



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

Music

MUSC6

(Specification 2270)

Unit 6: Performing: A Musical Performance

Report on the Examination

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MUSC6 Performing: A Musical Performance

This unit continues to produce many excellent performances, both acoustic and technology-based. Candidates and teachers are again to be congratulated on the way in which they have prepared for and realised the work for this component.

The majority of submissions were again acoustic performances, and standards were very high. It was a pleasure to listen to such fine recitals, where candidates had obviously prepared well and given a lot of thought to the content, balance and variety of their programme. Once again, thanks should go to the accompanists who tackled some very demanding pieces. There was a wide range of work, with examples of recitals on one instrument or on two, self-accompanied performances, combinations of an acoustic and a technology-based performance, and technology-based performances using one or both of the options.

Solo acoustic performances

This year's entry produced a wide range of marks. Performances that scored the highest marks were fluent, musical, confident, well-projected and accurate, demonstrating secure intonation, good technical control, excellent interpretation and a mature understanding of the music. These candidates chose music that was well within their technical capabilities and could therefore pay attention to all the other aspects that make a successful performance. Performances on piano, voice, alto saxophone, drums and electric guitar were common and there seemed to be an increase in male vocalists this year. Regrettably, there continues to be a decline in lower string and double reed players; however, the performances on these instruments tended to be of high quality.

There is no additional credit to be obtained by submitting performances on more than one instrument. Rather, candidates should be encouraged to submit the performances which best display their strengths. Centres should also advise candidates against the following:

- offering 'ensemble' pieces as solos; although the specification allows performance as part of a small ensemble, the other players should be in an accompanying role and a drummer or bass guitarist performing in a band does not meet the requirements of this unit. There seemed to be more performances of this type this year
- performing without an accompaniment where the piece was written to be performed with one: omitting the accompaniment invariably affects fluency, accuracy and sense of style
- submitting only lyrics with chords, in place of a score for vocal pieces: the examiner is unable to assess accuracy without additional information and will at least require the melody line or a guide recording
- performing the drum kit/rhythm guitar/bass part to a song without any other instruments; this places the individual part completely out of context and makes it very difficult to access marks for Communication and Interpretation
- performing pieces which are too challenging for the candidate: there are still too many candidates playing pieces which are harder than their technique allows.

Level of Demand

The Level of Demand mark accounts for only 10% of the overall total. There is really no need for candidates to overstretch their technique just to gain maximum marks here, and they will inevitably do so at the expense of marks in other areas of the assessment criteria. It is better to choose pieces which the candidate can perform comfortably and confidently, as the benefits in terms of Accuracy, confidence in Communication and ability to respond to the Interpretative requirements of the pieces will more than compensate. Unless the candidate is

absolutely confident and has the necessary techniques, there is no advantage in going beyond Grade 8 or its equivalent.

Recital programmes

In choosing the content of the recital programme, please bear in mind the following advice:

- a very long introduction before the candidate's first entry should be shortened in a musically-satisfying manner. The same procedure should be adopted where there is a lengthy coda or long linking sections which do not involve the candidate. These do not add to the candidate's opportunities to demonstrate his or her abilities and are not counted as part of the total performance duration
- repeats are not necessary unless they add something, such as ornamentation, to the performance and should not be included simply as a means of extending the performance to meet the time requirements
- the specification requires 'variety' within the recital, whether of period, style or technique: it is most unlikely that this variety will be demonstrated sufficiently if the performance consists of only one movement of a work
- where a recital falls substantially short of the recommended minimum duration of ten minutes, adjustments are made to the mark to reflect this.

Recordings

Recordings were mostly of a very high quality, but centres are encouraged to check the balance in advance of the final performance. Occasionally the accompanying instrument (usually a piano) tended to overpower the candidate or the recording was distorted, thus detracting from the aural experience and making assessment much harder. Care also needs to be taken when using backing tracks as these are often too loud or too quiet. Guitarists and bassists should check the clarity of the sound of the amplifier as, particularly with bassists, the sound quality can be very muffled on the recording. The inevitable sound of the school bell is a familiar problem, but peripheral noises should be eliminated as far as possible.

Centres should bear in mind that:

- a performance can be recorded in front of an audience (as many were) but a piece may be recorded again (in its entirety) if another attempt would be to the candidate's benefit
- the whole programme can be recorded in one session, or individual pieces can be recorded on separate occasions and the full final recital assembled at the end
- a whole piece or movement must be recorded in a single take; the examination is an assessment of a live performance and it is not acceptable to edit together sections of several attempts
- there is absolutely no need to exceed the upper time limit of 15 minutes, as candidates should easily be able to demonstrate the required techniques and skills within that time through a careful choice of pieces; there were quite a few submissions which were substantially in excess of 15 minutes
- the recording should be paused between pieces to remove the sound of conversations, shuffling of papers, extended silences, re-tuning of instruments and so on
- a candidate may perform with a backing track, whether performing a pop song, a song from a musical, or one of the many Rockschoo! pieces. However, it is not acceptable to play or sing along to the complete **original** recording; this results in doubling in a way which can obscure the part being assessed and offers undue support to the candidate
- 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.

Scores

Scores are needed to enable the examiner to assess the accuracy of the candidate's performance. If the performance intentionally differs from a submitted score, this should be noted on the score. Differences might typically be in dynamics (perhaps most likely in Baroque music where dynamic markings are editorial) or in tempo (though this should not be a case of deliberately slowing a piece down to accommodate a limited performing technique). In the case of some pop songs, the performer might change some rhythms and/or pitches while retaining the basis of the printed music; here it would be prudent to indicate on the score whether the candidate is performing in the style of the original artist (in which case a recording by that artist is useful) or is giving his/her own interpretation.

Where the candidate has learnt the music aurally and not from a score, 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 provide information about the basis of that improvisation: it might be a melody, a chord sequence, a rhythm or a particular style. If the piece being performed is the candidate's own composition, it is just as important that there is some benchmark against which the examiner can assess accuracy.

Technology-based performances

The number of Technology-based submissions was a little higher this year and it is hoped that this increase will continue. There were some examples of excellent work in both options. It was obvious that candidates who enjoyed using technology were prepared to spend many, many hours refining their recordings. In the majority of cases, this work was well documented, but there were a few candidates who wrote very little - which made assessment difficult. In the few instances where a candidate submitted both an acoustic performance and a technology-based performance, it was usually the case that the technology-based one was of a much higher standard.

Technology 1 - Sequencing

Technology-based option 1 combines sequenced tracks with audio tracks and it is a requirement of the specification that both are included. The ratio of these tracks is at the discretion of the candidate, and details should be set out clearly in the candidate's accompanying documentation. Only the candidate's final version is needed for assessment but it is imperative that a score or guide recording of the original song is available. There were examples of candidates who had chosen to sequence their own composition; this is not entirely suitable for this option as, unless clear information is given, it is difficult for the examiner to award marks within any of the five assessment areas. Choosing a commercially available piece should be encouraged, as there is then a clear benchmark against which the work can be assessed.

Candidates should provide clear written information about how they have completed the task, at all stages of production, and what they were aiming for with the finished product including any choices about style. They need to make explicit which tracks are audio and which tracks are midi. The audio tracks must not be sampled sounds. Screen shots in the sequencing software such as Logic or Cubase are not suitable as a score because they provide insufficient detail.

Technology 2 – multi-track/close microphone recording

The multi-track recording performance option produced work of a high standard overall, with candidates demonstrating a good level of knowledge and producing high quality recordings. Although candidates do not have to perform on the recordings, many do so and a wide range of styles is produced. The specification requires that both vocal and instrumental tracks are included, and an instrument-only submission is not therefore appropriate. Centres should

remember that **two** recordings are required: the initial unmixed sound capture and the mixed-down final version; not all met this requirement this year.

Both technology options

The time requirement of 10 – 15 minutes refers to acoustic performances only. Some candidates had tried to apply these time requirements to technology-based submissions, but the minimum requirement for these is 48 bars (though submissions will normally be complete pieces). When candidates choose a single technology option, they should remember that they must produce two contrasting pieces. Those choosing to submit work in both technology options need two pieces, each of at least 48 bars.

In all cases, it is vitally important that candidates provide examiners with information about the hardware and software used, and its capabilities, and about the process of achieving the recordings. The *Candidate Record Form* asks candidates to clarify which technology-based performance has been chosen and to indicate that all the necessary additional materials – documentation and recording(s) – have been enclosed.

Where a candidate submits a technology-based performance which does not meet all the requirements, the full range of marks will not be available as the necessary skills will not have been demonstrated to the degree required for the task.

It is perhaps worth reminding centres and candidates that, where the submission combines an acoustic recital with a technology-based option, a recital lasting about five to seven minutes plus the technology-based performance is sufficient. This should ensure that both performances still remain well within the recommended upper limit of fifteen minutes.

Administration

This is an externally examined unit and teachers are reminded that they should not enter marks on the *Candidate Record Form*; the section for marks and comments on page 3 is for the use of the examiner.

Please take care when packaging submissions - CDs should be protected to ensure that they are not broken in transit. Please also check that CDs will play on conventional equipment; there were some which had to be played on a computer and this should not be necessary. It is helpful for the examiner if the centre's composite CD can provide recordings in candidate order and pieces played in the same order as they are listed on the *Candidate Record Form*.

Bulky folders or individual wallets are not necessary. It is sufficient to enclose scores and/or other documentation within the fold of the *Candidate Record Form* so long as it is clearly labelled.

Please note that video or DVD recordings of performances are not accepted, and examiners should not be asked to access 'You tube' for a benchmark performance of a piece.

Please adhere to the deadline of 15 May and remember to include:

- the Attendance List
- the completed *Candidate Record Form* including
 - information as to the voice/instrument(s) to be assessed
 - titles of pieces performed, preferably with their composer
 - where relevant, the Grade of the music, the relevant board (e.g. ABRSM) and the year it was set
- scores or lead sheets and/or benchmark recordings and
- a CD of performances (there is no need to submit a separate CD for each candidate; a composite CD in candidate order and with a track listing is preferable).

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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