



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

Music

MUSC6

(Specification 2270)

Unit 6: Performing: A Musical Performance

Report on the Examination

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MUSC6 A MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Now in its second year, this unit continues to produce many fine performances, both acoustic and technology-based. Candidates and teachers are again to be congratulated for the way in which they have tackled this component.

As was the case last year, the majority of submissions were of acoustic performances and standards were, again, very high. It is always a tremendous pleasure to be able to listen to such good recitals, where candidates had obviously prepared well and had given a lot of thought to the content, balance and variety of their programme. Once more, it is only right that a word of thanks and recognition should go to the accompanists who tackled some very demanding pieces.

However, it has to be said that entries this year produced a wider range of marks than before. There were just a few occasions where candidates seemed to struggle with every piece performed and, in some cases, the level of demand was below Grade 5 or its equivalent.

Disappointingly, there were few Technology-based performances and it is hoped that the number will increase in future years. Those that were submitted tended to be good or very good. It was obvious that candidates who enjoy using technology are prepared to spend many, many hours refining their recording. In the majority of cases, this work was well documented, but there were a few candidates who wrote very little and this made examining difficult.

Solo acoustic performances

Recordings continue to be mostly of a very high quality, but it is essential that, before the full recital is performed, test recordings be made to ensure that the recorded balance is good and reflects what was heard live. Occasionally, the accompanying instrument (usually a piano) tended to overpower the candidate or a recording was distorted, thus detracting from the aural experience and making assessment that bit harder.

Level of demand

As pointed out last year, the Level of Demand mark is just 10% of the overall total. This means that there is really no need for candidates to overstretch their technique just to gain maximum marks here: it is more likely in such a scenario that they will lose marks in one or more of the other assessment areas to such an extent that the small gain will be more than offset. Better to choose pieces which the candidate can perform comfortably and confidently even at the expense of being awarded 4 or 5 for Level of Demand rather than 6. The benefits in terms of Accuracy, confidence in Communication and ability to respond to the Interpretative requirements of the pieces will more than compensate. Certainly, unless the candidate is absolutely confident and has the necessary techniques, there is no need to go beyond Grade 8 or its equivalent.

Scores

Scores are needed to enable the examiner to assess the accuracy of the candidate's performance. Where that performance intentionally differs from a submitted score, this should be noted. Differences might be to dynamics (this, perhaps, most likely in baroque music where dynamic markings are editorial), to tempo (though this should not be a case of deliberately slowing a piece down to accommodate a limited performing technique), or, in the case of some modern pop songs, the performance might well change some rhythms and/or

pitches while retaining the basis of the printed music. In this last situation, it would probably be prudent to indicate on the score whether the candidate is performing in the style of the original artist or is giving his / her own interpretation. In the former case, a recording by the original artist would be useful.

There will be some occasions where the candidate has not learnt the music from a score but has learned it aurally: in such cases, a benchmark recording should be submitted and the candidate's intentions made absolutely clear, preferably through the inclusion of a detailed lead sheet. Similarly, where there is an element of improvisation in the performance, candidates must make the basis of that improvisation very clear: it might be a melody, a chord sequence, a rhythm, a particular style, etc. It is preferable that, again, a lead sheet be provided to clarify the candidate's intentions, otherwise the examiner will not be able to assess the performance accurately and will have to contact the centre for details, thus delaying the assessment process.

Recording the recital

Centres should bear in mind that:

- this can be done in front of an audience (as many were) or can be done simply with the minimum number of people needed present
- it can be done in one 'take' or individual pieces can be recorded separately and the full final recital edited together
- there is absolutely no need to exceed the suggested upper time limit of 15 minutes: candidates should easily be able to demonstrate techniques to a very high standard well within that time through a careful choice of pieces. This year, there were, again, quite a few which exceeded this substantially.
- the recording should be paused in between pieces to remove comments between performers, the sounds of papers being rearranged ready for the next piece, extended silences, and so on
- performances must be of the whole movement or piece in one 'take': the examination is an assessment of a live performance and, as such, submissions which edit together sections of several performances are not admissible and are outside the spirit and ethos of the examination
- the over-riding aim of this unit, as far as the acoustic option is concerned, is to replicate the feel of an actual live performance in front of an audience.

Recital programmes

When determining the content of the recital programme, the following points may be of benefit to candidates and teachers:

- where a piece has a very long introduction before the candidate's first entry, this should be shortened in a musically-satisfying manner. The same procedure should be adopted where there is a lengthy coda which does not involve the candidate. Long sections for the accompanying instrument alone do nothing to add to the candidate's opportunities to demonstrate his or her abilities.
- there is no need to play repeats unless it adds something to the performance, for example by the addition of ornamentation where appropriate, or within *da capo aria* form. Certainly, repeats should not be seen as simply a way of meeting the time recommendation.
- the specification requires that there be 'variety' within the recital, whether of period, style or technique. It is most unlikely that this variety will be demonstrated sufficiently if only one movement of a work is chosen.

- where a recital falls substantially short of the recommended minimum duration of ten minutes, it is unlikely that the candidate will be able to demonstrate the necessary skills and techniques to be able to access the highest marks across the assessment areas.

Backing tracks

Within the context of this examination, it is quite permissible for a candidate to play along to a backing track. Several did this, whether performing a pop song, a song from a musical, or using one of the many such recordings available through Rockscool. However, it is not acceptable to play or sing along to the full original recording, as happened in a very small number of cases. The obvious issues here are, first, doubling in a way which can obscure the part being assessed and, second, undue support provided by the recording to the candidate.

Technology-based performances

There were some excellent examples of work this year in both options, although Technology-based option 2 was slightly more popular. Centres should remember that, in the case of technology-based option 2, **two** recordings are required: the initial version and then the mixed-down, final version. Technology-based option 1 combines sequenced tracks with audio tracks and needs only the final version for its assessment. However, it is an essential requirement of the specification that the candidate includes both audio and sequenced tracks if choosing technology-based option 1: the ratio of these tracks is at the discretion of the candidate, but both must be present and how this has been done should be set out clearly in the candidate's accompanying documentation.

Similarly, with option 2, the specification requires that the submission include both vocal and instrumental tracks, although the ratio is left to the candidate. Thus, an instrument-only submission is not acceptable.

In all cases, it is vitally important that candidates provide examiners with information as to the hardware and software used, the capabilities of these and the process of achieving the recordings. A revised version of the *Candidate Record Form* will be available for 2012, enabling candidates to clarify easily which technology-based performance is being submitted and to confirm that all the necessary and relevant additional materials – documentation and recording(s) – have been enclosed.

Where a candidate submits a technology-based option which does not meet the rubric, whether this be because there are insufficient tracks or because, in the case of technology-based option 1, there is not a combination of sequenced and audio tracks, the full range of marks will not be available to candidates, as they have failed to meet the requirements of the examination and will not have demonstrated skills to the degree required by this specification.

The full requirements for this option are set out in the specification and additional information can also be accessed on the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk). Should further help be needed, centres can contact the Music Department at AQA (music@aqa.org.uk).

General

There was a gratifying variety of submissions, including recitals on one instrument and on two instruments, combinations of an acoustic performance and a technology-based one, examples of work based on just one of the technology-based options and examples where candidates had entered a piece in each of the technology-based options. However, centres and candidates should remember that there is no additional credit to be gained simply by

submitting performances on more than one instrument. Rather, it is essential that candidates ensure they submit the strongest performances possible.

Where the submission combines an acoustic recital with a technology-based option, a recital about half the length of that required for the normal acoustic submission will suffice: thus, the expectation would be that the candidate would play for five to seven minutes plus the technology-based performance. This should ensure that both performances still remain well within the recommended upper limit of fifteen minutes.

Administration

In a few cases, teachers assessed their candidate's performances: this should not be done, as this is an examined unit rather than a moderated one. The *Candidate Record Form* makes it clear that the section for marks and comments on page three is for the use of the examiner.

Please take care when packaging submissions from the centre. CDs should be enclosed in a padded envelope or bubble-wrap to ensure that they are not broken in transit; this is particularly important where a centre has only a small entry numerically as the CD will be more vulnerable. A very small number of CDs were broken on arrival and this inevitably delayed the marking process.

Please remember to include:

- the completed *Candidate Record Form*
- information as to the voice / instrument(s) to be assessed
- titles of pieces performed, preferably with their composer
- where relevant, the grade of the piece, the relevant board (e.g. ABRSM, Trinity/Guildhall, or Rockschoo) and the year it was set
- scores or lead sheets and / or benchmark recordings
- CD of recitals (having checked that recordings are complete and are playable on standard CD players)

Mark Range and Award of Grades

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

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion