



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Music

42703

(Specification 4270)

Unit 3: Performing Music

Report on the Examination

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Unit 3 42703 – Performing Music

There was an interesting variety of instrumental and vocal performances this year for both the Individual and Group Performances. The number of Technology-based Performances continued to be small, but often these were very good and imaginative submissions. There were very few DJ'ing performances. In many cases a very good standard of performance was achieved in both the Individual and Group Performances, and centres and their candidates are once again to be congratulated on this. There were fewer performances of a basic standard.

Individual Performance

It was a delight to listen to so many musically mature performances, indeed some were absolutely outstanding. However, there were once again some unaccompanied instrumental submissions where an accompaniment was available and where it was difficult for the candidates to convey the style and the intentions of the composer without the support of the accompaniment. As stated in previous reports, this can really affect the musicality of the performance, and silences whilst the candidate counts (or miscounts) the rests do not help to deliver an accurate, musical performance. Possible alternatives include the use of unaccompanied studies or working with backing tracks (which many vocalists and Rock School performers already do), thus enabling the candidates to demonstrate good communicative/interpretative skills. Another possibility is to arrange for instrumental teachers (perhaps private or peripatetic) to accompany candidates when the music teacher is unable to do so.

The music should be within the capabilities of the candidates to enable them to demonstrate their skills to best advantage; unfortunately there were instances of candidates choosing pieces that were too difficult for them to deliver accurately and musically. An increasing number of (mostly female) vocalists performed pop songs but had insufficient technical skills to be able to deliver them successfully. The technical limitations of some candidates were not always fully taken into account in the marking.

Group Performance

There were some imaginative ensembles created by centres, alongside group performances such as duets and parts within larger ensembles. Many of these were of a very high standard and demonstrated good ensemble skills. However, large ensembles with many performers do pose problems for assessment, especially if more than one person is playing a particular part. The candidate's part must be clearly identifiable aurally to both the teacher and the moderator (this is required by the Specification). There were occasions when the candidate was performing the same part as others (in a choir or band) and the candidate's contribution could not be distinguished from the contributions of other performers. Where the moderator was unable to verify the marks awarded by the centre there were serious problems for the moderation process. Assessors at the centre are asked to place themselves in the position of the moderator, by listening to the recording they are submitting and considering carefully whether they would be able to identify and assess the candidate's part if they had not been present when it was made.

Teachers need to consider how well the piece chosen allows the candidate to demonstrate ensemble skills. Increasingly the opportunity to do so was rather limited. For example, in pieces which are really for solo voice/instrument with piano/guitar accompaniment, there should be sufficient opportunity for the singer/instrumentalist to show evidence of true rapport with and real responsiveness to the other performers, adjusting pitch/intonation, rhythm,

tempo, dynamics and balance as appropriate. The degree of success in this should be reflected in the mark awarded for Sense of Ensemble.

All performances

Centres are asked to give careful consideration to the concerns described below.

- *Candidates should avoid performing music which is too difficult for them to deliver to a high standard.* It was pleasing to note that more candidates were able to deliver a less demanding piece really well. Although a more challenging piece could attract a slightly higher demand mark, this can be at the expense of marks for accuracy, communication and interpretation if the candidate struggles to perform the piece musically. Teachers are reminded that the descriptors in the assessment criteria place emphasis on stylistic issues, and candidates are better advised to choose repertoire that they can perform well and musically.
- *Candidates must not perform the same piece for both their Individual/Technology-based and Group Performances.* There were a few instances of this again this year. To reiterate what has been said previously, the Specification clearly states that “each candidate should perform **two** different pieces”; performing a different part within the same piece does not constitute a different piece.
- *A backing track is not a substitute for a live performer.* Whilst backing tracks are allowed in Group Performances there should be two or more live performers including the candidate. There were a few examples of only one live performer together with a backing track being submitted as a Group Performance: this is an unacceptable combination. There was also an instance of a candidate multi-tracking their Individual performance; the specification requires assessment of a live performance under formal supervision and clear information must be provided as to which part was assessed live.
- *It is inadvisable for candidates to play or sing along with full original CD tracks for their Individual Performance.* There was an increase in the number of performances of this type. Doubling another part is acceptable but it often limited candidates’ ability to communicate or impose their own interpretation on the performance. It also sometimes caused problems for the moderator in actually distinguishing the candidate’s part.
- *Recordings of performances should not be mixed and enhanced by editing, including the addition of reverb and fades.* This practice seems to be on the increase as more centres have access to sophisticated recording equipment. The moderator needs to hear what the original assessor in the centre heard when marking the performance; any enhancement or editing does not allow for this and is not acceptable.
- *CDs should be checked before despatch.* Problems included poor quality recordings, parts of the performance missing, incorrect track numbers and the wrong performances being put on the CD. Centres are also reminded that performances should be submitted on CD or mini-disc; cassette tapes, DVDs, MP3 files and memory sticks are not acceptable.

Assessment Criteria

It was noticeable that fewer candidates achieved the full 60 marks this year, and some that really deserved maximum marks were actually awarded 58 or 59 by the centre. Some teachers wrote excellent comments on the Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) to support the mark they were awarding in each category of the assessment criteria and this is most helpful in the moderation process. The key words of the criteria need to be considered and

referenced in the comments sections of the CRF, and the mark awarded for a particular category should correspond to them. There were some submissions, unfortunately, where the teachers wrote very limited comments or no comments at all to justify their marks. Comments are invaluable for the moderator to show how decisions have been reached.

Level of Demand: the descriptors are laid down in the Specification but some centres do not refer to them, particularly in the awarding of 1 mark. A mark of 1 should be awarded for pieces that are equivalent to Grade 3 standard, although it may also be awarded for a more challenging Grade 2 piece. A piece should be *above* the equivalent Grade 4 standard to be awarded a mark of 3, while pieces *at* Grade 4 are awarded a mark of 2. In the case of Group performances it is the *candidate's* part/role in the piece that must be assessed, and not the performance as a whole. If there is any uncertainty about any of these aspects, the Controlled Assessment Adviser allocated to your centre is available to offer guidance. If you do not know who this is, please contact the Music Department at AQA.

Accuracy: marks were still awarded in the top band of this section despite melodic, rhythmic and - particularly - intonation errors that affected the fluency of the performance. Where these errors occur, a performance cannot be described as “secure” and a mark in the 6-4 band (“reasonably secure”) is likely to be more suitable. Variations in tempo are sometimes ignored when they result from the candidate struggling with a particular passage that they find challenging; sometimes centres tried to justify unevenness as the use of *rubato* even when it would be stylistically inappropriate.

Communication: It is possible for marks in the top band to be appropriate when a piece attracts 0-2 for Level of Demand. Some centres have assumed that the phrase “The music is likely to be complex and demanding” rules this out, but it is important to note the use of the word “likely”.

Interpretation: It is a concern that increasingly performances which demonstrated limited observation of dynamic contrasts, even when these were clearly called for in the score, were awarded a mark in the top (9-7) band. Incorrect tempi are also often ignored in this aspect of the assessment but, whilst there is obviously some leeway, a performance that is markedly under-tempo, for example, cannot be deemed to be stylistically correct. The marking criteria refer to evidence of “mastery of the techniques demanded by the music”. There were examples of singers performing pop songs where the mark awarded by the centre would suggest that such mastery was evident but where this was not the case.

As with Communication, the statement that the music is “likely to be complex and demanding” for a top band mark does not preclude a mark in this band for a piece which has a Level of Demand mark below 3.

Sense of ensemble: To be awarded a top band mark there must be “complete unity of purpose in all aspects of ensemble playing, including balance, timing, intonation and responsiveness to others”. Where the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate these skills in the Group Performance is limited, the mark awarded must reflect this. Some vocal submissions with accompaniment/backing track involved two singers mostly singing alternately and required little in respect of harmony and counter melodies.

Administration

It is pleasing to report that many of the submissions were once again very well organised. However, there were occasions where a great deal of time had to be spent rectifying errors and omissions. Centres are reminded to observe the following:

- When completing Candidate Record Forms:
 - please check the additions and ensure that the correct mark is transferred to the Centre Mark Sheet
 - please complete all the details requested, including titles of the pieces being performed
 - if candidates fill in much of the information themselves, teachers are asked to check what they have written and that the relevant sections have been completed
 - there must be details of the part the candidate is performing in a Group Performance; for example it is not sufficient merely to write “Piano” in a piano duet as the moderator needs to know which part to assess. Often this can be supported by a score on which the candidate’s part has been highlighted
 - for technology-based performances candidates must provide enough supporting information to explain how they achieved their performance (page 2 of the CRF)
 - please remember that the moderator has not had the benefit of actually being present at the candidate’s performance; for example in a keyboard performance there should be a clear statement of what the candidate has actually done, including whether they have used single/fingered chords and used any automated features on the instrument.

- scores/annotations or exemplar CDs must be provided from the outset. Some kind of score is essential, even if it is used as a guideline (in which case the centre should explain how the score and the actual performance relate to one another). A significant number of centres failed to provide these and moderators had to request them, including some where the candidate was performing their own composition. It is encouraging that more centres are now providing an exemplar CD track. However, often a centre merely sent a copy of the lyrics for songs - which is of little use to the moderator. It is not acceptable for a centre to send a list of “You Tube” references instead of an exemplar CD. Where a candidate has performed with a backing track it would be useful for a copy of the backing track to be sent for reference also.

- It is pleasing to report that an increasing number of centres sent the work to the moderator well before the deadline of 7 May and this is very much appreciated. Work should not arrive after this date unless the centre has been granted an extension by AQA. Work that is subsequently requested must be sent promptly; there were occasions when two or even three weeks elapsed before the work was received by the moderator.

- the submission should include the:
 - CRFs (signed)
 - scores/annotations/exemplar CD (including backing tracks)
 - Centre Mark Sheet (both pink *and* yellow copies)
 - Centre Declaration Sheet (signed)
 - CDs (or mini-discs) clearly labelled.

- Recordings on composite CDs are preferable to individual CDs/discs for each candidate but please provide a track list and write the correct track number on the CRF for the individual and group performance. Please ensure that each candidate’s two performances are on the same CD and that CDs are formatted correctly to play on standard equipment and not on a computer only. Mini-discs must not be submitted in the extended play version.

- please make certain that everything is correctly labelled (including the CD) and that copies of all materials sent for moderation have been kept at the centre. Occasionally materials do go astray in the post and it alleviates a good deal of stress for all concerned if the centre can send a replacement.
- Please do not send materials in a form that requires them to be “signed for” as this causes delay.

Details of the administrative requirements are set out in the Notes for Guidance for this unit, which are in the Teacher Resource Bank on the AQA website

http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/newgcse/art_dan_dra_mus/new/music_materials

Mark Range and Award of Grades

Grade Boundaries and Cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics (www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html) page of the AQA website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion