

MUSIC

<p>Paper 8663/01</p>

<p>Listening</p>

General comments

As in previous years, most candidates achieved their best marks in **Section A**. It was evident that they had prepared carefully. Answers in the highest band showed very close familiarity and appreciation of the music and gave recognisable descriptions of precise features in their examples. Although candidates generally also knew the Core Works of **Section B** well, there were many who did not do themselves full justice: answers frequently contained long passages of irrelevant material e.g. descriptions of the images contained in each of the six planets in the Holst without any reference to instrumentation, or commentaries on all the movements in the Vivaldi concertos, leaving themselves little space or time for the main focus of the question; or did not address part of the question e.g. **Question 5** began 'Compare the orchestras....'; or misunderstood the thrust of the question e.g. several answers to **Question 6** considered only the lyrics of a song, explaining the images behind them but not relating these to the music itself. **Section C** yielded few really satisfactory answers: where references to musical examples were required, most relied on the Prescribed and Core Works, some even duplicating material they had given in a previous answer. The level of expression was frequently poor (and handwriting by this point had sometimes deteriorated to near-illegibility) and the 'argument' often circular, with little evidence overall of familiarity with a wider range of repertoire (than the Prescribed and Core Works) or of reflection about the music which was known.

Section A

- 1 Responses to this question were disappointing. Although most tried to address the three aspects suggested, answers were generally vague, lacking convincing evidence of real familiarity with the music of either piece. Many were able to describe the first few moments of the first or second movements in some detail – Beethoven's use of piano to open the first movement, or the triplet accompaniment in Mozart's second – but rarely were there references to later events. Only one candidate discussed Beethoven's linking device. Although most were aware of the concept of a 'double exposition', hardly any candidates had noticed that the introduction of the second subject in both first movements was left to the soloist. Explanations about cadenzas were often very confused. The form of each of the second movements is problematic: some tried to squeeze both into sonata form; none understood the variation nature of Beethoven's. Few candidates chose to compare the third movements but one gave a masterly, succinct explanation of sonata rondo form followed by brief, but telling, descriptions of the different natures of the two themes and the piano textures. Many candidates had some awareness of the different natures of the pianos for which the two composers wrote and mentioned increased range, use of the pedal and the greater dynamic demands in Beethoven's music but very few could relate their discussion to specific moments in the music of either composer.

- 2 The candidates who chose to answer this question were nearly all on very solid ground (there were no poor answers). They knew their way confidently around sonata form and could often describe the course of the movement in vivid detail. Answers that could both show the extent to which Schubert was conventional (and many understood the 'Classical' nature of the movement) and point out the movement's less regular aspects (the four-bar introduction and the avoidance of the tonic at the beginning of the recapitulation) scored well, some very highly. A few candidates had made a close study of the score and committed to memory bar numbers of particularly significant moments: quoting these is not in itself evidence of close familiarity and understanding of the music – bar numbers cannot stand in place of recognisable descriptions of events or details which relate individual moments to the whole movement.

- 3 Of all the questions in this section this one attracted the most candidates and displayed the widest range of achievement. Comparing two such short pieces was the most contained of the tasks but also the one that depended for success on a very high level of detail. It was their ability to describe these details convincingly that differentiated candidates in the top mark bands. At the lower end there were a number of vague, often repetitive, answers. A few were not even sure about which instruments played what. Most candidates, however, mentioned many of the obvious points: melody back in the 1st violin; the octave transposition; the minor harmony at the beginning; the short coda (which prompted some very detailed, precise descriptions of the final two chords) and the scalar link between phrases. Full explanations of the changes in texture and the chromaticism were rare, though many candidates showed an appreciative awareness of their effects.

Section B

- 4 This was both the most straightforward and the most tightly-focused of the three questions in this section. The most successful answers were clear about which parts of the sonnets the music alluded to and illustrated their explanations of how the programmes were expressed by detailed commentaries which touched on instrumentation and performing techniques, tempi, textures, keys, rhythms and features of the principal melodies. Candidates who were less sure of the details but had a fair idea of the relationship between text and music often padded out their answers with irrelevant material about Vivaldi, concertos in general or the other movements. Some were only able to engage in impressionistic speculations that often confused imagery e.g. 'thunder' with 'flies' or, even, movements (there were a number of vivid references to Boreas and cracking ice).
- 5 The question demanded a comparison. Many answers gave detailed descriptions of a good range of examples from the music of both composers but left the comparisons unspoken. The best answers began by setting out clearly the similarities and differences in the size and make-up of the two orchestras and a few made telling points about Ravel's use of timbre to colour Mussorgsky's original. Some candidates discussed the musical material of *Pictures at an Exhibition* as though the original conception were Ravel's. There were many misspellings of Holst's name and some confusion about chronology, the two composers finding themselves sometimes categorised as Romantic composers, at other times described as influenced by World War II.
- 6 Several candidates who chose this question had not read it carefully or thought through the implications of 'related to an extra-musical idea': one wrote about Holst's *Mars* (the question ruled out the Core Works); several about popular albums, all with a strong focus on the meaning (rather than the musical interpretation) of the lyrics and which instrument played what when; one who wrote about background music to a film made some relevant points about the relationship between the visual images and the music. The most relevant choice was that of a Couperin keyboard piece. Many answers were weak, candidates not managing to get beyond writing an enthusiastic appreciation of a piece dear to their heart.

Section C

- 7 This question was poorly answered. While most candidates had at least some understanding of patronage, very few were able to discuss concert-giving and publishing. Several candidates sketched some political or social background – the French and Industrial Revolutions, the Napoleonic Wars, the rise of the middle class – but failed to make it relevant to their discussion of musical life. Some were very confused about chronology and several misunderstood what they called 'copywrite' (sic).
- 8 This was a popular question about which most candidates had a clear view (usually, 'yes, of course, one must treat the composer's intentions with respect but it is quite fitting to adapt/arrange to suit a contemporary audience'). No-one queried how we might claim to know a composer's 'intentions' (this was often interpreted as 'emotions') but many pointed to the importance of what had been notated. Some well-informed candidates knew about the search for authenticity in performance - the gap between the written score and how, historically, the music might have been performed – but hardly any of them supported what they said by reference to apt examples. A very small number were able to discuss changes in instrument technology and how this has affected performing techniques. Answers were often poorly-expressed, particularly those that dealt principally with 'cover' versions, and some were even downright contradictory. Many candidates were unable to support their assertions by more than one or two fleeting, superficial examples.

- 9** Very few candidates attempted this question and their answers were nearly all disappointingly confined to comparing Western classical and 'folk' (in the current popular usage of the term) music traditions.
- 10** 'Contrast' was rarely discussed *per se*: it was usually claimed as an illustration of a varied repetition (the same tune but with different instruments, different lyrics or change of key), although there were a few clear citations of Menuet and Trio form, as used by Schubert in Symphony no 5, and one or two references to Rondo form. Many did discuss relevant examples of contemporary popular songs but most other musical references were drawn from the Prescribed Works. Evidence of familiarity with a wider range of repertoire was scarce.

MUSIC

Paper 8663/06

Investigation and Report

Most of the candidates this year had approached their task in a business-like way. Although the overall range of achievement was wide, there was a very pleasing number of good submissions. Many candidates had pursued a sustained course of study investigating an appropriate topic and were able to present their report coherently. Those who scored less well, in spite of having worked hard at researching and reading, and presenting their findings carefully, were those in which the engagement with any actual music was rather slim. Centres are advised to draw their candidates' attention to the Assessment Criteria and to stress the importance of demonstrating their abilities in relation to the first and third categories (A – 'Aural perception' and C – 'Analytic/investigative techniques and technical vocabulary'). These both relate to the study of the sound of the music – at the very least, 'how it sounds' and, at best, 'why it sounds as it does'. Merely downloading and paraphrasing articles from Internet sites is only a minor aspect of 'Investigative techniques' – it does not offer an opportunity to candidates to demonstrate their own specific musical skills and understanding.

For 9703/05 the Assessment Criteria require that 'a link' be made with the other component being taken (either Performing – Component 3, or Composing – Component 4). In most cases this was explicit: candidates explored an aspect of their performing programme, usually in the context of the principal genre presented. These ranged from rather loose background notes (typically the composer's life and 'interesting' facts about performers or performances of the music or discussion of lyrics) to in-depth analytic discussion (e.g. detailed analyses of the ways in which three different composers handled their Sonata Form movements, or the evidence of jazz influences on a composer heard in the music being performed, or an assessment of the place of a specific nineteenth-century solo concerto in the overall development of the genre) and to a detailed comparison of the interpretations offered in two significant recordings of the main work in the candidate's programme. Some candidates found it hard to move beyond a 'programme-note' format, others appeared only to have extended slightly the spoken introduction to their performance in Component 3. Some of these had misunderstood 'link' as referring to the 'focus' of their programme i.e. what line of thought connected their pieces, and did not go beyond explaining the relationship between the individual items. A handful of others thought it sufficient to describe in some detail what technical difficulties had had to be mastered in learning their pieces.

It needs emphasising to candidates that the process of Investigation should involve a substantial amount of independent learning, undertaken over sufficient time to allow them to extend their skills and deepen their understanding (not quickly researched on the Internet over two days). The best Reports offered detailed, reflective accounts of candidates' findings, supported by musical examples (not just a brief summary). Many candidates managed this well but the evidence of some of the weaker submissions was that this had not always been fully understood.

Musical examples: these may be audio, or notated (the candidate's own transcriptions or score extracts). Before enclosing with the Report, it would be helpful to the Examiners if any CD is checked to make sure that it will play on a conventional stereo-player and that access to it is not restricted to the use of a personal computer. Complete pieces transferred to the CD were rarely necessary: brief extracts chosen to demonstrate a particular point in the text were more convincing than vague, general assertions that required the Examiner to listen to a whole movement e.g. of a concerto. The same was usually true for notated examples – that they worked best when they were incorporated into the text and carefully referenced (with bar nos. and CD track nos.). Occasionally, it proved very helpful to have a copy of the whole score (it should not be assumed that the Examiner of this component will routinely have access to any scores despatched with the recordings for Component 3).

Some candidates enclosed a mass of material, notebooks detailing all the work that they had done during the year. While this practice has the potential to throw light on how the Investigation was tackled, it is not a requirement and should not be assumed to enhance the submission. Candidates should be able to rely on their Report, setting out their link (between 3 or 4 for Syllabus 9703) and their aims, and explaining their methodology, followed by the main body of their text, and concluding with a detailed bibliography and

discography. Their attention should also be drawn to the use of the word 'documented' in the last of the Assessment Criteria: this refers to the need, not only to label all examples and to make clear cross-references between their text and CD tracks, but also to acknowledge in full (in a footnote, appendix or within their text) not only every direct quotation used but also, where another author's text is being paraphrased, what the source of the information was. Some candidates who presented apparently substantial pieces of work had relied far too heavily on the words of others: they could not, therefore, be credited with the information thus reproduced. Disguising the source by changing a word here and there wasted these candidates' time and offered no evidence that the 'knowledge' presented had been assimilated.