

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/11

Listening, Analysis and Historical
Study Sections A and B

Key messages

- Good time management is important in this paper – some candidates appeared to run out of time before completing the final question
- Precision is more important than the quantity of writing

General comments

This paper tests a wide range of different aural skills and the range of achievement varied considerably. A small number of candidates were strong in all areas of the paper, but most candidates' answers were strong in some areas and weaker in others. Questions requiring a detailed description would benefit from more precision in most cases. Questions on contextual awareness showed some improvement this year for those doing Topic B1 (question 8), although this was less apparent in answers for Topic B2 (question 18).

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Answers in **Section A** were very successful on the whole. Most candidates wrote detailed comparisons covering a range of performance issues; the majority correctly identified the different tempo relationships between the two recordings, and most identified the difference in pitch; better answers were able to relate this to the use of period instruments in the second recording. The differing approach to the use of continuo instruments was commented on in the best answers; few candidates named the lute but it was clear that some had heard there was an instrument other than the harpsichord playing (suggesting a harp, for example) – the Examiners took this into account. Very few noticed the use of organ as a continuo instrument, however. Many answers described in detail the different realisations of the continuo part – occasionally in rather too much detail; one or two precise references chosen to support the main point being made would have been preferable to a blow by blow account of the whole piece. There was a tendency for some candidates to 'over-demonstrate' their knowledge of performance practice at times, with some misplaced judgements. For example, it was quite common for candidates to describe the issue of period instruments being unable to sustain notes for as long as modern instruments and stating that this was the reason for the second performance to be played at a faster tempo – but rather missing the point that the Adagio (in which this might be seen as an issue) was taken at a slower tempo in performance 2, and in the fast passages it is not a relevant point anyway. It is important that a knowledge of performance practice supports aural perception, not vice versa. On the other hand, some candidates made accurate observations of aural differences but did not attempt to explain these with reference to performance practice. Less successful answers demonstrated some inaccuracy in either the listening itself or in the conclusions drawn from it. Overall, most candidates seemed well prepared for this question and there were a number of excellent answers.

Section B, Topic B1 Instrumental Music

Question 2

This question was answered extremely impressively by virtually all of the candidates; many gained full marks. Both pitch and rhythm were equally accurate in most cases.

Question 3

A was quite often placed in bar 18 (where the clarinet briefly doubles the melody, not the flute); B was correctly placed by many candidates; C was less accurately identified but D was usually correctly placed. Most candidates gained at least two marks here.

Question 4

This question was less well answered in general; many answers were not sufficiently focused on identifying similarities and differences within the specified passage to gain high marks.

Question 5

Many candidates identified and corrected both errors accurately. Those who did not gain full marks usually identified and corrected the rhythmic error but not the pitch error.

Question 6

This question was well answered; a number of candidates gained high marks by making a variety of accurate observations about both orchestration and harmony.

Question 7

Most candidates gained some credit here, but the question asked candidates to 'comment in detail' and quite often the answers were not sufficiently precise to gain all five marks.

Question 8

There were some excellent answers to this question, with a number of candidates commenting in detail on the conservative nature of Mendelssohn's style and the lyrical quality of the music, making precise and convincing comparisons with a variety of other pieces. Some answers concentrated on the extent to which the movement was programmatic and again made a number of apt comparisons, often with Beethoven (*Pastoral Symphony*) or Berlioz (*Symphonie Fantastique*). Less successful answers attempted to describe the style of the extract but without comparing it with other pieces of music (or by making comparisons to other composers in general but without naming any actual works as examples). Some candidates compared the extract with chamber music repertoire (the question asked for comparisons with orchestral music) and occasionally pieces were chosen from beyond the nineteenth century. On the whole, however, there was a general improvement in this question, with the best answers showing a clear familiarity with repertoire from the period. A small number of candidates may have run out of time, as they did not make an attempt at an answer; given the number of marks available in this question, it is advisable to prepare candidates in managing their time effectively.

Section B, Topic B2 Vocal Music

Question 9

This passage of melodic dictation was completed with varying degrees of success; some candidates completed the melody accurately, but others did not identify the larger intervals correctly.

Question 10

This question was well answered; many candidates identified and corrected both errors accurately.

Question 11

A was correctly identified by most candidates and B was often correctly placed; C and D were less accurately identified.

Question 12

This question was fairly well answered in general, with most candidates gaining at least some credit.

Question 13

This question was also fairly well answered. Many candidates identified the diminished sevenths; a smaller number identified the Neapolitan and/or Augmented 6th chords.

Question 14

Many candidates wrote successful answers to this question, often commenting on the preparation for the perfect cadence.

Question 15

Most candidates identified the addition of the tenor and bass soloists to the soprano solo, and many also commented on the differences in the orchestration.

Question 18

Answers to this question tended to be less successful than those for the equivalent question in Topic B1. Few made comparisons with other mass settings; the most common works chosen for comparison were Brahms' *German Requiem* and Mendelssohn's oratorios. However, it was common for the comparisons made to be rather vague and limited in their relevance. Weaker answers tended to consider the use of voices only, ignoring the use of instruments. See also the comment on **Question 8** about time management.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/12

Listening, Analysis and Historical
Study Sections C and D

Key Messages

In **Section C** the **(a)** Questions demand detailed knowledge of the Prescribed Work, coupled with analytical skills which allow candidates to address the specific points raised in the Question. In the **(b)** Questions candidates should demonstrate an understanding of the Topic as a whole, backed up by familiarity with a range of relevant repertoire. From 2013 onwards, there will be a choice of **(b)** question.

In **Section D** the best answers should demonstrate a broad understanding of various musical issues, drawing on experience gained in any part of the course. Candidates should be able to organise their thoughts into coherently argued essays, expressed in language of good quality.

General Comments

Most candidates were well prepared to answer the Questions in this year's Paper. All candidates had studied either Topic C3 *Modernism in France* or Topic C2 *The Origins of Opera*, although *Modernism in France* was substantially the more popular option. In both Topics there were some very thorough answers, though Question C3**(a)** revealed a generally less analytical approach than the Question really demanded.

In **Section D** there were answers to all five Questions. The majority chose D2, D4 or D5, while D1 and D3 were chosen by significantly fewer candidates. The best answers were impressive, both in their understanding of the subject and in their command of language to express quite complex ideas.

Section C

Question C3(a)

Most candidates took a narrative and descriptive approach to this Question. Almost all wrote much more successfully about melody than about rhythm. They were able to explain how the initial *tolchok* chord gives rise to the ostinato at Fig. 14 (and several mentioned that this ostinato makes its first appearance before the chord itself is heard). The repeat of the 'stamping' chords at Fig. 18 was noted and almost everyone drew attention to the 'new' theme at Fig. 19 (although very few had realised that the superficially complex woodwind writing at Fig. 17 is actually the first time this theme is heard). The horn theme at Fig. 25 was noted and several candidates traced the gradual reduction of this melody into an ostinato in the music that follows. The connection between the trumpet theme 5 bars after Fig. 28 and the theme of *Spring Rounds* was frequently mentioned. Most candidates tried to describe the increasing complexity of the music from Fig. 32, but with varying degrees of success.

So far as rhythm is concerned, the majority knew that the section under discussion represents one of the most extended passages of music in regular metre in the entire work (though only a few noted the two bars of 3/4 time just before Fig. 28). Almost everyone thought that the accented chords in the 'stamping' music were randomly placed. No one at all mentioned any of the standard explanations for the placing of these accents. Very few noted that the rhythmic pattern introduced at Fig. 13 returns later, notably at the 4th bar of Fig. 20 and at Fig. 30, or that the rhythm of the 3rd bar of Fig. 13 reappears many times throughout the passage (both of which are important unifying elements in this section of the work). Several candidates drew attention to various details of cross-rhythms, especially towards the end of the section.

Question C3(b)

The wording of the Question ('How significant was ballet...?') invited candidates to take a broad overview of the music written in France during the period and to attempt an evaluation of the place of ballet within that repertoire. The best answers did exactly that and the Examiners were pleased to observe that several candidates had a reasonably wide knowledge of relevant works. Weaker answers took it as axiomatic that ballet was significant and gave a more or less chronological account of the genre during the years in question. There was some confusion about which works were conceived as ballets and which were not. A few candidates decided that ballet was not as significant as other genres and attempted to prove this point by referring to works which they clearly thought were not ballets, but which actually were (e.g. Milhaud's *Le bœuf sur le toit* or *La création du monde* and even, in a small number of cases, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*).

There was an emphasis on Diaghilev and the *Ballets russes*. Most candidates wrote at some length about Stravinsky's three ballets, though without placing undue emphasis on *The Rite of Spring*. It seemed as though almost everyone believed that the *Ballets russes* was the only company active in Paris during the period. No one mentioned Rolf de Maré's *Ballets suédois* by name, even though several candidates wrote about individual works which were produced by that company (notably *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel*, Milhaud's *La création du monde* and Satie's *Relâche*).

(c) Question C2(a)

Candidates had a good general grasp of the main aspects of Monteverdi's symbolic use of instruments in *L'Orfeo*. Almost all knew that the Underworld scenes (and characters associated with the Underworld, Charon in particular) are depicted by the use of trombones, cornetti and the regal, while the pastoral scenes set above ground involve strings, lutes, harpsichords and organs. Very few, however, demonstrated a clear understanding that many of the directions about the use of instruments derive from the earliest printed sources of the opera and may therefore be based on Monteverdi's own instructions. Nor was it often noted that the majority of these instructions concern the use of specific continuo instruments. The use of solo instruments in the aria *Possente spirto* was usually described in great detail. Some candidates wrote about the instruments used in the opening Toccata, though without mentioning that these instruments do not feature in the opera itself.

Candidates need to understand, if only at a basic level, the nature and properties of the instruments used in *L'Orfeo*, especially those with names that are relatively uncommon today (e.g. the chitarone, cornett or regal). A few candidates who evidently lacked this understanding demonstrated a serious misconception by writing about the use of 'reed instruments' in the Underworld scenes (and it was clear from the context that they were not referring to the regal, which is the only reed instrument required in the score).

(d) Question C2(b)

Most answers to this Question demonstrated a good knowledge of the immediate precursors of *L'Orfeo*, particularly Peri's *Dafne* and *Euridice*, Caccini's *Euridice* and *Le nuove musiche* and Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione di Anima e di Corpo*. Some wrote very convincingly about these works, having evidently listened to extracts from them during the course. The Florentine Camerata was mentioned in most essays and candidates generally knew about the interests and influence of some of its members. The Florentine *Intermedi* of 1589 were discussed in commendable detail by some candidates.

A few essays mentioned the Madrigal Comedy, though it was clear that the candidates concerned knew rather less about this genre than about the earliest operas. Only a small number could name some relevant composers (e.g. Striggio, Vecchi).

Section D

Question D1

There were relatively few answers to this Question. Hardly anyone wrote about playing Bach on the piano (which was rather surprising, considering how often his music features in the repertoire of young pianists). Most candidates gave an account of the kind of information they need for **Section A** of Paper 11 and focused on orchestral instruments and ensembles. It was surprising that no one referred to the performances in this year's Paper 11, one of which demonstrated how modern instruments can be used to produce a stylish and historically aware result. Nevertheless, most candidates had a reasonable command of a range of relevant issues.

Question D2

This was a very popular Question and several candidates demonstrated a thorough understanding of Beethoven's influence on later nineteenth-century composers. Most of them wrote about the *Pastoral Symphony* as the stimulus for much romantic programme music (often showing how Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* was largely modelled on the Beethoven). They also considered Beethoven's expansion of the symphony, citing the 5th, 7th and 9th Symphonies in particular. They drew attention to the cyclic elements in the 5th in relation to composers such as Liszt or Tchaikovsky and to the use of voices in the 9th in relation to Liszt and Mahler.

Several candidates referred to the way in which the dominating figure of Beethoven had inhibited Brahms from completing a symphony for several years. Some of these, however, suggested that the 1st Symphony had taken Brahms forty years to complete (which would have meant that he started it at the age of three)

Almost every candidate concentrated on Beethoven's symphonies. Few if any mentioned his single-movement orchestral works in relation to the many overture and tone poems of the later nineteenth century.

Question D3

Although the number of candidates who answered this Question was fairly small, the quality of essays was generally good. The main points of Wagner's Theory of Opera were well understood and clearly expressed; their origins in Wagner's writings of 1849–1852 were known, as was their effect on his approach to the composition of Music Dramas in the years following. Two significant points were often missed: first, that the continuous development of themes in the orchestra was essentially symphonic, deriving from the precedent of Beethoven's 9th Symphony; and second, that Wagner departed from the stated principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his later stage works.

Candidates were well prepared to draw contrasts between Wagner's practice and Verdi's. They understood the difference between a Wagnerian Music Drama and the Verdian approach, which remained rooted in 'number' opera however strenuously he aimed for a sense of dramatic continuity. Supporting examples were taken from a variety of relevant operas, including *Die Walküre*, *Tristan*, *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*. It was pleasing to see that the examples chosen really did support the points that candidates were making.

Question D4

The quality of answers to this Question was very variable. Several essays lacked a clear focus and tended to ramble; relatively few candidates communicated a real understanding of the issues involved. It was often assumed that interpretation is necessary only in cases where the composer is dead, or where few marks of expression are written into a score (as in a great deal of baroque music, for example). Some of the better answers, however, referred to Stravinsky's different recordings of *The Rite of Spring*, illustrating how even the composer himself can change his own approach to interpretation with the passage of time.

Question D5

This proved to be a very popular Question and it elicited a wide range of different points of view. While most candidates thought that the proposition in the Question was a 'good thing', there were some who argued that it was not. Almost everyone could make suitable references to music in support of their opinion, though such references were scarce in the weaker essays.

Questions such as D4 and D5 in this year's Paper, which invite candidates to express their own point of view, can be much more difficult to answer than some candidates seemed to think. It is essential that they realise the significance of the rubric for **Section D**, which states that the clarity of arguments and the quality of language will be taken into account in this Section. This applies, of course, to all the Questions, but is perhaps especially true of Questions where candidates cannot rely on factual recall but need to frame an argument which expresses and legitimises their own opinions.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/02
Performing

Key messages

- Ensure that candidates' recitals meet the time requirements
- Pieces which are just too technically demanding are likely to be less successful than slightly easier pieces played accurately, confidently and stylishly

General comments

The Examiners greatly enjoyed visiting Centres for the performing examinations, and are most appreciative of the hospitality shown to them in all cases. The internal timetables for the examinations were organised efficiently by Centres, and copies of the sheet music were comprehensively supplied.

Although there was a range of performing ability demonstrated, the standard was often very good indeed, and on a number of occasions it was outstanding. Candidates performed on a range of orchestral instruments, saxophone, guitar, piano, organ and voice; there was a wide range of different musical styles represented, and a very interesting mix of ensembles. Most pieces were well matched to the candidates' abilities, but there were again some pieces which seemed too demanding. This sometimes led to poor intonation (particularly for string players), occasional hesitation, or too much focus on technical challenges at the expense of expression, phrasing and musical style. This year a few recitals fell short of the minimum time of 15 minutes, sometimes by quite some way. The Examiners do have to take account of this when assessing the performances.

Improvising

No candidates opted for improvising in **Section B** this year.

Accompanying

The Examiners would like to thank all those teachers who undertook the accompanying themselves, and for arranging accompanists in other cases.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/03
Composing

Key Messages

In the Stylistic Exercises Examination, candidates demonstrate the command of their chosen style that has been reached through sustained study during the course.

In the Stylistic Exercises Coursework, candidates submit five exercises in each of their chosen styles, representing the best work they have done at different stages during the course. These exercises should be presented with whatever comments and annotations have been made by the teacher during the course and initial drafts may be included in addition to the final versions. Fair copies made with a computer notation program should not be submitted.

In the Commissioned Composition section, candidates submit a composition that closely follows the instructions given in the Commission, together with a recording. Recordings should ideally be of live performances, and CDs should be playable on a standard domestic CD player.

Section A: Stylistic Exercises (Examination)

The most popular choice by far was the Bach Chorale. Some candidates chose the Classical String Quartet or the Romantic Keyboard Accompaniment. Very few selected 2-part Baroque Counterpoint and hardly any candidates chose the Jazz, Popular and Show Styles option.

In the majority of cases the levels of achievement in the examination were typical of the quality of work found in the Coursework submissions. There were, however, some instances of the examination exercise being substantially better than the Coursework, and vice versa.

Section B: Stylistic Exercises (Coursework)

Most submissions followed the Syllabus requirements carefully. There were a few cases where exercises were not dated, some where the candidates' names did not appear on every sheet (which can be problematic where everything is not firmly fixed together in some way) and some in which it was difficult to see exactly which part or parts were given and which were the candidate's own work.

A number of candidates presented their Coursework exercises in fair copies that had been produced on a computer. These exercises lacked any evidence that they had been seen by a teacher and they were not supported by any preliminary drafts. This contravenes a requirement of the Syllabus, which states that 'legible working copies should be submitted, with initial sketches and drafts as appropriate, containing any annotations, suggestions and corrections added by the teacher'.

The presentation of Coursework submissions was sometimes scrappy. Some exercises were based on handwritten incipits, some of which were difficult to read and a few of the given incipits had mistakes in them. Candidates' music handwriting was sometimes hard to read and in some cases the submission had not been collated into chronological order. The two most fundamental requirements of a Coursework submission for this Component are **(a)** the clarity of correct stylistic incipits for candidates to follow and **(b)** the legibility of the completed exercises.

(a) Chorale Harmonisations

These were usually quite well managed, with broadly appropriate chord choices and reasonably accurate cadential progressions, although the general standard was slightly lower than in previous years. Problems usually occurred between cadences, where opportunities for passing modulation within a phrase were often missed and suspensions were rarely used. Voice leading was another frequent weakness: alto lines, in particular, were often rather static and lacking in interest. In several cases there were very few passing

notes; conversely, some candidates tried rather too hard to maintain quaver movement, resulting in fussy textures.

In Coursework exercises in this style it is expected that given incipits will consist of the first phrase of a chorale in its complete four-part texture, so that candidates have a clear model to follow in the phrases they complete (in which the treble part should be given throughout).

(b) String Quartets

Candidates' success in this option often depended on the selection of suitable examples for them to complete. These sometimes appeared rather straightforward in their requirements, in terms of both harmony and texture, across the five exercises submitted. To gain marks in the highest bands, candidates should work towards exercises which provide opportunities for variety and development of texture and for modulation beyond a simple move into the dominant.

While many candidates were able to produce accurate harmonisations of the given 1st violin parts, some had difficulty in avoiding basic errors such as consecutive fifths (sometimes between the 1st violin and cello parts). The recognition and handling of accented passing notes was another common weakness.

(c) Two-part Baroque Counterpoint

The number of candidates presenting this option was much smaller than in previous years. While it may be good practice for some exercises (especially those completed early in the course) to be based on sonata movements with a figured bass to which candidates add a melody line, this must not be the sole model to follow throughout the course. In the examination candidates will be expected to add a melody part to a given bass *and* to add a bass part to a given treble; examination exercises will not give figures in addition to the bass part at any point. During the course, therefore, candidates should have experience of completing exercises of the same kind, aiming to be able to handle such features as key changes and suspensions, showing an independent understanding of harmonic matters.

(d) Early Romantic Keyboard Accompaniments

Several submissions in this option showed rather too little variety. Candidates ideally need to show that they can do more than simply continue a given piano figuration within the confines of primary triads; they should learn how to handle some of the characteristic chromatic harmony of this style and how to vary or adjust an initial figuration in accordance with the requirements of the melodic part and its implied harmony. The repertoire includes several more composers than just Schubert and various instrumental pieces in addition to songs; it would have been good to see a slightly broader range of extracts represented in some of the submissions.

(e) Music in Jazz, Popular and Show styles

Very few candidates chose this option. It would be helpful if the sources of exercises could always be given (in particular the title of the piece from which the extract is taken and the name of the composer).

Section C: Commissioned Composition

There was a wide range of attainment in the compositions submitted this year. The best were very inventive and highly accomplished, but there were several which were rather brief and showed some insecurity with tonality and development within the structure.

It was clear to the Examiners that candidates in general had taken a great deal of trouble over the appearance of their scores. In most cases it was obvious that they had spent considerable time and effort in producing this work; relatively few compositions betrayed signs of last-minute completion and loose ends.

The most popular choices were the octatonic scale and the rondo, but there were some examples of all the options.

1 Richard Church: *Be Frugal*

Among the most successful settings of this poem were those in which the vocal part and the accompaniment had been kept in balance with each other. Where this was not the case, the vocal part was sometimes

relegated to a very minor role in the piece, with weaker melodic material than the much more prominent accompaniment.

There were some well-judged treatments of the second stanza of the poem, with effective settings of the second line (*Meet with the ghost of what you woke*) and of the word *shattered* in the third.

Several of the songs used an ensemble in the accompaniment, sometimes with a slightly unconventional choice of instruments. The best of these pieces made very effective use of the ensemble.

2 Abandon: Hold On

There were few settings of these lyrics, but among them were some very attractive songs in a popular style, in which the conventions were well observed and creatively applied.

3 Rondo

This was one of the most popular options and candidates often approached the task with great ingenuity. A few compositions did not follow the commission in its entirety, producing rondos with only two episodes rather than the three required.

The most common difficulty in this option was with the question of how to compose *contrasting* episodes, while maintaining a sense that everything belonged to the same piece. Some compositions resembled collages of rather unrelated ideas, with insufficient attention to balancing the competing demands of unity and variety. In pieces of this kind, tonal structure was also a common weakness. Some other compositions included little by way of contrast: episodes in pieces of this kind were often developments of ideas taken from the principal theme, making it quite difficult to see how the structure had been applied. These candidates certainly demonstrated quite advanced technical skill, but it was not always entirely appropriate to the nature of this particular commission.

4 Pitch and/or Rhythm Cells

The pitch cell, an octatonic scale, was also a very popular option. Several candidates were extremely resourceful in avoiding an undue dependence on diminished triads and sevenths; in other cases, however, the harmonic style was rather limited by this feature. There was a wide range of different styles and techniques in several of the compositions and this option seemed to have inspired some of the most sophisticated work in all the compositions submitted this year.

A few candidates decided to combine both cells in their compositions. Those who chose to use just the rhythm cell sometimes found it difficult to create convincing melodic or harmonic material to fit with the irregular metre of the cell. Some of them used rests a little too extensively within the statements of the cell, which tended to obscure the rhythmical drive they seemed to be aiming for.

Scores, Recordings, CDs

Most scores were produced on the computer and demonstrated a fairly high level of competence in the use of their chosen notation program. Scores were often fully marked from the point of view of expression markings and dynamics. Articulation, especially for woodwind instruments, and bowing for strings often received less thorough attention; phrasing of the kind that is used in piano music is not always very helpful to string, woodwind or brass players.

Tempo indications frequently consisted of a metronome mark, without an accompanying verbal indication. The common words used to describe tempo, especially Italian ones, often carry a connotation that goes beyond just the tempo and are therefore helpful to performers. Many composers have found that English words and expressions can carry an even more immediate sense of what the music is about. A metronome mark is necessary to ensure that playback from a computer file goes at the correct speed (and this may be one of the reasons why so many candidates included them), but a really polished score should include descriptive words as the priority, with the addition of a metronome mark as a helpful, but optional, extra.

There were many live recordings, often giving very impressive accounts of quite challenging instrumental parts. Live performances always give the Examiners a better impression of the music than sequenced playback can ever do.

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Most Centres submitted a separate CD for each candidate. If all the recordings are assembled onto a single CD it would be helpful if a detailed track list could also be supplied.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/41
Dissertation

Key messages

Reading needs to be thoroughly assimilated: first-hand experience of all the music to which it refers is necessary.

Presentation needs to be designed in such a way that all the evidence needed for a reader to understand any significant musical point in the text is incorporated.

General comments

There was some very fine work, the majority of which had been carefully and accurately marked. The Moderators were grateful to all those Assessors whose documentation was complete and whose comments on each of the Assessment Criteria threw relevant light on how/why they had reached the mark they had. In some cases, however, comment did no more than summarise the descriptors of the chosen band: this added little to the Moderator's understanding of the Centre's Assessment process. A little more detail might sometimes have been helpful.

It was clear that some Centres had taken note of comments made in previous Sessions' Reports. There were fewer over-generous judgements, but the problem of undue severity towards the less able candidates tended to persist.

It was noted that some Assessors, in reaching their mark for **Contextual Understanding** continue to attach undue weight to the quantity of 'scholarly reading' undertaken. The comments in last year's Report may bear repeating:

'The first half of the top-band descriptor begins 'A wide range of scholarly reading/research' and many candidates did, indeed, fulfil this part: they had been assiduous in seeking out relevant scholarly books and articles. The second half of the descriptor, however, is the one that should clinch an assessor's judgement: how far does this reading 'inform a secure understanding of significant contextual matters'? The crucial words here are 'inform', 'understanding' and 'significant', i.e. to what extent has the reading been assimilated and applied independently to the music in question. Mining the sources for impressive-sounding quotations did not, by itself, demonstrate this.....'

In fact, a small improvement in this respect was noticed in candidates' actual work.

Moderators looked for contextual understanding, not so much in discrete paragraphs devoted to 'background', but in the way that a secure grasp of it is reflected throughout the text. Wider listening is as, if not more, important than too narrowly-focused reading, in nourishing a candidate's ability to 'place' a piece of music in its time, style and genre. Comments on a late-nineteenth century symphony suggesting that it was in certain ways ground-breaking may, indeed, show acute perceptiveness about features of the work itself, whilst at the same betraying a disabling lack of familiarity with innovations (e.g. by Beethoven) earlier in the century.

It is assumed that Assessors will, as a matter of course, have checked the accuracy of analytic judgements, but Moderators also need to be able to verify these for themselves. Several Dissertations included no audio recording or score and very few MSS examples: close discussion of a single piece of music referring entirely to bar numbers or rehearsal figures cannot just be taken on trust. Candidates may reasonably assume that their teacher-Assessor will have access to a score, possibly the very one they themselves have used, but this is not necessarily true for the Moderator. The presentation should be designed with this in mind – the key word in the heading of the Assessment Criterion (5) is 'Communication.' A CD of judiciously-selected extracts may well enhance the value of the text considerably.

Where a score was not enclosed some candidates put a wealth of relevant MSS material into an Appendix. This was helpful to the Moderators in allowing them to verify the examples for themselves, but not always enough to facilitate their making equally important judgements about whether, in the context of the whole piece, the observations made and the examples chosen for comment were the most significant.

Many of this year's submissions were found to be overly 'score-bound'. Details, relevant or otherwise, seemed to have been found more by eye than by ear. Moderators, therefore, frequently had to take on trust the Assessor's judgement about the level of aural perception: in the most impressive Dissertations, the keen ear at work was self-evident. Again, this reflects the overall balance between reading and listening: candidates who had undertaken an enquiry which encompassed a range of a composer's music, or made some comparisons, did better in this respect than those who had focused on a single work.

In general most candidates had successfully negotiated the 'word count'. The process of being selective and succinct showed 'critical thinking'. Overstepping by a hundred or so words is understandable and tolerable. Excessive wordiness, however, is not.

Acknowledgements: most candidates were comfortable with the scholarly conventions for the presentation of bibliographies and were meticulous in their acknowledgements of judgements, quotations and sources of examples. A few, however, trespassed dangerously close to plagiarism in their heavy dependence, not only on the judgements of their commentators, but also on their actual words. Candidates should be clearly warned of the danger of reproducing, (perhaps unwittingly?) *verbatim* notes that they may have made at the beginning of their research. Some may not have intended to 'borrow', but this is just as much an act of plagiarism as cutting and pasting material downloaded from the Internet.

Teachers have a role to play in guarding candidates from falling into this trap: at the outset of the course they need to draw attention to the danger in not recording the source of notes made and whether the notes are very close paraphrases of whole sentences and paragraphs (or even *verbatim*); and, before they countersign the candidate's formal declaration that the Dissertation is all the candidate's own work, they should make checks to satisfy themselves that this is so.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/42
Advanced Recital

Key messages

- The CD of short extracts is an essential part of the written project, as it substantiates the judgements made in the text

General comments

Once again, the Moderators enjoyed seeing and hearing the advanced recitals, which often demonstrated an exceptional level of performance, although there was quite a wide variety of achievement overall. Some candidates played a complete concerto as their recital, but most consisted of a variety of shorter pieces, sometimes linked (e.g. a song cycle) but often not. There is no restriction on the type of programme that is presented, and candidates should aim to choose a programme which allows them to demonstrate their best performing work. In many Centres the recital is clearly seen as a very special event, with a full audience and careful attention to the presentation of all aspects of the performance – these recitals were often the most successful.

Written project

On the whole, the written projects were successful, although there is still room for improvement in some areas. Most projects do now link the listening to the candidate's own performing intentions (which is the whole purpose of this project) but some still do not make this link clear (or fail to address it at all). The CD of musical extracts is the main evidence for the substantiation of judgements, but there were some problems here. Some candidates had not provided short extracts but had simply presented the entire recordings with references in the text to timings – this is not what the syllabus asks for. In other cases, the recorded extracts did not match the reference to them in the written commentary at all, or did not actually support the point being made. The importance of this CD should be made clear to candidates as they complete their project.

Marking

Most Centres applied the mark scheme well, but there were some examples of rather lenient marking this year, and some of the adjustments that the Moderators made were larger than in previous years. Feedback has been sent to individual Centres on the marking.

DVDs

Most DVDs worked well, but there were occasional problems, so it is important to continue to make the audio recording on separate equipment. Some of the performances were slightly out of focus, and a wider camera angle would still be appreciated in some cases to give a better impression of the recital as a whole.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/43
Free Composition

Key messages

- Candidates should look carefully at the requirements of the written commentary

General comments

Only a very small number of candidates chose Free Composition, and so this report is somewhat limited in its scope. The work that was submitted was entirely appropriate this year, demonstrating a clear extension of the candidates' skills beyond that submitted for Component 3. Scores were submitted with live audio recordings of the pieces, which were clearly contrasting.

Written commentary

Candidates are required to provide a written commentary which describes the expressive intention of the pieces, how the contrast has been achieved, an account of the process of composition, a list of the music studied in preparation, and explanation of the ways in which this listening was (or was not) helpful and an evaluation. Not all of the commentaries addressed all of these areas.

Marking

Feedback has been provided to individual Centres.