

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

Listening

General comments

Section A

Although fewer candidates chose **Question 2** their answers were nearly all of a high standard. **Question 3** also attracted some good answers but the range of marks for the most popular question (**Question 1**) was very wide, with comparatively fewer really successful answers. This question attracted candidates who would prove to be insecure throughout the paper and there were some disappointingly low marks for it.

Close familiarity with the Prescribed Works is essential to this section of the paper: there is no reward for generalities unsubstantiated by reference to relevant examples in the music. On the whole, candidates were most secure when invited to give straight commentaries that follow the events in the music. Even when they know the music well they find it hard to select and describe specific examples, the first hurdle being to locate them in a recognisable way. Some candidates referred to CD timings: this was not acceptable, because no two recordings will be exactly the same. All the Prescribed Works in this section were in standard classical forms for which common shorthand terms could be used and more candidates should have been able to use these as reference points in their discussions.

Standards of expression: Examiners appreciate that many candidates were writing in their second language and full allowance is made for this - provided that the meaning is clear, odd spellings or awkward grammatical constructions need not be an issue. But all candidates (this applies equally to those for whom English is their first language) should learn, and be careful to spell correctly, the names of composers and the titles of their music.

Question 1

The principal difference – that Beethoven's orchestra was actually larger than Mozart's – was widely understood and some candidates contrasted the nature of the sound in vivid and sometimes subtle language. But only a few were able to list accurately how the 'larger/smaller' orchestras were made up. These were often the ones who were also able to explain the differences in sonority in terms of pitch-ranges, timbres and textures, although surprisingly few showed any awareness of doubling techniques or common *tutti* effects. Several candidates' answers were confined almost entirely to discussion of differences in dynamic markings (more appropriate to **Question 9**). Some wasted time and space on irrelevant, usually biographical, information.

Question 2

Candidates wrote very full and accurate accounts of Variation IV with a clear focus on the piano part and its relationship with the other instruments. More comparisons were made with Variations II and III than with any of the others. Although they generally wrote in less detail about their chosen comparison variations, several candidates convincingly sketched three distinct roles for the piano: as the bearer of the theme; as an accompaniment; as an active participant in a dialogue. The original song had clearly captured the imagination of many candidates but their attempts to relate specific moments in the variations to events in the song were irrelevant to the question.

Question 3

Most candidates chose the first movements of the two symphonies to illustrate their answers. Some distinguished well between symphonic and concerto practices. All were secure in their understanding of the basic outline and main principles of Sonata Form and some of the commentaries were impressively detailed.

Section B

There was a noticeable trend for candidates to refocus the questions so that they could write enthusiastically about aspects of the Core Works that they particularly enjoyed. While **Questions 5** and **6** were framed in a relatively open way, they were not invitations to 'say everything you know about' e.g. Penderecki's *Threnody*. Only a few candidates referred to other repertoire (in **Questions 5** and **6**): where they did, it always strengthened the communication of their understanding of the thrust of the question.

Question 4

Disappointingly few candidates answered this question and even fewer made any real attempt to address it wholeheartedly. Most answers were loosely-focused, or spent too much time explaining the other sections of the movement. Most had understood Owen's general meaning and were clearly very sympathetic to its 'message' but few were able to illustrate specific ways in which Britten's music interpreted it. Only two candidates made the obvious point that the setting is unmetered: none seemed to have understood the vocal lines as a type of recitative.

Question 5

Many candidates liked the idea of this question but, when it came to it, found that they could only speak about the Penderecki (though some managed to smuggle in references to both of the choral works). Although they gave very full, detailed accounts of the innovative techniques used, they found it hard to demonstrate how these contributed to the expression of 'aggression' or 'peacefulness' rather than simply 'suffering'. A wider range of listening and more reflection were necessary as preparation for such a question. A few candidates showed their awareness of the need to broaden the discussion with brief references to film scores, popular music or African traditional music but only a few were sufficiently developed to be wholly convincing.

Question 6

Many candidates took it for granted that, because they had chosen to talk about passages with evocative text, that the relevant points would be almost self-evident. While there was a great deal of appreciative descriptive writing, much of it avoided grappling directly with choral techniques. A few answers stood out, with clear explanations of the handling of metre, tonality, word-painting and fugal textures. One enlarged the scope of her answer, very successfully, by an equally analytical discussion of a traditional African choral piece.

Section C

It is a pity that candidates again appeared to be rushed at this point in the examination. Several answers began promisingly but rapidly tailed off into undeveloped generalities or even stopped abruptly.

Question 7

This was the least favoured of the questions in this section. Although candidates had some difficulty pinning down what 'classical' means in terms of Western traditions, most were very clear about its meaning in relation to African, Indian and Japanese traditions. Discussion of social and cultural context was often lacking.

Question 8

Most candidates understood well the principal features of Haydn's working life but many made wildly over-generalised comparisons between the realities of 'patronage' in the 18th century and current practices with recording contracts. A few had thought through the practical differences in terms of the range and level of skills needed in both situations.

Question 9

There was a clear division between those candidates who understood the term well and could illustrate its use by reference to a range of relevant examples and others who had only a vague idea of what it referred to. Some of the latter tried to discuss what they thought makes a piece of music 'dynamic', others strayed into explanations of articulation signs, tempo markings and performing instructions.

Question 10

A wide range of religious traditions was covered. Some answers were well-organised and gave a clear explanation of the occasions for music, distinguishing between sung texts and traditional instrumental usages. Most showed a sense of personal commitment but found it difficult to tease out the role of music in their own religion e.g. the narration of sacred texts and instruction of the people, expressions of worship or thankfulness, or an aid to reflection/meditation. Very few offered any musical examples at all.

MUSIC

Paper 8663/06

Investigation and Report

General comments

The small number of reports submitted this year were all well-presented. Careful thought had gone into the organisation of material and there was generally a good level of intellectual reflection. The Examiners appreciated that, for candidates whose first language was not English, laying out and developing what were in some cases quite sophisticated arguments was very challenging. However, in spite of inconsistencies of spelling and some awkward grammatical constructions, most managed to convey their meaning clearly and they are to be congratulated for their courage and application to the task.

The choice of subject matter in some cases was a cause for concern. The syllabus makes it quite clear that candidates are expected to demonstrate not only that they have close familiarity with the repertoire they have chosen, but that they have applied their aural skills to it in their Investigation. While most chose to write about music that had appealed in a very personal way to them over quite a long period of time, it was not always evident that they had tried to listen again, almost with fresh ears, using the aural perception techniques that they had developed during their course of study for Component 1. The approach to the topic (and it was often that – a 'topic' rather than a specific body of music), persuasive though it might be, was often of a sort that a journalist might research and then present with an 'angle', rather than one that offered any specifically musical insights. Several Investigations allowed psycho-social issues to dominate, or were essentially polemical, the music itself relegated as part of the background to their discussions. Careful consideration of the Assessment Criteria for this Component will show that, if detailed examination of musical examples is not a central part of the Investigation, candidates are denying themselves access to the higher mark bands. This report deals with each of these Assessment Criteria in turn:

A Aural perception

This is defined in the Notes for Guidance as aural perceptiveness and 'an ability to recognise and select what is significant'. While most candidates could talk with enthusiasm in general terms about the music they had chosen to study, very few could 'recognise' or 'select' aspects which had 'significance'. As these are skills which are learned and practised in **Sections A** and **B** of Component 1 in the process of learning to understand and unfamiliar music, it is disappointing that so few could apply them to music with which they presumably felt more comfortable. At the very least, they were expected to single out the more obvious features of the music for discussion – such as rhythm, tempo, melody, harmony, texture, instrumentation. Many candidates could not get beyond vague references to 'mood', without being able to explain what its musical ingredients were.

B Contextual understanding

In many cases this was the strongest part of a report. Candidates were often already well informed about the developmental background to the repertoire they were discussing and were able to give illuminating accounts. Often there was little that would be gained further from researching scholarly reference material (i.e. books) and a range of websites was, in these cases, sufficient supplement.

C Analytic/investigative techniques and technical vocabulary

The descriptors for the lower bands make explicit that it is techniques for exploring the music itself that are the focus of assessment here, e.g.:

5 – 8 A sensible attempt to investigate relevant aspects of the music partly supported by necessary terminology.

These, of course, are closely related to 'Aural perception'. They are the tools that candidates need if they are to get under the skin of the music and be able to explain to the reader how the music achieves its effects. Without these, the Investigation is likely to be stuck at a superficial level.

D Substantiation of judgements

Candidates are expected not only to 'investigate' but to reach conclusions and make judgements of their own. In background descriptions, generalisations should be supported either by reference to indisputable facts or careful argument, or by precise reference to the 'authority', the reputable source, from which it is quoted, e.g. by a footnote reference to a relevant book. A few candidates were exemplary in this respect, but some either failed to support their generalisations, or did not acknowledge their sources sufficiently precisely.

Musical judgements need aural examples. Most candidates included a CD of representative examples of the music they were discussing but, in nearly every case, these were of whole pieces: very few supplied timing references to point out where significant moments were to be heard. Again, there is a correlation with the further definition given above of criterion A – Aural perception: substantiating a musical judgement involves recognising and selecting 'what is significant'. Candidates would find it a useful exercise to try to record onto CD much shorter examples that demonstrate and support a specific point that they are making in their text. One candidate included two CDs: one had well-chosen extracts to support specific points made about, in this case, two musicals which were being compared, the other a very illuminating set of extracts from other musicals against the background of which the two principal works were examined.

E Communication of findings and acknowledgements

There are two questions here: is the candidate's meaning clear? how much is the Report the fruit of the candidate's own, independent thought? In general, as stated at the beginning of this report, most candidates managed to convey their meaning clearly, despite whatever difficulties they had turning sometimes quite difficult concepts into English. Almost every candidate listed websites consulted: those who had relied on other sources, particularly books, gave an adequate bibliography and used footnotes to acknowledge when they were quoting. In a few cases it was obvious from the way the text lurched from section to section that a variety of sources was being paraphrased quite closely: this, too needs formal acknowledgement. Overall, however, a good deal of independence of thought was in evidence.