



# Examiners' Report Lead Examiner Feedback

January 2021

Pearson BTEC Level 1/Level 2 Firsts in  
Music  
Unit 8: Music and Production Analysis  
(20375F)

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## Introduction

This was the fourteenth time Unit: 8 Music and Production Analysis has been offered.

The overall performance seen across all items demonstrated a slight improvement in comparison to previous series, with a more even spread in achievement across all questions. This paper was accessible, in line with expectations and discriminated well.

## Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

Learners demonstrated better knowledge and exam technique in the 2-mark questions in particular, where they were able to describe features and apply knowledge in context. Most learners were able to provide a response to all questions with only a small minority who left some questions unanswered.

The questions in section A are based on the track; 'MacArthur Park' by Donna Summer and section B on the track; 'Blinded By Your Grace, Pt 2 (feat. MNEK)' by Stormzy. The final question in section C relates to both tracks.

In the main, learners were able to recall knowledge in all of the lower level questions, including the multiple-choice questions 1a, 12 and 14.

The structure question (16) continues to prove successful for learners, with most able to access the full 3 marks available.

Learners were able to score at least 1 mark in responses relating to musicality and expression. Questions which allowed learners to 'describe' are successful in enabling learners to access the mark scheme through simpler forms of expression.

There were a few examples of learners misinterpreting questions, others that did not demonstrate reliable knowledge of the key terms and processes of music and music production. Similar to previous tests, there continues to be an imbalance in learner knowledge of music and music production, with more learners missing out on the production marks this series compared to previous ones.

Knowledge of key technical terms prevented a few learners from accessing some of the questions, particularly with items relating to devices and techniques.

Question 22 continues to prove accessible with most gaining at least 3 marks, demonstrating improved exam technique and practice, whilst the higher-level responses demonstrated effective comparison and more confidence in making effective judgements and analysis.

## Individual Questions

### Exam or Test Questions

#### Section A

Questions 1 to 11 relate to track 1: MacArthur Park by Donna Summer.

**1** (a) Identify which **one** of the following genres best fits this music.

- A** Blues
- B** Disco
- C** Jazz
- D** Rock

1 mark

A good number of learners were able to demonstrate their understanding of musical genres by correctly identifying the piece as Disco.

**1(b) Describe the rhythm in the instrumental introduction (0:00 to 0:04).**

There was evidence that some learners misunderstood this question and provided descriptions of a range of musical elements and instrumentation. Several were able to correctly identify syncopation to gain 1 mark.

**2 State the tempo of this piece in BPM (beats per minute) from 0:05 to 0:26.**

Learners appear increasingly confident in identifying the tempo with several instances of notes and calculations made to arrive at the correct tempo gaining 1 mark.

**3 Name one idiomatic technique used by the violins between 0:00 and 0:15.**

Learners need to identify the idiomatic playing technique used by the violin. Whilst there continues to be some uncertainty amongst learners in understanding idiomatic techniques, several were able to gain 1 mark by identifying 'bowed' as a correct response.

**4 Name a lower pitched orchestral stringed instrument that plays in the section from 0:00 to 0:25.**

This was a highly successful question where the majority of learners were able to identify the cello or double bass in the given section for the 1 mark. Whilst misspellings are awarded a mark, learners are encouraged to apply the correct spelling for key musical instruments and terminology.

**5 State the dynamics in the section from 0:05 to 0:21.**

There were mixed responses to this item, where some learners addressed tempo or pitch changes instead of dynamics. It was encouraging to note the number of learners that are confident in the use of Italian musical terms gaining 1 mark.

**6 The vocals are prominent in the section 0:26 to 1:00.**

**(a) Describe two features of the vocal performance in this section.**

This question was very accessible and allowed learners to engage reasonably well by selecting appropriate aural features. A range of accurate descriptions were provided with a good number achieving the full 2 marks as in the example below:

1. The vocals seem to build up and sound like they're getting stronger and louder.
2. The backing vocals are descending.

2 marks

**6 (b) Name one production technique used to thicken the texture of the vocals in this section.**

This question required learners to demonstrate understanding of distinctive production techniques. A good number were able to hear delay or reverb for the 1 mark. Several learners provided musical responses by referring to vocal techniques, which was inaccurate in this instance.

**7 Identify a brass instrument that enters at 1:06.**

This was well answered with a high percentage of learners able to identify the Trumpet, some answered with Cornet, which also gained one mark.

**8 Give two idiomatic playing techniques used by the bass guitar between 1:29 and 1:43.**

This question tests learners' ability to recall and apply key terminology which in some instances proved challenging. A few learners were clearly able to gain the full 2 marks available by identify the idiomatic playing techniques of the bass guitar. Slide and pick were the most popular responses. Some inaccurate responses referred to aspects such as rhythm.

**9 Explain two ways a dramatic build is created in the section from 2:24 to 2:45.**

This question discriminated well in the main and at best learners were able to provide detailed explanations of the dramatic build at the points. There are two parts to the response here, which include identifying different features, such as the use of instrumentation and engaging in aural perception to characterise the different ways a build is created.

To access the full four marks, responses must show full justifications and reasoning for the build or alternatively provide an explanation/musical expansion point as in the example below:

1. One way the build is created, is through the brief key change. The change gives the song more life and excitement without altering any dynamics; therefore, creating a dramatic effect.
  2. Another way the build is created is through layering sounds/samples and thickening the texture. The siren adds to the dramatic build as it is more dominant in the mix.
- 4 marks

Learners who were unable to score well, did not include a valid musical point or provided general observations.

**10 Identify the stereo placement of the repeating descending drum synth sound from 3:18 to 3:47.**

This item required learners to define a key aspect in music production by identifying the stereo placement to the left side. Whilst a good number were able to answer correctly for the 1 mark, there appeared to be examples of guess work with some providing more than one response.

**11 This track was recorded in 1978 using studio overdubbing techniques. Explain one advantage and one disadvantage of using overdubbing when recording.**

As with the other higher-level questions, this required learners to analyse and communicate key aspects of music production by selecting both advantages and disadvantages of studio overdubbing techniques. The most successful responses demonstrated knowledge of overdubbing and were able to present a balanced response for each, achieving the full 4 marks available as in the example below:

1. It allows you to correct mistakes from an otherwise good recording, without having to re-record every instrument.
2. Listeners may complain that it doesn't sound authentic and loses the more 'genuine' sound of standard recordings. Especially if it isn't overdubbed well.

4 marks

Those achieving 2 marks invariably were able to identify and explain one advantage only or provided one valid reason for each without explanation.

It was apparent that a number of learners did not have knowledge of studio overdubbing or presented responses relating to other areas of music production which were inaccurate.



## Section B

Questions 12 to 21 relate to track 2: Blinded By Your Grace, Pt 2 (feat. MNEK) by Stormzy.

**12** Identify the musical device used by the organ from 0:00 to 0:15.

- A Arpeggios
- B Block chords
- C Ostinato
- D Swung rhythm

A well answered question with a high proportion responding accurately with block chords to gain 1 mark.

**13** Describe two features of the vocal part between 0:29 and 0:44.

Most learners were able to provide one accurate response by identifying different vocal interest, thus gaining 1 of the 2 marks available. Responses were varied with the most popular 2 mark answers identifying the limited melodic range and repetitive melody.

**14** Identify the time signature of the piece from 1:00.

- A 3/4
- B 4/4
- C 6/8
- D 12/8

This was successfully answered by a high proportion of learners identifying 4/4 as the correct time signature of the piece gaining 1 mark.

**15** Describe two ways the feel of the piece changes in the section 1:00 to 1:34 compared to the previous section.

The answers provided clearly understood the requirement of the question where the majority of learners were able to achieve on average 3 out of the 4 marks available. Learners demonstrated good preparation for this type of item. Whilst some identified changes, they weren't always specific and therefore could not always be credited. Other responses described the change but did not specify how this changed the feel of the piece in comparison to the previous section.

A good example achieving the full 4 marks:

1. One way the piece changes is through texture. The drums are brought in to create a dramatic mood. The drums are prominent in the mix with a large bass drum to change the feel.
2. One way the piece changes is vocally. At 1:17 in the track, backing singers are brought in thickening the texture and therefore increasing the dynamics in turn, changing the feel of the song.

4 marks

**16 Identify the structure of the piece by inserting the following sections in the correct order in the box below.**

This was a highly successful question where almost all learners were able to achieve the full 3 marks available through identifying the structure of the piece.

**17 A melody instrument can be heard over the vocals between 1:37 and 2:11.**

**(a) Name the instrument that plays this melody.**

Almost all learners were able to answer correctly and gain 1 mark by identifying the guitar as the instrument playing the melody at the point provided. Incorrect responses included drums and organ.

**17 (b) Describe the melodic relationship between this additional instrument and the lead vocal from 2:24 to 2:36.**

This question focused on the melodic relationship only, where a good number of learners were able to respond accurately by drawing references to the unison for 1 mark. Incorrect responses provided production answers or references to rhythm.

**18 Identify the panning of the tom-toms from 2:04 to 2:08.**

Learners were challenged by this question with a few leaving the item unanswered. Others were unable to provide the direction of the panning. A few gained the 1 mark available by identifying the panning as Right to Left.

**19 Identify one rhythmic device used on these words between 3:12 and 3:19.**

This item requires learners to recall and apply terminology. Whilst some learners were able to perform well through identifying the dotted rhythm, it was evident that a number were lacking in the knowledge and understanding of key language, essentially rhythmic devices. Learners continue to include production answers where the question asks for musical devices failing to gain the 1 mark available.

**20 Explain one way the music reflects the lyrics from 3:28 to the end of the piece.**

This was an accessible question where most learners were able to score at least 1 out of the 2 marks available as in the example below:

<p>The instruments cut out to leave just the singing which makes the lyrics more impactful, as well as the choir having large backing vocals.</p>
<p>2 marks</p>

Many referred to features such as the reduction in texture, the Gospel choir and the vocal harmonies. Whilst some were able to provide a valid musical point, several did not access the additional 1 mark as they did not include an explanation to support their point.

**21 Explain two tasks a sound engineer may undertake when capturing a good quality recording of a choir.**

This item requires learners to analyse and communicate key aspects of the processes of music production.

Marks are credited for accurate responses identifying tasks the sound engineer may have undertaken during recording to capture good quality sound. The first response must correctly identify an appropriate task and the + 1 mark must explain the reason for this in terms of the quality of recording.

Whilst a few were able to demonstrate a firm grasp of the question gaining the full 4 marks, a number of learners scored 1 mark mainly for references to selecting microphones and minimising ambient sound.

The example below gained a total of 4 marks:

1. The placement of the microphones as the audio needs to be captured evenly so there isn't too much of one sound.
2. The acoustics of the area they are being recorded as there may be too much echo for a clean recording.

4 marks

## Section C

### **22 Compare the musical style and genre of the two pieces.**

This continues to be an accessible question with evidence suggesting a continuous increase in the overall average mark gained by learners compared to previous sessions.

To score successfully in this question, learners must explain a range of similarities and differences in depth, through providing balanced consideration of both similarities and differences, drawing on a wide range of examples in either music and/or production.

The higher-level responses gaining 7-8 marks, demonstrate effective comparison and with evidence of a more applied understanding of the style and genre of both tracks.

Those achieving 4-6 marks are balanced in the main but may have one or two rather important aspects missing from the response, which prevent the awarding of top band marks.

Lower level responses tend to discuss general musical features, provide lists or aspects unrelated to style and genre gaining 3 or fewer marks.

## Summary

Based on performance this series, learners should:

- ensure that key terminology from the specification used within questions is understood, for example, rhythmic devices, idiomatic techniques etc.
- focus on both music and production areas of analysis to access the full range of marks across the paper
- practise identifying and describing a variety of stereo placements
- expand upon their identification of points with further explanation where questions have +1 marks available
- use the musical elements to support and structure their response to 8-mark questions relating to style and genre.

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