



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Music

MUSC3

(Specification 2270)

Unit 3: Performing: Interpreting Musical Ideas

Report on the Examination

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MUSC3 INTERPRETING MUSICAL IDEAS

As in the first two years of the current Specification, there were many excellent performances this year, making moderation of this unit very enjoyable. Acoustic performances continue to be the most popular options, with the majority of candidates submitting a Solo and an Ensemble performance. There were, however, some very pleasing combinations of Solo performances with a Technology option, with Technology 2 (Multi-track recording) being the more popular of the two options. The general standard of Technology performances was high, with enthusiastic and knowledgeable candidates producing some excellent musical submissions.

As teachers have gained in confidence in delivering the Specification and in applying the marking criteria, there were many centres whose marking was in line with the AQA standard and supported by detailed comments on the Candidate Record Forms. However, a few specific points are worthy of clarification and emphasis:

- In marking Accuracy, the top band of marks should be reserved for performances that are secure, with only minor slips. It must be borne in mind particularly that where there are issues with intonation marks in the top band are inappropriate.
- When assessing Interpretation, *mastery of the techniques demanded by the music* must be considered along with matters of style and period of the music. However, care must be taken that a candidate is not penalised twice for the same shortcomings, for example where poor intonation is reflected in marks for Accuracy and also for lack of control in marks for Interpretation.
- In marking Ensemble performances it is the candidate's contribution to the performance which must be assessed. It was felt that some teachers had marked the effectiveness of the ensemble as a whole rather than the candidate's own part in that ensemble. This was particularly noticeable in respect of marks awarded for Sense of Ensemble.
- Technology performances were, in general, leniently marked. Teachers are urged to look at the descriptors for each of the assessment criteria.
- Centres are reminded that the whole spread of marks in a mark band should be used. A judgement must be made about precisely which mark from within the band is appropriate.
- Centres are reminded of the need to provide detailed comments in support of the marks awarded. This is particularly important in the case of marks for Communication as the teacher hearing the original performance is in the best position to be able to judge the extent to which a candidate's performance is committed and assured.

Acoustic performances

Solo performance

There were many superb performances that were a delight to moderate. The choice of music for performance is, however, crucial. Often candidates had chosen to perform music that was beyond their technical ability. It is better for a candidate to sacrifice marks for Level of Demand rather than finding themselves losing marks in other marking categories.

A number of specific points should be borne in mind:

- When a chosen piece has an accompaniment that accompaniment should be used. The accompaniment is integral to the performance.
- Candidates should try to avoid submitting the drum kit/rhythm guitar/bass guitar part for a song as their solo performance. Again, this part taken out of context does not make musical sense.
- In order to access accuracy a score or guide recording is vital. This is a particular issue with vocal performances. A sheet of lyrics or a basic lead sheet does not provide sufficient information against which to assess accuracy.

Ensemble performances

There were many excellent Ensemble performances, demonstrating much care and innovation within centres in providing opportunities for ensemble skills to be developed. Again, there were some common issues that need noting:

- In a number of cases there was a disparity between the standard of a candidate's Ensemble performance and Solo performance. There appeared to have been both a lack of preparation of the individual's part and a lack of rehearsal of the Ensemble as a whole. Candidates are reminded that there are equal marks available for Solo and Ensemble options.
- An Ensemble performance should present the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate genuine ensemble skills, holding an individual part within a group. Too often the choice of repertoire for singers limited this opportunity. Several of the popular 'duets' from musicals contain very little actual ensemble singing. Similarly, a singer performing with, for example, piano and bass merely replicates the demands of solo performance.
- Whilst an Ensemble should ideally consist of three or more performers, duets for like instruments are acceptable.
- A candidate's part in an ensemble must be audible and must not be doubled. There were a number of Big Band / Swing Band / Brass Band submissions where the candidate's part was indistinguishable and in which the candidate did not have the opportunity to demonstrate true ensemble skills.

A number of points are applicable to both Solo and Ensemble performances:

- Centres are reminded that both Solo and Ensemble performances should consist of between 5 and 8 minutes of music. There were still too many performances that fell short of the 5 minute point, some being shorter than 3 minutes. Marks for Level of Demand will be reduced for short submissions. Conversely, there were a number of performances that unnecessarily exceeded the 8 minute point, some being considerably longer.
- Performances should not be 'padded out' by the inclusion of unnecessary repeats. Where possible tuning time and applause should be edited out of the final submission.
- The performance may be recorded in a single take but this is not necessary. In fact, it may be to the candidate's advantage to record the separate pieces of their submission at different times, as the pieces come to readiness.

Technology performances

There were some very accomplished Technology performances, reflecting a good deal of imaginative and creative work from candidates. Of the two options, Multi-track recording was the more popular and a number of candidates demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the process, producing high quality recordings. The need to provide a write-up for the technology options was better observed than previously; however candidates need to be reminded that they must provide a detailed account of the process by which they have completed the task, including information as to decisions taken, for example as regards panning and the use of effects. Points to be borne in mind include:

- The minimum requirement for both options is for 32 bars of music, but the submission should have a sense of wholeness and finality.
- In Technology Option 1 several candidates chose to sequence their own compositions. This is not suitable for this option, as Accuracy must be assessed. Candidates are better choosing a commercially available piece upon which to base their sequencing. A recording or score of the original is of great assistance to the Moderator.
- In submitting work for Technology Option 2 (Multi-track/close microphone recording), the original capture **must** be submitted along with the final mixed version.
- As mentioned above, it is essential that Technology submissions are accompanied by a write up containing information about the hardware/software used and the process by which the work has been completed (please refer to the *Coursework Explanation Writing guide* in the Teacher Resource Bank on the AQA website).

Recordings

There were many excellent recordings, illustrating again the time and care that staff in centres put into the presentation of the work of their candidates. One or two points arose during the moderation process:

- Recordings should be on CD or Minidisc, the CD being playable on a standard stereo system. Recordings should not be presented on DVD or as WAV or MP3 files.
- Recordings should be presented either as a composite CD with a track list or as individual CDs for each student. The separate options of an individual candidate should not be submitted on separate CDs.
- Increasingly some recordings of performances have been mixed and enhanced by editing, including the addition of reverb and fades. This does not enable the Moderator to hear exactly what went on in the actual performance and, in particular, makes ensemble balance difficult to assess. The moderation process relies on Moderators having access to recordings that replicate as closely as possible what the original assessor in the centre heard when marking the performance, without the enhancement of an edited recording.

Administration

It was very pleasing to see the generally high degree of accuracy in the presentation of candidates' work and in the supporting paperwork. It is vital, however, that Candidate Record Forms are completed fully, with all details of the candidate's performance made transparent to the Moderator.

- Track numbers should be written in the appropriate space on the CRF.

- Care should be taken with addition and transfer of marks to the total box on the final page of the CRF and to the Centre Mark Sheet.
- The pink and yellow copies of the Centre Mark Sheet must be sent to the Moderator with the completed work from the centre.
- The Centre Declaration Sheet must be signed by the teacher(s) responsible for assessment of the work **and** the Head of Centre.
- A separate track listing for the CD should be included with the work.

Conclusion

This continues to be a unit in which many candidates are able to demonstrate considerable musicianship, achieving high marks. Credit must, however, be given to the teaching staff in the centres, to individual instrumental and vocal teachers, and accompanists who facilitate and make possible this achievement.

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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