

GCSE

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Examiners' Report

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GCSE Music Paper 1a Solo performing

As usual, this year there was a wide range of performances on a vast array of instruments and most centres continue to work hard to improve their standards and the quality of their presentations to the moderator. However, there are still a significant number of centres that ignore the requirements of the specification and present incomplete submissions. It is important to note that all submissions should include two recordings per candidate and two scores for these recordings (a source recording for reference is acceptable in lieu of a score). Where there may be some difficulty in presenting a score, it is important to include the alternative reference material to enable the moderator to have enough evidence with which to assess the candidate's performance.

At the More Difficult level, there were many impressive mature performances given by students, which went far beyond the requirements for GCSE. Allied with this, there were also some performances where students were playing at the very limit of their abilities and consequently, marks were lost because the pieces were not under complete control. In these cases it would, perhaps, have been more appropriate to select a slightly less demanding piece to ensure that full marks could be achieved. In a similar vein, some students presented performances that exceeded 5 minutes in length. As well as the obvious disadvantage in that there has been more material to prepare and consequently more opportunities for the student to lose marks, it really is unnecessary. A shorter piece would be more appropriate.

There were a number of examples of inflated Levels of Difficulty, most often pieces being judged as More Difficult level when they were actually of Standard level. There were only a relatively few accounts of Easy performances. These, on the whole appeared to be ill prepared. Some were too short even for the breadth of GCSE: 4-bars of music does not give time to mark interpretation effectively. Unfortunately, a few candidates presented accompaniments of popular songs for their solo performance. This is not acceptable as an accompaniment by itself is an incomplete performance if it does not include the melody to some extent. Some candidates got around this by singing as they played.

There appeared to be an increase in the number of vocal and keyboard performances this year, and though, as already mentioned, there were some excellent performances, there were many presentations that were disappointing. Vocal quality often displayed a lack of preparation: pupils tried to emulate a version that they knew of a popular piece, but their performances sometimes lacked the basic skills, particularly attention to breath control and diction. Similarly, with the keyboard, appropriate time must be spent with the choice of sound and ways to display the interpretative skills of the performer. Many performances were let down by a rather perfunctory play through, with little or no attempt to add interpretation.

Improvisation provided the solo for a number of candidates and this was presented well overall. It would be useful if more effort were made presenting the stimulus material, as this would benefit many of the candidates.

Only a very few candidates opted for the Directing an ensemble option. The video presentation made the moderating process straightforward.

About 20% of candidates overall, presented their composition 1 as the second recorded piece. Half of the Performing During the Course pieces presented were ensembles and the genuine ensemble is on the increase. This is pleasing to see, as a

soloist with piano accompaniment does not present the same ensemble opportunities as a genuine duet or such like.

Very occasionally the quality of the instruments had some affect on the final outcomes. While there were some fine sounding instruments, the tuning of pianos often left something to be desired and some keyboards were obviously rather long in the tooth.

The comments by teachers were found to be more helpful this year. It is evident that the recommendations over the past few years are taking effect and teachers are using the grade descriptors more. Though this is very evident with the solo, it is vital that in addition to this, the teacher examiner makes it clear exactly what the candidate is doing in the ensemble activity. There were many instances this year of teachers making comments on the logged performance and leaving no justification for their mark or the pupil's activity in the recorded ensemble. It resulted in many unnecessary phone calls taking up both moderator and teacher time.

As ever, appropriate time and effort put in to the presentation of the submission pays off. The vast majority of centres present their material as requested and the moderator has a straightforward task. The MUS100 forms were generally filled out carefully, and marks are added appropriately. However, there are still a significant number of centres that continue to ignore the requirements of the board and consequently, the moderation process becomes both lengthy and tedious.

The quality of the recordings was far more varied. Taped submissions continue to be on the wane, and mini discs are becoming increasingly popular. It is important that mini disc submissions are in short play format (long play is not permissible) on a mini disc intended for audio use. High density and data mini discs are not acceptable. CDs should be checked on a consumer system before being sent to the moderator (there were some examples of CDs which had not been finalised or were on CDRW discs).

While track texts are very helpful, nothing is as helpful as a track list.

Candidate's work should be presented together on the same disc, and candidates may follow one another. With CD and MD, separate discs are not required for separate candidates. It is important NOT to put solo performances on one CD and PDC on another; the solo recording for one candidate should be followed by the PDC recording on the one disc. Please refer to the Supplementary Information Booklet for full details and some helpful hints for recording.

GCSE Music Paper 1b Solo performing

Performing Using Music Technology

Moderators report that there still seems to be some genuine confusion over what constitutes a 1B submission as opposed to a 1A submission. Many centres entered candidates incorrectly for paper 1A when they should have been entered for paper 1B and vice versa.

If the recorded work sent to the moderator contains a sequence or a multi-track recording then the candidate should be entered for paper 1B. If sequencing or multi-track recording do not feature in either of the two recorded pieces sent to the moderator then the candidate should be entered for paper 1A.

Straightforward keyboard performances using the accompaniment feature and other features offered by the keyboard such as intro, fill, etc. are 1A performances. A keyboard performance is only to be entered for paper 1B if the candidate has recorded the tracks one by one, using a built-in sequencer. This use of a keyboard is only recommended for paper 1B if it is possible to edit individual notes after they have been recorded on the sequencer (many keyboards do not offer this level of functionality).

A wide range of submissions was heard this year, with some examples of very high quality work. Moderators report that there were fewer examples of very good work, but also fewer examples of very poor work. The majority of candidates entered for paper 1B submitted a sequenced performance of their own composition, with varying attempts to provide a score for assessment of accuracy. Many candidates simply printed off the score after they had recorded the work from their computer package. This invariably led to high marks for accuracy, but often there was little, if any, attention paid to the interpretation of the piece. Scores produced in this manner were often very difficult to follow as the majority of candidates made no adjustments to clefs or spacing between staves, resulting in overlapping ledger lines etc. Some scores had no instructions as to instrumentation making it difficult to credit appropriate choice of timbre. Many scores had doubled notes and other anomalies that may have arisen as a result of automatic quantizing by the software package. If this went unchecked the candidate may have lost marks for rhythmic accuracy.

Although it is not acceptable for other levels, Sibelius is acceptable for sequencing at GCSE level. Although it is principally a notation package, it still offers many of the functions available on bona fide sequencing packages, including the ability to add volume information, panning and to change the pitch and duration of individual notes. It will be more difficult to achieve some aspects of phrasing on Sibelius, so candidates may find it useful to transfer their work to a sequencer such as Cubase, Logic or Sonar for some finishing touches. Others will find it more useful to complete all their work on a sequencing package as they prefer working in the piano roll style view rather than using traditional notation. When trying to achieve a sense of musicality, or for points of interpretation, there is no substitute for playing parts in live using a MIDI keyboard. These can later be edited for accuracy. Parts may be entered using the mouse, but these should later be edited for phrasing, interpretation and gradation of dynamics.

As for previous years, the candidature for paper 1B included a higher proportion of centres' weaker candidates than paper 1A. This is reflected in the percentage of candidates achieving the highest marks for this paper. Candidates often offered both a traditional performance and a performance using music technology for their

submission and there was no evidence to suggest that it was either easier or more difficult to achieve high marks by either route.

There were more multi-track recordings submitted this year than ever before, with the quality of submissions continuing to improve. There were fewer examples of very poor recordings (although there were a few!) and more examples of high quality work that had clearly been carefully planned and executed. There were examples of all the permutations available for this option, from candidates performing all the instruments themselves to candidates acting only as the engineer and producer, recording and mixing everything, but not actually playing any of the live instruments. Some candidates included an element of sequencing in their recordings as well as the live instruments. It is pleasing to note that examples with noise and conversation at the beginning and a loud click or laughter at the end are very few and far between, but there are still examples of poor quality master recordings, even if the original tracks have been well recorded and mixed appropriately. It is beneficial to present work of this nature in a digital medium (CD or MD) to show it off at its best.

Teacher examiner marking was significantly more accurate this year than in previous years. Teachers obviously had a better idea of what is expected, particularly for interpretation which, although often generously marked, was less so than in previous years.

It is surprising that so few centres take advantage of the options offered in paper 1B. The performing using technology route would clearly benefit many more candidates than are being entered for the option, especially when compared to the number of candidates who use some aspect of music technology to enhance their compositions.

GCSE Music Paper 02 Composition

General Comments on the individual topics within the four Areas of Study

In this third year of the specification, the range of compositions presented was quite similar to previous years. All four of the topics from Area of Study 1 (Ground Bass, Variations, Ternary and Rondo) were seen in abundance and remain as popular as ever. In Area of Study 2, the two topics of minimalism and serialism were well represented, although again this year, only a relatively few candidates offered electronic and experimental pieces. In Area of Study 3, the most popular topics were the 12 Bar Blues and Songs from Musicals. As in previous years, there were not many submissions of Reggae, although there seemed to be an increase in technology driven Club Dance Remix pieces, many of which were quite successful. There was also an increase again in the number of Indian Raga and Gamelan compositions from Area of Study 4 this year, as well as a good range of different Fusion pieces and many more African Drumming compositions than previously.

Again, it is unfortunate to report that some candidates, although thankfully less than last year, were penalised for submitting two pieces taken from the same Area of Study. It is vital to check that each composition *clearly* comes from a different topic and a different Area of Study. The other problem identified this year by the moderators, was that often teachers ignored the topics altogether and gave loose briefs such as, 'compose a piece in a popular style,' 'write a programmatic piece' etc. In these and many other cases, moderators found it difficult to place the compositions into appropriate topics. Whilst it is good that the topics are used *as a starting point for composition*, the resulting compositions must show elements and ideas taken from one of the prescribed topics, for example a repeating bass part (ground bass) or a repeated chord pattern (12 bar blues).

The practice of whole centres slavishly submitting 'compose by number' Pachelbel Canon ground bass pieces or mechanical 12 bar blues keyboard pieces was prevalent again this year and as a result, these pieces realised only mediocre marks. In such cases as these, real creativity and freedom of expression is clearly stifled as compositions are forced into straightjackets.

There were a large range of marks which is typical of previous years, although there appeared to be fewer pieces that were worthy of full marks than last year. There was a marked lack of really original and inspired work that achieved 60/60. However, at the same time, there were many that fell into the next category down, that is to say, the upper middle of the mark range. On a positive note, there were generally fewer weak compositions than in the past and less instances of candidates only submitting one composition. The overall feeling therefore, was one of an improved performance at the lower and middle range, coupled with fewer cases of first class work.

The best work came from candidates with interesting and personal briefs, and in many cases, teachers had helped the candidates by choosing imaginative and exciting ideas and using the set topics only as a *starting point* for creative work. By liberating the candidates in this way, some really effective and high quality work was produced. These candidates were writing from a position of strength, rather than conforming to a strict routine prescribed by the teacher. The enthusiasm of the candidates for their compositions was clear from reading their appraisals in the Understanding the Brief proforma. These were highly detailed and informative and often scored full marks.

The Understanding the Brief component is far better understood and hence the quality of the writing has drastically improved again this year. Teachers have obviously helped the candidates to write critically and analytically and to ensure that the writing contains appropriate musical vocabulary. The number of centres making improvements to this aspect of the paper has increased significantly this year.

Area of Study 1: Repetition and Contrast in Western Classical Music 1600-1899.

The four topics of Ground Bass, Variations, Ternary Form and Rondo were all popular across the ability range.

Ground Bases were written in many styles and for a wide range of instruments and voices. There were less mass produced Pachelbel basses thankfully, and candidates seemed to understand the importance of varying textures and thinking about the overall shape of the piece. The best examples explored many different procedures and techniques including augmentation, diminution, canonic treatment, inversion etc. Careful thought too was given to dynamics and expression as well as ensuring a progression in the variations.

Variations proved to be as popular as ever and there were many successful pieces in this form. Many were written for a solo instrument plus a piano accompaniment or even for a solo unaccompanied instrument. Several of these without accompaniment were very effective and explored a wide range of playing techniques associated with that particular instrument, rather in the form of an instrumental study. These were effective.

Sets of keyboard variations again were very popular and demonstrated many of the standard methods of melodic variation treatment. It is evident that many candidates had studied some of the Mozart piano variations for inspiration! Large scale orchestral variations were much less in evidence, although string quartets and woodwind and brass ensembles occasionally appeared.

There were no attempts at Romantic style variations in the style of Beethoven or Brahms, in which variation is achieved through motivic development.

It would be refreshing in the future to see candidates attempt this type of variation procedure, which of course can be done just with a solo instrument as well as on the large orchestral scale!

Ternary Form pieces continue to be one of the favourite forms of all across the entire ability range. As was mentioned in last year's report, the key element in this structure is that of repetition and contrast. The middle section (B) *must* display clear contrasts to section A in at least one way, be it a change of mode, tempo, pitch, rhythm etc. The best pieces managed this contrast effectively. The repeat of section A is an opportunity to write a varied reprise to avoid that 'cut and paste' feel that often lets pieces like this down. The use of introductions, links, and codas all add to the structure too.

There appears to be an increase this year in the number of Rondos written by the candidates. There were many spirited pieces of an exuberant nature often in 6/8 time 'alla gigue' These pieces often were successful and the best had well-contrasted episodic material to provide variety and interest to the musical structure. Again, a contrast in key, tempo etc. was effective.

In all these four forms, the best work came from candidates who had a good grounding in melody writing and the development of melodies in regular four bar phrases. A working knowledge of simple diatonic harmony, modulation, keys and cadences also was apparent in the best of these pieces. Many candidates had studied minuet and trios in the Classical style, as a preparation to their ternary pieces.

It is essential to study these key musical elements of the four traditional topics if the candidates are going to be equipped to compose informed pieces.

Those candidates without these musical skills and knowledge produced quite stilted and unidiomatic pieces. However, on a positive note, there appeared to be less weak pieces this year in this particular Area of Study.

Area of Study 2: New directions in Western Classical Music-1900 to the present day.

There were examples of all four set topics of Serialism, Minimalism, Experimental and Electronic Music and as was the case last year, the most popular by far, were Minimalism and Serialist compositions. The rise in serialist pieces in particular over the last three years has been meteoric.

The moderators were pleased to report a general rise in the standard of minimalist pieces this year. Last year, these pieces often suffered at the hands of the 'cut and paste' facility on the computer resulting in characterless, meandering pieces.

Thankfully many more of the pieces this year demonstrated a practical understanding of the key ideas of note addition and note subtraction technique, repetition of a musical motif and phasing. The essential idea of the gradual evolution of a melodic motif over time is key to writing a convincing minimalist composition in pastiche of the style of Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Many more of the compositions this year incorporated these procedures and techniques and therefore scored high marks. The topic was popular across the entire ability range, and the quality of work offered by the weaker candidates was improved this year, mainly because they had a grasp of the key principles and endeavoured to use these in their pieces. It is hoped that the quality of these pieces continues to improve next year.

The number of serialist pieces has again increased dramatically this year and generally the standard has been good. The best pieces were often written for a solo instrument (often unaccompanied) or for a small group of instruments.

There were very few poor examples in this style. The weaker candidates were able to demonstrate the four basic manipulations of the prime order, retrograde, inversion and retrograde inversion and even writing for a monodic line, there were able to score quite well. What these pieces lacked though, was variety in rhythmic interest and textural contrasts. Many candidates were able to score very high marks by ensuring that the rhythms were inventive and that the musical textures were varied and interesting, often incorporating contrapuntal devices, such as canons to good effect. Some of the most effective pieces were framed within a traditional structure, such as ternary form. One excellent composition combined the ground bass idea with serialist techniques. It is now clear that this topic is just as popular as any of the traditional Area of Study 1 topics.

Experimental pieces were on the decline this year and there were only a relatively few of real quality. This is not an easy option and the pieces in this style need to be carefully thought out. Often the graphic score or pictorial representation of the music was given much attention and care, but sadly the quality of the realisation was often facile and lacked inventiveness. As was pointed out in last year's report, the commentary is vital in such a work and the best pieces were accompanied by a rich plethora of musical detail, which helped to provide the moderators with a clear insight into the compositional ideas. A good quality recording is of course vital in works of this nature. Many pieces were pastiches of works studied in the GCSE Anthology. The main influences were composers such as Cathy Berberian, Meredith Monk, Cornelius Cardew and John Cage. There were several excellent pieces, but many were of a poorer quality and lacked musical coherence.

The number of Electronic pieces submitted was generally few and far between again this year. However, where a centre had the music technology in place and a teacher

to teach this option, then the work was impressive across the whole centre. These pieces also were accompanied by excellent commentaries which explained in great detail the entire compositional process from beginning to end. One of the main criticisms mentioned last year, is also pertinent this time, i.e. the length of these pieces. Many are still far too long. Marks are awarded for quality rather than quantity and an over long piece can easily have a detrimental effect on the impression of the whole composition.

Area of Study 3: Popular Song in Context.

The topic of the '12 bar blues' and 'Songs from Musicals' were two of the most popular of all the sixteen compositional topics. 'Club Dance Music' submissions were only really undertaken by centres with the appropriate technology in place and once again, Reggae pieces were quite rare.

The 12 bar blues was tackled by thousands of candidates across the entire ability range. However, as a general rule, few were inventive and entirely original in their approach. There were fewer vocal pieces, which is a shame, as last year, these tended to produce the best results. Too many of the pieces were simply hackneyed repetitions of the chord sequence accompanied by melody lines that lacked development from the original idea. Whilst swung rhythms and blue notes were often used in the melody part, the melodies themselves were fragmentary and limited in appeal. The weaker candidates again simply produced a repeated chord sequence on a keyboard with a melodic part on top. The melody part often lacked blue notes or syncopated rhythms and even clashed with the harmony of the underlying chords. A rhythm preset on the keyboard did little to improve the overall impression of the composition; in fact it often proved a further hindrance to the candidate. Little credit can also be given to keyboard presets as this is not composition.

The best pieces were some exciting instrumental numbers that took the 12 bar blues idea as a starting point for a composition. There were some pieces that displayed excellent performance skills as well as including some accomplished improvisatory sections. It was felt by the moderators that candidates should be encouraged to get away from the restrictions of keyboard pieces that slavishly adhere to a rigid chord pattern and rather to attempt to write pieces that feature well-developed melody lines.

It might be worth considering writing a blues piece within a traditional structure, such as ternary or rondo form and perhaps a different 12 bar chord pattern could then be employed in the contrasting sections etc. A little more originality and creativity is required in this option.

Songs from Musicals was again probably the most popular of all the topics. Many talented song writers were given the freedom to compose a song in a style that suited them and to then 'fit' this song into a hypothetical musical context. Natural songwriters were able to score high marks quite easily in this option. A word of warning here about the brief. Only a paragraph at most is needed to place this song into a musical context. Too many of the candidates wrote only about the story of their musical, at the same time neglecting to say anything about the actual music or composition of the song.

Many of the songs submitted this year, were not really songs in the truest sense, as they lacked vocal lines and lyrics.

As a general comment, the best songs had an effective and catchy chorus with well-contrasted verses.

Club Dance pieces were often of a high quality, produced using sophisticated studio equipment and were quite authentic and musically convincing. The commentaries and track diagrams were full of detail and showed how the candidate had manipulated samples, composed drum and bass loops and structured their

compositions in the process of the layering of tracks. In many, there were some original sounds produced by using music technology effectively. As last year however, some candidates were only producing keyboard mixes that lacked the essential ideas of sampling and sequencing.

Some of the poor submissions abused the use of such music software programmes as 'Ejay' and 'Acid'. As last year, these pieces lacked any real evidence of composition having taken place and were rather just a selection of preloaded samples and loops picked out by the candidate. However, on a positive note, there appeared to be less of these submissions this year.

Reggae pieces were fairly sparse. Where they appeared, they tended to be quite stylish and idiomatic, and, as a result, scored high marks. These are not particularly difficult pieces to write and it is rather strange that the moderators see so few. Perhaps, this is because 12 bar blues and Songs from Musicals are far more accessible and appealing.

Area of Study 4: 'Rhythms, scales and modes in music from around the world.'

The popular topics again were Gamelan and African Drumming compositions with a noted decrease in Indian Raga and Fusion pieces.

The Indian Raga pieces were stylish and there were several authentic realisations with sitars, tambura and tabla. Equally effective were those that used Western instruments (commonly the violin, cello and bongo drums) and were written in several sections to imitate the characteristics of the alap, jor, jhalla and gat elements of the raga. There were also several pieces that used Sibelius to good effect. In all, the works heard in this genre tended to score high marks.

Gamelan pieces this year were a little disappointing and tended not to achieve the highest marks. Whilst the best pieces effectively imitated the sounds of the gamelan orchestra using a range of school percussion instruments, the music lacked variety and variation, which is an essential element in this type of music. Hardly any of the pieces attempted to imitate the idea of contrasting sections of music at varying tempi. Too often, the tempo was kept static throughout and as a result, the music became very repetitive and dull. As last year, the worst pieces were produced at the computer abusing the 'cut and paste' facility and thus were monotonous and aimless. These weak pieces often lacked even the fundamental idea of the slow moving *pokok* and the layering of melodic parts above this trunk melody.

African drumming pieces were very popular this year, with some authentic works displaying the characteristic polyrhythms, cross rhythms, call and response, virtuoso solo writing etc. that are features of this rhythmic style of music. It was a rare delight to hear some examples of real tribal drumming from centres in Africa!

As in the gamelan works, the weak pieces here overused electronic shorthand on the computer in order to 'cut and paste' large sections of music. Also lacking in these pieces was contrasting rhythmic textures between solo passages and ensemble riffs in the normal call and response pattern. As this type of music has no melodic element, it is essential that contrasts are provided in the musical textures, otherwise the result is a static feeling in which the music seems to lack direction and forward drive.

The number of Fusion pieces remained about the same as last year, although the quality of these pieces seems to have improved. The freedom to combine any two different styles provides ample scope to the candidates to experiment with styles with which they are familiar. Folk Rock and Bhangra were particularly popular this year as well as some excellent examples of Afro Pop!

Understanding the Brief Proforma

The writing on the Understanding the Brief proforma has improved dramatically this year. Teachers now understand what is required for a good mark and are clearly helping their candidates to take this task seriously. Again, the best commentaries contained a rich plethora of musical vocabulary and the candidates were able to provide critical judgements and justifications for the compositional process from the first note to the last. These candidates also considered how their work reflected the set brief and how the changes and alterations were made to improve the composition as it evolved over time.

There were fewer weak briefs this year, but these were characterised by the lack of musical vocabulary and they simply wrote in general terms about the composition. Some of the briefs for songs for example, simply told the story of the musical with no mention of the actual music itself.

The problem highlighted last year of 'see attached commentary' was less in evidence this year. It is worth restating that the coursework requirement is that the commentary and brief should *both* be submitted. This is made quite clear in the specification as described in the box diagram on page 15. Moreover, the aim of this piece of writing is also clearly stated on this page of the specification, i.e. '*to appraise the brief and evaluate their composition, its performance (where appropriate) and the Area of Study.*'

Teacher set briefs

The set briefs varied from the highly imaginative to the rather dull. The best briefs were carefully tailored to the abilities and interests of the individual candidate and as a result, the completed coursework too then tended to be of a high quality.

The worst briefs were of the open ended variety, such as 'compose a piece of descriptive music, 'write a classical piece from Area of Study 1' or even 'write a pop song' Attention should be given to the specification for guidance as to the purpose of the brief. It has a clear purpose to '*describe the stimulus for the composition and provide a clear indication of the candidate's intentions. It should include reference to some or all of the following: purpose, resources, effect, time and place.*'

Exemplar material of sample briefs can be found on pages 18-22 of the Specification and it would be good practice to discuss options with the candidates in order to agree a brief that they will find stimulating and bring out the best of their individual abilities.

Teacher-examiner Assessments

In general, the moderators reported that they found the teacher examiner assessments to be far more accurate this year and it is clear that care has been taken to read each level descriptor carefully before deciding on an appropriate mark. There were, of course, cases of some over assessment, but to be fair this was found to be less extreme than previously.

In the compulsory criteria, A 'Use and development of ideas' and B 'Exploitation of the medium' were well assessed, although marks were sometimes slightly inflated and a '4' was often brought down to a '3' etc... In the case of C 'Structural Interest', this was still over-assessed this year. This was stated in last year's report and still seems to be a problem area. It is therefore worth repeating the example quoted then to make clear how this criterion should be assessed:

'A straightforward application and rendition of the structure (eg. simply ternary ABA) should only warrant a mark of three, i.e. it displays a 'clear and simple structure'. However, teacher-examiners were frequently awarding a 4 or 5. To achieve this mark, there must be more to the structure, be it an introduction, coda, or a real sense of proportion and development of the musical material within the structure

In D: 'Understanding the Brief,' the moderators reported that these were far more accurately marked by the teacher examiner. As this is now the third year of the specification, teachers have a clearer idea of what is required in this criterion. It is worth stating moreover, that in order to achieve a high mark of 4 or 5; the candidates need to make critical judgements about their work in their writing. The demonstration of a good musical vocabulary on its own i.e. a description (albeit of a high quality) will still only realise a mark of 3.

The optional criteria were generally used effectively and appropriately to the particular topic chosen. There were only a few instances where the moderators found that they needed to change these choices in order to secure higher marks for the candidates.

'Melody' (E) was well-assessed, although in order to achieve a top mark of 5, the melody must display character and style. 'Harmony/ Accompaniment' (F) was again over marked this year. A piece which uses just the Primary Triads warrants a mark of three. As the descriptor clearly states, to achieve a mark of four, the harmony should demonstrate a good repertoire of chords. The moderator would expect to see use of either dominant 7ths, diminished 7ths or secondary triads etc. 'Texture' (G) and 'Rhythm / Tempo' (H) were quite accurately assessed, although again this year, Dynamics (I) was over-assessed. It is important that dynamics make good musical sense and care is taken about the aural effects of dynamics and the balance between the parts. Some candidates had simply littered their scores hoping for a high mark! The final criterion 'Use of technology' (J) was well-assessed in the majority of cases and those writing pieces that feature technology heavily, such as electronic music and club dance remix, often deserved full marks here.

Arrangements.

These were rare again this year and as last year they were either very good or quite poor. The best candidates created new pieces from their original source material. The music was often rescored for new instrumentation with different harmonies and often included some original melodic parts, counter melodies etc.

The weak candidates simply transcribed the original for another group of instruments preserving the melody, rhythm and harmony parts from the original version. These were only awarded low marks.

Technology and Composition

This year, the moderators found only a few instances of the abuse of technology based programmes in composition. Where such programmes had been used, for example, 'Dance Music EJay' the candidates were far clearer about what they had used from the programme and which aspects of the music they had composed themselves.

'Sibelius' is now used extensively for the production of scores and parts and the standard of scores generally were much improved on previous years, with fewer examples of scores not matching the recording etc.

Administrative Matters

There were again cases of missing or incomplete submissions. One of the most bizarre omissions this year from several centres was the lack of recordings of composition 2. In addition, the following list summarises common problems experienced by the moderators.

- Late work
- Incomplete submissions - missing recordings, commentaries, scores etc.
- Arithmetical errors on Mus Forms and transfer errors to OPTEMS
- Highest and lowest candidates missing from the selected sample
- Still many using C90 tapes with one candidate on each side
- Lack of track order on CD or MD.
- Multiple MDs where one would suffice for the entire centre
- Missing signatures - teacher-examiner and candidate
- Missing teacher-examiner comments on Mus Forms
- Performance work sent to composition moderator
- Poor quality (sometimes inaudible) recordings

Many centres however, managed to present the coursework and recordings in a clear and concise format. Those that presented all of the centre's work on a single CD or Minidisk with a clear track order are to be commended. This is often the most efficient way to present candidate's work to the best advantage. It is fully understood that this requires a considerable amount of work at a busy time of year. The moderators are always grateful when the moderation process of a centre is found to be straightforward.

GCSE Music Paper 03 Listening and appraising

The examination this year still had rather mixed responses with very few candidates managing to score marks in the top mark range area. This was once more particularly disappointing as either the correct musical terminology or an adequate description was acceptable for a mark as has been the case in the past. The open-ended questions still prove to be problematical although the question format within the paper endeavours to help the candidate focus on the correct response that is to be required. It is appreciated that the length of the paper and the large area of knowledge required also contributed to the pressure that the candidates felt in this component. It is important to get them to focus on each question and then move on to the next without thinking about any shortcomings in the responses that they might have already written. Responses can also be in short note form, bullet points or sentences. The essential information can be produced in any format and this also needs to be made clear to the candidates. I appreciate that these comments have been stated previously but their importance cannot be understated.

Area of Study 1: Repetition and Contrast in Western Classical Music 1600-1899

Question 1

It was hoped that this question would give the candidates a confident start to the examination and therefore consisted of many one word responses and some multiple choice options as well one more detailed part requiring a justification for the period of the extract. In (a) the sound of the instrument in the recording was such that a guitar, lute or harp was acceptable however an electric guitar was not. Still quite a few candidates wrote several differing instruments instead of just one as required. In (b) the melodic movement was stepwise or conjunct. Other words that adequately described the way the part moved were scalic or sequential. As all the questions within the specification are based on the topic areas, there were only four choices available to describe the bass part (it was not ternary, nor rondo or theme and variation) which was the ground bass. Many candidates could name the soprano correctly for (c) but the style of the singing was a problem. What was expected was really ornamentation, decoration or melismatic. Operatic and vibrato were also accepted but many wrote the word 'high' which was not. Many heard the harpsichord and the cello for (d). The tempo was moderato for (e) but there were quite a few adagios and largos in the responses. The period was quite well answered with 1689 and amongst the reasons were the Baroque Period, the use of the harpsichord, the ornamentation, contrapuntal texture and the use of continuo. A total list of all the options for the different parts of this question is given in the mark scheme.

Question 2

There was quite a good response overall in this question. For (a) quite a few heard the pedal note or described it as an ostinato or drone which was acceptable. Many recognised the pizzicato or plucked technique in the string part for (b) and the descriptions of the beginnings of the A and B sections, the former being an ascending scale figure and the latter, a descending one occasionally proved problematic. The arpeggios in the clarinet for (d) were often described as scales and the trill for (e) was often called a turn. Many heard that the tempo became faster for (f) which was the correct answer but then at the very end of the extract there was a slight silence

and a final chord and quite a few candidates decided to add this into the response but did not always describe it correctly. Many correctly identified ternary for (g).

Question 3

The completion of the melody (which was triadic) was quite well handled but few obtained full marks. Often the last two notes were the problem. For (b) there were many correct responses within the mark scheme and quite a few candidates did manage to obtain full marks here. Amongst the most obvious responses were that the melody part was now played by the piano (worth 2 marks), that the section was longer, the bass played pizzicato, the strings were now only the accompaniment, that the variation was slightly louder and there were many references to the extra ornamentation. Unfortunately candidates still write vague responses - it is important that they specify what they can hear by reference to an instrument or some musical feature.

Area of Study 2: New Directions in Western Classical Music -1900 to the present day

Question 4

The music of this extract was difficult to listen to and needed quite a lot of concentration. When music is chosen within this genre, it is important that the candidates try to focus on the listening intention of the questions. In (a) quite a few heard the panning effects and also could comment on the sample being added that had a water, wind or rushing sound. Others were aware of the sample being added over the top of the chord. These were the most common correct answers but there were many other alternatives as shown in the mark scheme. What were involved were samples, not instruments and this was one of the main sources of error. In (b) the overall dynamic was loud and the piece had a rather limited range. A large number of the candidates identified this loud aspect and quite a few qualified that the level had little variation. Others heard a very slight crescendo at the beginning and also commented on the fade at the end of the extract. The latter was purely for recording purposes but as it would be in keeping with the style, this was given credit if the candidates mentioned it. Part (c) had many vague answers to do with water aspects and candidates missed the key word manipulation which should have led them on to thinking about technology. Those who did mention the looping, reverb, multi-tracking and panning. Again there were a variety of correct responses to be given credit. Overall this was one of the most disappointing sets of responses within the whole examination.

Question 5

This was a minimalist piece of music and there were many incorrect responses here - the most common being serialist or experimental. The reasons for (ii) were also poorly answered as a result of an inaccurate identification of style. Some commented on the use of cells or short motifs, quite a few heard the repetition or ostinato and others heard the interlocking or cross rhythms. Some could distinguish between the melodic and rhythmic repetitions which were separate credit points. The majority of the candidates named the string family but there are some who still

name a string instrument not the family and therefore lose the credit. It is important to emphasize that if a family is asked for, there are only four possible answers. The true/false format for (c) was quite well answered across the ability range but there were often errors over the crescendo at the beginning which did not exist and the syncopation which did.

Question 6

This was a different approach to dealing with serialism which was more effective than in the past. It was unfortunate that the first instrument to play the start of the extract was not the solo one and many candidates therefore identified this wrongly, however, the violin when it did some in was very distinctive. Where the candidates heard the violin correctly, they could also name the harp or clarinet as the accompanying instrument. Many heard the broken chord for (iii) but quite a few confused this with a glissando. The Andante tempo for (c) was occasionally confused with Adagio. The technical name for (d) was occasionally mixed up by the mention of the chromatic scale rather than the tone/note row etc. There were a variety of correct answers for this question. Part (e) showed some improvement with quite a few candidates managing half marks or over. There were a reasonable number who managed to obtain full marks as well. The most common correct responses included mention of the row itself, retrograde, inversion and retrograde inversion. Others mentioned transposition or verticalisation or complex dynamics. The large range of correct answers can also be found in the mark scheme.

Area of Study 3: Popular Song in Context

Question 7

Quite a large number of candidates correctly identified this as an example of reggae which was the correct answer but ska was also acceptable as the tempo was that bit faster than some reggae pieces. For (b) there were quite a few who wrote syncopation or offbeat and others who mentioned the prominent bass line all of which were acceptable answers. The true/false questions were amongst the best set of responses across the entire candidature. Many obtained all six marks here.

Question 8

Part (a) was asking for a straightforward response based on musical reasons. Many candidates again were vague rather than specify a feature and then describe it. Amongst the correct answers were the following: loud, repetitive or looped, constant beat, fast tempo, catchy melody and a prominent bass. Part (b) was looking for technological effects and in this part quite a few heard the reverb, delay or echo and the scratching. There were many additional correct responses. Unfortunately, looping and sequencing, both of which were popular responses, were unacceptable because they are not effects. The remix changes also had many vague responses without clear focus on what was being described. Amongst the most common correct responses were the bass drum/drum loop coming in at the start, the vocals coming in much later, a different key, less vocals and a more prominent bass part. Many mentioned the echo/delay effect on the vocals but did not state that it was more

prominent which was necessary to distinguish it from the original which also had this effect. As a whole, this question had a rather disappointing set of responses.

Question 9

Many of the answers required for this extract were meant to be straightforward but were not answered as such. In (a) the starting section was called the introduction or intro but many decided to describe something to do with the music they heard - improvisation etc that was not relevant. Quite a few correctly identified (ii) as the correct shape for (b) and then for (c) candidates were writing improvisation again which is not a playing technique. There were a number of correct responses for this - the most common being pitch bends/note bending/string bending or sliding/glissando. The candidates who really knew the guitar techniques mentioned the hammer-ons, pull-offs and palm muting. Most candidates managed to score some marks in (d) with quite a few obtaining maximum credit. The most common errors were the first line chords I and IV often being reversed and the first of the chord V's in line 3 being incorrectly identified as chord IV. Part (e) was the solo section or it could be considered to be a break or fill as well as several other solutions. The purpose for (ii) was to allow individual performers to improvise and show off their playing skills. Other correct possibilities were for this section to provide a bridge or link to another section or to add variation or interest. Other creditworthy responses are listed in the mark scheme.

Area of Study 4: Rhythms, scales and modes from around the world

Question 10

This was also meant to be a straightforward question dealing with the study of the Gamelan. For part (a) there were many correct answers of Bali/Java or Indonesia. These are the standard responses expected for this question. As Indonesia is a part of the world, so the question needs to state this option. Unfortunately, there were quite a lot of Asia or south-east Asia responses which were not specific enough. The music of the gamelan always features heterophonic texture and this question has been asked previously. Still candidates opt for homophonic or polyphonic as a response to (b). The suhling played some decorations at the end of the line which were like turns and also embellished the piece at one point. Quite a few mentioned the answer aspect and others the turns or fills. Part (d) was the Gamelan and a large number of candidates wrote this but part (ii) was meant to be the standard three types of instruments listed in most text books - gongs, drums and metallaphones. Quite a number of candidates listed specific instruments or described them. Part (e) was asking for the two tuning systems (some books talk about scales) and these were the Pelog and Slendro with the description of the seven notes/heptatonic and five notes/pentatonic respectively. The overall response to the whole of this question was also generally disappointing.

Question 11

This question may have needed clearer guidelines. The fact that there were two extracts and ten marks should have implied that there were five points in each extract to be found. Quite a few marked more than the five in A and less in B, others had less in both and vice versa. Extract A featured India in the fusion but quite a few had Indonesia. The vibraphone and the sitar were the correct instruments but occasionally the djembe was indicated. The features were the ostinato and sliding

effect but quite a few drum rolls were marked. The second extract featured African fusion but quite a few had India or Indonesia here also. The djembe and violin were the featured instruments but there were quite a few who wrote 'sitar'. The features were the drum roll and the ostinato although quite a few wrote 'sliding effects'.

Question 12

This was another disappointing question - many candidates did not know the names of any of the sections of the raga and left this blank. Others wrote the words raga or Indian on the section headings. Some however did know the correct names of what they were listening to. Within the features, quite a few noted the improvisatory quality, the slow tempo of the first and a faster tempo for the second, no sense of pulse for the first and a steady pulse or sense of metre for the second. A few mentioned that the second section was also louder than the first. The characteristics of a raga were often unclear or vague - a lot wrote Indian music here. Amongst the most common correct responses was the reference to mood/time of day or season and the fact that the raga is in between a scale and a melody. The assorted correct answers to these sections are in the detailed mark scheme.

General

It is still hoped that, with a greater focus on the sixteen bullet point topics within the four areas, candidates can improve their responses for next year. The questions try to relate to the detailed information given within the specification and the importance of noting the emphasis of the question and the clarity of the answer is highly significant.

There was a slight improvement in the overall marks obtained this year but it is hoped that there can be further improvement in the future.

Grade Boundaries - GCSE Music 1426

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upper	100	83	74	64	54	45	37	29	21
Lower	84	75	65	55	46	38	30	22	0

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