



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

Music

MUSC3

(Specification 2270)

Unit 3: Performing: Interpreting Musical Ideas

Report on the Examination

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MUSC3 Interpreting Musical Ideas

This was the fourth year of this Unit and there has been a pleasing increase in the confidence shown by centres both in preparing students for assessment and in dealing with the assessment criteria. Moderators enjoyed some excellent, well-marked submissions, illustrating a high standard of music-making in many schools and colleges.

Acoustic performances remained the most popular options, with the solo and ensemble combination being the most common. There were fewer technology submissions this year, although there were some good examples where candidates combined an acoustic performance with one of the technology options, most commonly Technology 2.

Acoustic performances

The guidelines given in the Specification on length of solo and ensemble performances should be noted. Candidates should perform for between 5 and 8 minutes for each acoustic performance option. Performances should not be ‘padded out’ with unnecessary repeats. There were examples where candidates performed for less than 3 minutes while, conversely, some performances lasted in excess of 13 minutes. Candidates do not need to perform for longer than 8 minutes in order to demonstrate their ability but those who perform for less than 5 minutes will lose marks.

Solo performance

There were many excellent solo performances, with piano, voice and guitar predominating. There were also some very good self-accompanied vocal performances, where the candidate’s overall performance with piano/guitar accompaniment was marked holistically. A number of general points are worthy of note:

- Many candidates presented performances containing work that had already been prepared for grade examinations, but there were still too many situations in which candidates, or teachers, had selected pieces that were beyond the candidate’s technical or musical ability. This may result in marks being secured for Level of Demand, but at the expense of marks across the other aspects of the assessment criteria.
- If a candidate selects two solo options it is vital that the two options enable the candidate to explore different techniques **and** repertoire. (Acceptable combinations of instruments can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions in the Teacher Resource Bank on the AQA website.) The repertoire for the two instruments should be different: it is inappropriate for a candidate to perform the same piece on two different instruments.
- If a piece of music is written with an accompaniment, the accompaniment should be used: the piece is incomplete without it. Where a centre is unable to provide an accompanist, it would be worth exploring bringing in an accompanist as this role is essential not only for the completeness of the performance but also for the confidence of the performer.
- For the assessment of Accuracy, a score or guide recording must be provided for the moderator. In a number of cases singers simply presented lyrics, with or without chords, or guitarists supplied inaccurate tab scores, with an indication to the moderator that this was the candidate’s own interpretation of the music. Most of these performers will have learnt their music aurally from recordings, which should be made available to the moderator.

Ensemble performance

Whilst there were many excellent ensemble performances, and examples of centres that provided imaginative and creative ensemble opportunities for their candidates, too often the ensemble performance appeared to have been ‘manufactured’ as an afterthought. In order to be able to gain high marks for Sense of Ensemble the candidate must have the opportunity to demonstrate genuine ensemble skills. The choice of ensemble and repertoire is vital to the success of the candidate.

The singer, for example, who is basically being accompanied by piano, bass and drums, does not necessarily have the opportunity to demonstrate genuine rapport. In a number of cases singers performed in a duet with backing track where the vocal parts rarely sang together. In this situation some of the more popular duets from current shows are inadvisable choices for ensemble performances. To take a completely different example, a candidate performing a Baroque solo concerto movement with strings and continuo may not be able to demonstrate genuine ensemble skills, because the piece is basically an accompanied solo.

An ensemble is defined in the Specification as a performance where the candidate will normally play within a group of three or more performers where the demands of the parts are of roughly equal difficulty. There are many excellent instrumental and vocal duets that will suit the purpose, in which candidates can fully demonstrate their ensemble skills.

There were fewer examples this year of candidates performing in large ensembles, but centres are reminded that a candidate’s part must (a) be audible and (b) not be doubled.

If teachers in centres are uncertain as to the suitability of ensemble repertoire they are encouraged to contact their AQA Coursework Adviser for advice.

Technology performances

These performances tended to be good or very good, reflecting a high degree of skill and enthusiasm on the part of candidates. In most cases centres had observed the technical requirements of the Specification, but a few specific points need to be noted:

Technology 1: Sequencing

- As Accuracy is assessed, it is inappropriate for a candidate to sequence his/her own composition. There are many excellent existing songs that lend themselves to this task.
- A score or guide recording of the original song is necessary for the moderation process.
- There must be at least one audio track in the sequence.
- The submission should consist of one complete piece which must be 32 bars or more in length. In some cases centres appeared to have misunderstood this requirement, with candidates setting out to present 5 - 8 minutes of sequencing.
- Written commentaries were, on the whole, good, but a number did not make the role of the candidate totally transparent. ‘Next we did.....’ does not provide the information that the moderator needs.

Technology 2: multi-track/close microphone recording

- This was the more popular of the two Technology options and the overall standard was very high. Although candidates do not have to perform on the recordings, many did so, in a wide range of styles.
- There must be four independent tracks and the minimum length is, again, 32 bars.

- It is essential that the moderator receives two recordings, the initial unmixed sound capture and the final mixed/produced version. Centres are urged, however, not to provide the initial sound capture in the form of an individual track for each part.

Assessment

It was very pleasing to see many centres assessing their candidates' work in a fair, objective way. It is quite natural to want the best for one's own candidates, but in a number of cases teachers had inflated the marks beyond those that were deserved. Conversely, there were occasions where a candidate deserved the highest mark but where the teacher had shied away from awarding full marks.

Acoustic options

Level of Demand

This was generally well marked, with centres linking instrumental pieces to music examination grades where these were available. In assessing Level of Demand in ensemble performances teachers must take into account the role of the candidate within the ensemble as well as the technical demands being made on the performer.

Accuracy

The marking of Accuracy tended to present the largest discrepancies. The top band of marks must be reserved for performances that are secure in all respects and in which there are minimal flaws. A performance in which there are intonation problems will not attain a mark in the top band, however fluent it is.

There was a tendency for teachers to use only the marks at the top of a band, particularly when performances had slipped out of the top band. The full range of marks within the band should be used.

Communication

Commitment is only one aspect of communication. Too often candidates were awarded marks in the top band for a performance that, although fully committed, lacked the assurance and conviction for a top mark.

Interpretation

This was generally assessed well, but it must be noted that '*mastery of the techniques demanded by the music*' is included within the assessment of Interpretation. Too often, particularly in the case of singers performing pop songs, the sense of style may be evident without the ability to deliver the song. The singer must be able, for example, to demonstrate control of the voice across a wide range of pitch, which was often not the case.

Sense of Ensemble

The choice of mark must be tied in with the choice of repertoire for the ensemble performance. A candidate must have the opportunity within the ensemble to demonstrate genuine ensemble skills if he/she is to attain high marks for Sense of Ensemble. It must be borne in mind that it is the contribution of the individual candidate that is being assessed. In a number of cases the comment written by the teacher suggested that the mark was being awarded for the response of the whole ensemble.

Technology options

Assessment of the Technology options tends to be lenient. Teachers are urged to look closely at the separate descriptors and the mark range for each of the assessment criteria.

Administration

Recordings

Most recordings were of an excellent quality. The following should be noted for future reference:

- Announcements need not be made on the CDs.
- Centres are urged to send one composite CD or minidisc to the moderator, with performances presented in candidate order. This year there was an increase in the number of centres who sent individual CDs, not only for different candidates but also for all the individual options.
- It is not necessary for recordings of the separate pieces performed to be made on a single occasion. Individual pieces can be recorded at any stage and assembled on one CD for submission.
- A CD track list is essential, as well as the track numbers being written in the appropriate boxes on the Candidate Record Forms.
- CDs must be finalised and playable on standard audio equipment.
- Please exclude tuning, applause and unnecessary gaps from the recordings. Please also avoid including extra tracks which are not being presented for assessment.
- Guide recordings sent as a substitute for a score should be provided on CD (or minidisc). MP3 files are not acceptable, nor are YouTube links.

Presentation of candidates' work

The presentation of many centres' work was excellent, but centres are urged to avoid sending bulky ring binders to moderators. Similarly, whilst plastic wallets have the advantage of making everything neat, they are less helpful to the moderator than individual A4 document wallets for each candidate.

- Candidate Record Forms should be fully completed, with mark totals checked and signatures provided for the candidate and the assessing teacher.
- A Centre Declaration Sheet must be completed, signed, and sent with the work.
- The pink and yellow copies of the Centre Mark Form must be sent with the work.
- A separate track listing for the CD/minidisc should be included with the work.
- Copies of all Candidate Record Forms and recordings should be retained in the centre.
- Work should be sent to the moderator by standard 1st Class post. Please do not use registered mail which requires a recipient's signature and can cause significant delay.

Conclusion

Moderation of this unit is most enjoyable as there is a huge amount of musical talent present in our schools and colleges. Many of the performances presented for examination were truly excellent and were a credit to the teachers, within and outside the centres, who have enabled these young performers to achieve such heights.

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