Several candidates this year used page numbers which is a huge problem for the examiner, because they obviously vary between editions.

The response required to the more 'open-ended' **Questions 6** and **8** needed to be as detailed as to the questions on specified sections. Whilst there were many very good answers, some candidates did themselves no favours by skimming briskly through the whole of the symphony, thus writing at length but superficially. A better approach would be a detailed investigation of selected short sections - two or three would be sufficient - spread through the symphony. Many candidates who chose Question 6 (Mahler's use of melody) concentrated on identifying motifs but neglected the way in which Mahler constantly develops them. There is a danger that this sort of approach will lead to descriptive writing, focusing mainly on instruments and performing detail and not addressing other characteristics of the melodies such as the implied harmony or their structural function. Similarly many candidates who chose Question 8 gave lists of modes and/or keys without considering an overview or reaching any conclusions about the use of harmony and tonality in the symphony.

Section C

Many responses to the questions in this section were a pleasure to read, with writing as detailed as that for the set work questions. These questions will necessarily be open-ended; no matter how they are phrased, they are intended to elicit from candidates a detailed appreciation of some of the music they have experienced at the same time as providing them with a focus for their writing.

Analytical detail is essential to score a high mark: candidates **must** write about harmony/tonality, melody, rhythm, texture - unless the question specifically targets only one or two of these. Candidates need to know this; it is clearly stated in the mark scheme, which refers throughout to the quality of responses in terms of candidates' *references to music*. The marking must also, of course, reflect how well the essay addresses the question set, and candidates should be alert to the fact that there may be different, equally valid, ways of approaching the question.

The descriptors of work which is characteristic of each mark band, given on the previous page of this report, apply to Section C essays as well as to the questions on the set works.

English Choral Music in the 20th Century

Once again, *Belshazzar's Feast*, *Dream of Gerontius* and *War Requiem* were very popular choices for this Area of Study, as were some smaller-scale works by John Tavener, Karl Jenkins, John Rutter and Hubert Parry (particularly *I was glad* in this Jubilee Year).

Question 9 produced some very good answers which discussed one or two pieces from the output of the composers chosen. Some candidates wrote fully about the music of two composers but without referring directly to what the *challenges* might be. Whilst it is not necessary to repeat this word in every paragraph, candidates must bear in mind that this is the focus of the question and direct reference is therefore vital.

Question 10 also attracted some excellent responses. The question asked for comments on *harmony, tonality and texture*. Responses needed reference to all three of these aspects to score a high mark. The main area of weakness here was *harmony* - naming and identifying chords and their harmonic context.

Chamber Music from Mendelssohn to Debussy

Question 11 typically produced discussions of the music of two composers, although it was equally valid to choose music by only one composer so long as the movements selected were contrasting. Again there were some excellent answers. Mendelssohn and Debussy were popular and good choices, but there was also work on Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Dvorak. Despite the question asking about *forms and structures*, the instruction to *write informatively* indicated that comments on aspects such as harmony, tonality and texture were also important and relevant.

Question 12 offered a choice of focus. *Writing for instruments*, which should address the sharing out of melody, different textures, different accompanimental figurations and so on, was probably the most popular. There were also some good answers to the other choices.

Four Decades of Jazz and Blues

This Area of Study was chosen the most often, but teachers are reminded that **musical detail is just as important** here as in the other Areas of Study.

Question 13 was by far the more popular of the two questions. It specifically asked for

essays on **pieces of music**. It is worth repeating that too much biographical background about the musicians, although it might be relevant to the character of the music, will be far less successful than discussion of the structure, the harmonic vocabulary (naming chords or chord sequences) the melodic and rhythmic characteristics and the different forces used.

For example, an essay on *Moonlight Serenade* might refer to details such as

- *the music is in G major*
- *the first note is treated as an added 6th to chord I*
- *Miller harmonises the next E using a diminished 7th, then chord II still over a pedal G*
- *the phrase ends with a rising chromatic appoggiatura*

and might also discuss form and structure and the keys/characteristics of the sections which follow. This is the sort of musical detail which would be awarded a high mark.

There were only a few answers to **Question 14**, despite it being clear in the Specification that jazz influences on composers of 'classical' orchestral music are part of this Area of Study. Some candidates who chose this question interpreted it as meaning influence *on jazz* by composers of *previous* generations and gave information such as "the classical composers used cadences and this can be seen in Ragtime...". Careful reading of the question is essential to success.

Conclusion

Teachers are reminded that past examination papers are available and exemplar materials (used for past Teacher Support meetings) are provided in Secure Key Materials. Teachers and students are once again to be congratulated on their careful and detailed preparation and their enthusiasm in tackling the wide range of music necessary to do well in 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.

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