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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE Music 6MU06

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Introduction

It is pleasing to report that candidates in general responded well to the questions set in this first examination of the new specification.

The Unit 6 examination (Further Musical Understanding) combines in a single two hour paper elements from the listening tests which previously formed Paper 61 in the legacy specification, and analysis and history questions, not unlike those set for the old Paper 62. The compulsory listening tests come at the start of the exam, after which candidates are able to select from a range of questions on Music in Context and Instrumental Music.

Two hours are allowed for this paper, and it appears that candidates were able comfortably to answer the demands of the paper within that time.

Examiners are well aware of the pressures on candidates, especially in Part A (Aural Analysis), but feel bound to point out that the space allotted in the answer booklet is more than sufficient. In Question 1, in particular, excessive numbers of points were made, often involving contradictions and duplication of previous answers.

Comments on individual questions follow, with some exemplar material and additional advice.

Question 1 (a)

Question 1

The excerpts were taken from Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* in the Rimsky-Korsakov version. Excerpt A was from the Garden Scene in Act III, Scene 2 and Excerpt B from Act IV, Scene 2.

In (a), very few candidates failed to identify opera as the type of longer work from which the excerpts were taken. In (b) (i), the vast majority of candidates correctly named the type of male voice singing in both excerpts, but in (b) (ii) there were many more incorrect responses regarding the excerpt with the larger vocal range.

Question 1 (c)

This section produced a much more varied response. Those candidates who experienced most difficulty appeared to be unfamiliar with basic terminology: few, for example, referred correctly to the use of sequence, and even fewer distinguished between the rising sequences in Excerpt A and those which descended in Excerpt B. Some candidates appeared to hear the opposite of what was actually played on the CD, with conjunct movement said to be more in evidence in Excerpt A than Excerpt B.

Question 1 (d)

Many identified the instruments which appeared in Excerpt A as opposed to Excerpt B, notably harp and piccolo, as well as the presence of counter-melodies in A. Sadly, the presence of string tremolo was often noted in one excerpt only. Terminology again posed problems for some candidates, with many finding it difficult to convey their thoughts succinctly.

In both sections (c) and (d), presentation was at times poor.

In sections (e) and (f), it was surprising to observe how frequently Mozart and 1782 were given for composer and date of composition, indicating a need to develop a more secure knowledge of changing musical styles.

Question 2 (a)

The excerpt was taken from the slow movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in D minor, Op. 18, No. 1. The melodic notation test in (a) proved to be the best-answered part of this question, with many correct or very nearly correct workings. The most frequent errors involved missing accidentals, such as the sharp before the first F, the natural before the second F and the sharp before the C. Rhythmic problems tended to arise mainly in the second bar, with some crotchets incorrectly dotted, or else given as quavers.

Section (b) was answered least satisfactorily. Even the cadences were very often incorrect, and few candidates succeeded in identifying both the tonic key and relative major. It is clear enough that candidates often fail to apply their theoretical knowledge of harmony and tonality in the course of their listening, a view confirmed by a survey of the answers for section (b) (ii), with such implausible suggestions as chord Ic in place of the dominant seventh, and diminished seventh for either Chord A or Chord B.

Most identified the excerpt as being part of a string quartet, and suggestions for a composer and date of composition were very often correct.

Question 3 (a)

Part B: Music in Context

There were many good responses to the questions set in this section. Of the three options, the question on Purcell proved to be the most popular and also the best answered of the three. Of the remaining questions, that on Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* was taken up by more candidates than the one on *Baris Melampahan*. It is, however, pleasing to report that there were many good answers on the Balinese work.

It should be pointed out, though, that candidates are not expected to write extended essays in response to Part B questions. Indeed, answers in note form or bullet points are just as acceptable as continuous prose, and there was a number of cases where a more succinct approach would have been desirable, especially in those cases where excessive and only marginally relevant background material was provided. Notable examples of this involved detailed explanations of the recitative and aria form of the Purcell, the dramatic context (and especially in those instances where Dido appeared to be a male character), and Diaghilev and the Commedia dell'arte.

Candidates should also be aware of the fact that the mark scheme makes it abundantly clear that higher marks are available for responses in which illustrated points are made. In effect, illustrated points will entail the offering of substantiation, perhaps in the form of an explanation of a term used, or else a location (bar and beat number) for the device in question.

In option (a), candidates often appeared unsure as to the precise origins of Stravinsky's source material, and tended to look for false connections with concerto grosso layout. Most identified the presence of what would have been unusual instruments for the Baroque era, and some of the other features of Stravinsky's recomposition, notably the dissonant harmony and modifications to the tonal scheme. 'Du talon' was frequently cited as an example of a Stravinskyian touch, but was not always defined.

Question 3 (b)

Responses to this question were often full and detailed, showing a sound and sympathetic knowledge of the set work. Unfortunately, misplaced enthusiasm could lead to diffuse writing.

(b) In 'Thy hand, Belinda' and 'When I am laid in earth' from *Dido and Aeneas*, Purcell portrays a character facing death. Describe those features in the music which underline Dido's state of mind at this point.

(13)

- In 'Thy hand', vocal line descends an octave on note of C - shows despair
 - dissonances (second note bar 2.)
 - suspensions ('a welcome guest' - bar 8.)
- } Thy Hand
- ↳ bar 7 in 'When I am', 1st note of ~~verse~~
- melisma on word 'ah' suggests cry/sigh (voice bar 34, 30)
 - chromatic, descending ground bass - causes juxtaposition, makes minor + major versions of same chord.
 - highest note in voice is a G as 'remember me' (b 42-43)
 - stays in 1 key (a minor) throughout - inevitable fate
 - vocal melody descends at end into sorrow (b 45)
 - high note of D, two above middle c, in violin 1, bar 33-34 helps create tension.
 - Ground bass and vocal line overlap, so not clear cut phrases (eg bar 11, ground bass starts half way through vocal line and bar 31 at 'forget my fate' - 'bliss' slightly - anxiety)
 - High, descending violin 1 at end (end of bar 49 onwards) creates tension



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Examiner Comments

This example of a candidate's work shows that it is possible to earn high marks by way of an economic, bullet-form style.



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Examiner Tip

In the end, you must approach these questions in a way with which you are comfortable. If you like writing continuous prose, don't change your approach but simply try to be as succinct as possible.

Question 3 (c)

Candidates are to be commended on their grasp of the nature of Gamelan music, there being many detailed accounts of the workings of *Baris Melampahan*. The less satisfactory accounts tended to focus on superficial details of instrumentation, without explaining fully how these interacted to produce a genuinely communal work.

Question 4 (a)

Section C: Continuity and Change in Instrumental Music

Of the two available options, that on melody and rhythm in the works by Cage, Haydn and Schumann proved to be significantly more popular than the enquiry into tonality in music by Tippett, Beethoven and Armstrong.

Answers in this section of the paper have to be written in continuous prose, and it is pleasing to report that almost without exception, candidates complied with this demand. It is also reassuring that the improvement in essay writing observed in the last few years in Paper 62 of the legacy specification has been maintained.

Though there were many responses gaining high marks, there were also many instances in which overall organisation of work was less than convincing. The works for each question were listed on the examination paper in the order they appear in the New Anthology of Music. Candidates are free to draw on them in any way which is logical and permits the structuring of a sound argument. In both cases, candidates frequently referred to the most recently composed work first (Cage's *Sonatas* or Tippett's *Concerto*), whereas a more compelling case might well have been made by discussing the works in chronological order. In some cases, candidates even tried to make spurious connections between earlier and later composers, such as the use of rests between phrases in the works by Haydn and Cage.

There continue to be problems arising from irrelevance. In the first question, candidates were sometimes more concerned with textural issues, such as where the melody appeared (e.g. right or left hand in Schumann's *Kinderscenen*). In some cases, chords in Cage's *Sonata I* were regarded as a melodic feature. In the second option, candidates often erroneously took into consideration such harmonic features as augmented sixth and diminished seventh chords, or else fleeting chromatic passing notes. This confusion no doubt arises again from problems with terminology, and in this connection it has to be noted that the term syncopation was very often misapplied, not merely in such cases where 'off-beat' would be a more appropriate expression (Schumann *Kinderscenen*, No. 11, bar 9 in the right hand), but on occasion to simple dotted rhythms (*Kinderscenen*, No 1), cross-rhythms (Cage, *Sonata II*, bars 30-31) and any place on the score where an instrument enters after a rest.

Section C

Centres and candidates are to be congratulated on their approach to this unit. In the light of the response to this year's questions, future candidates are strongly advised to note the following points.

The number of marks available for each question is a reliable indication of the number of points which should be offered in the answer.

Candidates should attempt to keep to the point. In question 3, in particular, it is not necessary to write at length about the historical background.

Substantiation of observations should be offered wherever feasible.

Candidates should listen to as much music as possible beside their set works in order to bolster their knowledge of various musical styles.

A secure grasp of terminology is essential.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	90	69	62	55	48	42	36
Uniform boundary mark	120	108	96	84	72	60	48

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