

GCSE

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Music (1426)

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Examiners' Report

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1426/1A: Performing

This year there was, as ever a wide range of performances on a vast array of instruments. The moderators have reported that it is encouraging to hear that there is such a diversity of performing that is going on in our schools. In addition, this year there was a survey of moderated music undertaken and this has been quite eye-opening for the moderators and the board overall.

Firstly, at the More Difficult level, while there were some impressive and mature performances there were significantly fewer than last year; if this was due to candidates taking heed of advice given in the past about performing pieces that are beyond the remit of this exam, this does not account for the fact that there were also very few performances getting full marks in their own right - the pieces tended to get fewer marks but relied on the difficulty grid to raise the marks to full.

There were many instances of these candidates losing marks because of simple issues within a performance. Attention to detail is important: all dynamic markings and phrasing should be adhered to and instruments should be properly tuned.

The majority of pieces are deemed MD. Those that are marked as Standard were, on the whole, very well prepared. There were a few outstanding standard level submissions. There were a far higher number of pieces deemed easy this year, most of which were performed on the keyboard and were arrangements of well known tunes for this exam. Attention to basic accuracy and fluency in all cases would help significantly for future submissions as 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.

The survey undertaken by the moderators has shown that piano, voice, keyboard, drums and guitar make up 64% of the performances heard, with the piano accounting for nearly 20% of the entries. At the other end of the scale, it is worrying that there were far fewer performances on orchestral instruments and in particular, brass, along with unusual and world instruments. Vocal music displayed the widest diversity of music and of performing standards. There were fewer examples of classical song and most performances were of pop songs or songs from musicals, many of which were sung to backing tracks. While many entries were excellent, there were too many performances in which the vocal quality displayed a distinct lack of preparation: pupils tried to emulate a version that they knew of a popular piece, but their performances sometimes lacked the basic skills, in particular attention to breath control and diction. 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.

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 suchlike. There were some fine performances overall, with many centres going to great lengths to ensure that the correct type of ensemble was submitted. There were still many cases of solo plus accompaniment being used as an ensemble for the soloist. This will not be permissible under the new issue of the specification. There were a number of accompaniments used as solo performances - these were mainly guitarists.

Again, the marking overall was a further improvement on last year's. It is good to know that teachers are getting to grips with the demands of the course. There were many instances where the Teacher Examiner applied the Level of Difficulty grid incorrectly: there are exemplars given in the specification, please try to look at these to get a more accurate mark. Moderators reported an increase in the number of administrative errors by Teacher Examiners. While the standard of marking has increased, they found many errors in the arithmetic, incomplete submissions with scores missing, recordings not working, quality of the recordings varying and signatures missing. It is of professional importance to ensure that the moderators receive the correct submission. While the vast majority of centres make every effort to send the correct items, moderators reported that they contacted a third of their centres because of one or more of these issues. In addition, it is regretted to note that many moderators reported that nearly one quarter of their submissions were received after the deadline - most of these arrive a day late, and a few over a week late. Only a few of these were sanctioned by Edexcel.

The vast majority of performances were well recorded and of an appropriate length. However, some performances exceeded the recommended limit of 5 minutes (indeed one ensemble movement lasted for nearly 20 minutes), which is not recommended as it not only self-indulgent, but time consuming for the moderator. At GCSE, a limit is placed as this will be more than enough time to display a candidate's abilities, without putting too much pressure on, or giving more opportunities for the candidate to make mistakes. There were still some cases of poor recordings, particularly with the ensembles where the candidate had been highlighted in the recording to the detriment of the other parts and therefore making it harder to mark the ensemble element. Please take care here. Similarly, it is wise to send only the correct recording - some schools submitted recordings where the candidate had made several attempts and discussions with the teacher were included between takes. Similarly, in one instance a teacher insisted that the pupil carry on when the music had come to a halt, giving no opportunity for the pupil to start again and perhaps gain better marks.

In summary, 2006 has been a successful year, but one in which the very top performances were missing and one in which the issues with administration took up too much of the moderator's time. As a guide for future, please read the Specification Guide and Supplementary Information Booklet for help, but ensure that what you send to the moderator is simply put together and clear. Two recordings need two items of source material; preferably scores, but commercial recordings are acceptable and so is a good tab. Words only for songs are not. For the record, CDs seem to be the preferred medium for both schools and moderators - these are easily accessible these days and one disc is usually enough for most centres, making administrative matters very straightforward. All recordings should be sent with a track list. Some centres use equipment that can name tracks - while this is useful, it is not as good as a track list, particularly in those instances when the recordings are not in candidate order.

1426/1B: Performing Using Technology

The performance of candidates for Paper 1B in 2006 was similar to that in 2005; the standard of submissions ranged from very high quality work scoring full marks to work displaying very little resemblance to the stimulus material. The candidature for Paper 1B is significantly weaker than that for Paper 1A. With the exception of centres who often enter all their candidates for Paper 1B, centres seem to enter their weaker candidates for this paper, perhaps because it is the only way they can fulfil the specification requirements for performance. It was noted by moderators that some teachers clearly specialise in this field and had led their candidates to produce some outstanding sequences with a clear understanding of interpretative detail in addition to the required accuracy of note input.

The choice of stimulus material for sequencing is as important as the choice of piece for a traditional performance. The specification requires that there are at least three individual parts sounding at the same time (drums count as one part and a piano counts as one part), so it is going a long way beyond the requirements for this level if students sequence orchestral scores or pieces with eight or more parts. Although some of these pieces were in the outstanding category, others lost marks in interpretation because candidates had spent all their time trying to input the material accurately. At the other end of the scale, some candidates would select overly simple, melody-only arrangements as their stimulus material leaving little room for interpretative detail and failing to meet the minimum requirements of the specification. Judging from how candidates managed the task this year the best stimulus material to choose contains between three and six parts, lasts no more than 48 bars, uses a range of instruments that sound good on the equipment provided by the centre, includes some dynamic contrast in the individual parts and motivates the candidate to complete the work (i.e., is a piece they enjoy sequencing and are keen to complete so they can hear the overall effect). It is not necessary for each candidate to sequence a different piece: the specification allows candidates from the same centre to sequence the same piece, provided that the finished sequence is entirely the work of the candidate and can be verified as such by the Teacher-Examiner.

As in 2005, the majority of candidates entered for this paper sequenced their own compositions. Please note that it is just as important to provide a score for sequenced compositions as it is for any other stimulus chosen. If the candidate has produced a commentary for the composition it is vital that this contains enough information to allow for assessment of accuracy. Guitar tablature is an acceptable form of notation (if rhythmic detail is included), but submitting a guitar tab on its own is insufficient if the candidate has sequenced the performance of the full band - a recording of the piece as performed by the original artist would be a much more suitable stimulus allowing for assessment of accuracy.

The number of multi-track recordings submitted in 2006 was similar to that in 2005. The quality of these recordings continues to improve. Although there were less examples of near-professional quality, the number of very poor recordings was significantly on the decline. Those centres who attempted this option seemed to understand the requirements, both of the specification and the task, leading to better quality submissions overall. There were fewer examples of over-ambitious recording tasks this year, again leading to an improvement in standards.

Teacher-Examiner marking was more accurate in 2006 than in 2005 with fewer errors in arithmetic and application of the Levels of Difficulty grid. However, moderators reported that there were still a number of examples of very generous marking, especially for interpretation in sequenced performances. Many centres omitted their Teacher-Examiner comments or gave very vague or brief comments. It is important to note that these comments should support the marks awarded and justify any borderline decisions made in the marking process.

Moderators reported that there were very few submissions on tape this year, with the majority of work submitted on CD or MD. Some submissions on tape appeared to have been recorded by pointing a mono microphone (or portable cassette player mic) at the computer speakers, inevitably producing very poor quality recordings and disadvantaging the candidates. This practice is to be avoided. It is not necessary to provide a separate CD or MD for each candidate; one well-labelled disc is sufficient. If centres use MDs for recording candidate work over the duration of the course then these should be edited and compiled into one disc instead of sending all the discs to the moderator containing numerous irrelevant performances.

1426/02: Composing

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

The range of compositions presented in 2006 was quite similar to previous years. All four of the topics from Area of Study 1 (Ground Bass, Variations, Ternary and Rondo) were represented, although the most popular choices by far were Ground Bass and Ternary pieces. In Area of Study 2, Minimalism and Serialism were well represented, however only a relatively few candidates offered Electronic and Experimental pieces and in fact, there was a notable decline of these two genres from last year. In Area of Study 3, the most popular topics again were the 12 Bar Blues and Songs from Musicals. As in previous years, there were only a few submissions of Reggae and for the first time this year, a marked decline in Club Dance Remix compositions. The biggest changes were observed in Area of Study 4, where there was a significant reduction in the number of Indian and Gamelan pieces. Fusion pieces were also few and far between. However, there was another noticeable increase in the production of African Drumming compositions, frequently generated through software programmes such as Sibelius.

It is pleasing to report for the first time this year that only in a few instances were candidates penalised for submitting two pieces taken from the same Area of Study. The message from last year for teachers to check that each composition *clearly* comes from a different topic and a different Area of Study seems to have had a positive impact. The other problem identified last 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. Sadly, this practice still persists as a real cause for concern. The results are often bland and mediocre compositions which lack focus and are frequently not 'fit for purpose'.

Many of the moderators reported the continued practice of 'composing by numbers' or 'template compositions' where the teacher has dictated how each part of the composition is to be organised. This practice stifles creativity and potential and results in a series of unimaginative 'cloned' compositions. This manufacturing of music for the purpose of the examination was seen in a variety of compositions across all Areas of Study. One common example is the over used and weary Pachelbel canon clones. Variations too, were prone to bad practice. There were examples of variations on 'twinkle, twinkle' where the teacher had rigidly laid down the sequence of variation techniques, e.g., variation 1 in quavers, variation 2 in triplets, variation 3 in the minor key, etc.

There was a large range of marks in this component which is typical of previous years, although there appeared to be more pieces achieving the higher range marks than last year. However, there was a dearth of really original and inspired work that achieved 60/60. Nevertheless, at the same time, there were many that fell into the next category down, that is to say, the middle and upper middle of the mark range. On a positive note, there were generally fewer weak compositions again this year than in the past and less instances of candidates only submitting one composition. The impression overall was that the general standard had improved slightly on last year. One factor in this was the noticeable improvement of the writing of the brief at criterion D, more of which will be mentioned later in the report.

The best work this year came from candidates with interesting and personal briefs, Teachers have obviously given assistance and careful thought to his planning stage and ensured that each candidate was motivated by their own individual assignments. The resulting compositions revealed a maturity of understanding, displayed thoughtful preparation of the task and, in writing the 'Understanding the Brief', the opportunity was exercised to appraise and evaluate their work. Without exception, these candidates also presented scores and recordings of the highest quality.

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 entire ability range. Ground Basses were written for a wide range of instruments and/or voices. There were the inevitable Pachelbel pastiches, but also some real attempts to provide a coherent and progressive set of variations over the ground. The most successful of these pieces exploited different compositional procedures and techniques including augmentation, diminution, canonic treatment and inversion as well as taking care to vary the textures and provide meaningful dynamic contrasts. Variations proved to be another popular option and there were many successful pieces in this form. There were solo pieces without accompaniment, keyboard variations, as well as pieces for small ensembles, and in a few cases, full orchestral variations!

This form is well suited to candidates who like to work on small sections of a work at a time rather than to try to build up one large scale composition. It was clear again this year that teachers had used well known classical variations, such as the ever-popular Mozart piano variations on 'Ah, vous dirai-je maman?' as a model for melodic variation techniques.

There were sadly again no attempts at Romantic style variations in the style of Beethoven or Brahms, in which variation is achieved through motivic development. This was commented upon in last year's report and it would be good to see candidates attempting this type of variation procedure which can be interesting and stimulating for the candidates to endeavour to develop motifs from an existing melody to create new melodies etc.

Ternary Form pieces continue to be the favourite choice of formal structure across the entire ability range. The most successful of these pieces were those that could provide a well-contrasted middle 'B' section to the outer 'A' sections. In addition, 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. It is also important to consider the phrase structure of each of the sections and to ensure that each has its own sense of internal form and balance. The key elements of 'repetition' and 'contrast' are vital to this form, as indeed is of course equally true of the Rondo.

There were fewer examples of Rondo pieces this year, although those that were seen tended to be quite successful and were often lively works displaying real character and spirit. There were also well-written for the chosen instrument.

It is worth reiterating the points made in last year's report that 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 is also a great aid to effective composition. Candidates should study these key musical elements of

the four traditional topics if they are going to be equipped to compose convincing musical pieces.

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

All four set compositional topics of Serialism, Minimalism, Experimental and Electronic Music were heard, although as was the case last year, the most popular two by far were Minimalist and Serialist compositions. There were considerably fewer Experimental and Electronic works this year, but those that were heard fell into two distinct camps - the very good and the very bad!

The noted improvement last year in minimalist works was less noticeable this year. The best works displayed the essential idea of the gradual evolution of a motif through a process of very gradual change and displayed the use of phasing, note addition/subtraction techniques over a very simple, often static harmonic foundation. However, this year again, the moderators reported the poor practice of constant repetition with little or no development of ideas. These pieces were also often simple pentatonic offerings that were done with the abuse of the 'copy paste' facility on the computer. One of the moderators summed up this problematic topic succinctly, 'minimalism is perhaps used the most and is understood the least. The majority of such works consist of endless repetition of one motif (often for 15 minutes!) with no understanding of the characteristics of the genre.'

The number of serialist pieces has again increased this year and generally the standard has been very good. This topic seems to be well taught and appeals to the whole ability range. At the best, the moderators heard some imaginative works in the style of Webern, Berg, etc. Some adventurous candidates exploited instrumental textures to good effect, writing for a whole multitude of ensembles, from string quartets to brass groups.

There were very few poor examples in this style. The weaker candidates were able to score well by demonstrating at least their understanding and application of the four basic manipulations of the prime order, retrograde, inversion and retrograde inversion. Sensibly, the teachers had directed them to write for an unaccompanied instrument to keep things as simple as possible. This wise advice served the candidates very well indeed. More attention though needs to be given (even at this modest level) to writing idiomatic angular melodic lines and using irregular and fragmentary rhythms to achieve the desired atonal framework of the serialist piece. Some of the most effective pieces were composed within a traditional structure. There were examples of ternary, rondo and even variations! One exceptional piece took the idea of the four elements of earth, air, fire and water to write short descriptive cameos. This topic is now just as popular as any of the traditional Area of Study 1 topics.

Experimental pieces were scarce this year. Those that were heard often were based on one of the compositions in the GCSE anthology and these tended to be interesting pastiches. The commentary is vital for this type of work and will assist the moderator in understanding the intentions of the composer. Therefore, this writing needs to be as detailed and replete as possible. There were some weak pieces in this category too, where the music seemed to bear little or no relation to the graphic score. The music tended to meander and lacked any form of coherence or direction.

The comments on Electronic pieces apply equally this year. The only notable difference (as with Experimental works) being the decline in actual submissions.

As was highlighted in last year's report, where a centre had the music technology in place and a teacher to teach this option, the work was impressive across the whole centre. These pieces also were accompanied by excellent commentaries too which explained in great detail the entire compositional process from beginning to end. One of the main criticisms mentioned last year is again apparent and that is 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. One gets the impression that the candidate is far more interested in technological effects rather than the overall impression of the total structure and shape of the music.

Area of Study 3: Popular Song in Context.

The '12 bar blues' and 'Songs from Musicals' were two of the most popular of the sixteen compositional topics. There was also a notable decline in 'Club Dance Music' submissions and once again for the third year running, Reggae pieces were rare. The 12 bar blues was popular across the ability range. The best pieces were imaginative and displayed idiomatic melodic lines, improvised sections, stop choruses etc. Careful consideration was also given to make the rhythms exciting with the use of syncopation and melodies that featured blue notes to create a true sense of the blues style. It is a shame however, that we have less blues songs as opposed to thousands of instrumental pieces. At the lower ability range, these 12 bar blues pieces are little more than basic workings, often lacking in the blues style at all. Some of the worst used grids of chord patterns in which the candidates simply had to write in notes to 'fit' the given chord. These simply had no sense of the blues idiom whatsoever.

Songs from Musicals featured strongly again this year. For many, it was an excuse to write a popular song in a free style and then manufacture a hypothetical plot for the musical. Natural songwriters were able to score high marks quite easily in this option. Last year, it was mentioned that candidates need only refer briefly to the plot or setting of the song. However, again this year, 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. Some submissions were not really songs in the truest sense, as they lacked vocal lines and lyrics. The topic does allow candidates to write 'instrumental numbers' and many seemed to enjoy this opportunity.

Club Dance Remix pieces were lacking in number this year. There is still evidence of the over use (or even abuse) of programs such as 'Ejay' and 'Acid' 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. It needs to be stressed again that the moderator can only credit work done by the candidate, which of course in this case will include the manipulation of samples, loops, etc. Some of the best pieces in this genre clearly had been done using advanced and sophisticated technology and where this was the case they often scored high marks. However, this topic does seem to be less popular than in the previous three years of the present specification.

Reggae pieces were rare too. Where they appeared, they tended to be quite stylish and idiomatic. Often these were undertaken by a whole centre where there was specialist interest and knowledge of the repertoire.

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

The ever popular topic in this Area of Study was African Drumming. Moderators reported a notable decrease in Indian Raga, Gamelan and Fusion pieces this year.

The Indian Raga pieces were generally stylish and candidates displayed a good knowledge of the contrasting sections of the alap, jhor, jhalla and gat. Gamelan pieces this year were disappointing and tended not to achieve high marks. They suffered from undue repetition and a real lack of contrasting sections at differing tempi and melodic variation above the trunk melody. The textures instead of being varied were therefore dull and stagnant and the pieces seemed to be static and inorganic. The moderators felt that this option was employed for use by only the weaker candidates, who to be fair, were able to at least produce simple and workable compositions, often in a basic pentatonic framework. It is possible that some teachers feel that this option does not really enable the best candidates to display their compositional skills to the full.

African drumming pieces were on the increase again this year. At the top end of the mark spectrum there were some convincing works displaying all the characteristic polyrhythms, cross rhythms, call and response, virtuoso solo writing, etc. that are features of this rhythmic style of music. The weaker pieces were monotonous and dull and relied heavily on the 'cut and paste' of large sections of music. These pieces typically lacked solo/tutti contrasts that are so vital to this type of music. The number of Fusion pieces declined further again this year, although the quality of those submitted tended to be very good indeed.

The Brief Proforma

The writing on the brief proforma continues to go from strength to strength. There is far more detail and musical vocabulary in this piece of writing and it is pleasing to note that, teachers now seem to concentrate on getting their candidates to critically appraise their own music. Far more of the briefs include personal judgements and candidates seem to be becoming better at being critical about their own pieces. In simple terms, if candidates use expressions such as 'I felt that..', 'I decided that this..', etc. then they are making evaluative judgements and hence start to qualify for the 4-5 mark band. The problem highlighted in the past of 'see attached commentary' was less in evidence this year. It is worth restating from last year's report 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 considerably again this year. The best were tailored to the abilities and interests of the individual candidate and the worst briefs were of the open ended type, such as 'write a classical piece from Area of Study 1' or even 'write a ternary form piece' Many failed to include a brief at all. A simple title of 'Comp 1' and 'Comp 2' even appeared. As was mentioned in last year's report, the specification gives clear guidance on the setting of the brief and its 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.' For those looking for ideas, sample briefs can be found on pages 18-22 of the Specification

Teacher-examiner Assessments

In general, the moderators reported that they found the Teacher Examiner assessments to be far more accurate again this year. By using and applying the descriptors from the specification to justify marks awarded, this was seen to be a positive step to aid the overall accuracy of the assessment. Of course, where assessment was wayward, it veered to the over-generous side although this was less noticeable this year than in the past.

In terms of the individual criteria, the following general comments can be made:

A Use and Development of Ideas.

The majority of candidates managed to achieve at least 'adequate use of standard conventions', and a pleasing number 'good use'. Few however, demonstrated real imagination in the process of developing ideas. Thankfully, only a minority fell into the lower two bands showing an 'attempt to develop ideas' and only a few to have shown a minimal ability.

B Exploitation of the Medium

There was a slight increase on those achieving a mark of 4 (and 5) this year. However, some pieces were not effective either in terms of meeting the brief or in realising the potential of the selected resources, and as a result, quite a few were deemed to be only 'functional' in their exploitation of the medium.

C Structure

The majority seemed to fall into the 'clear and simple' criterion for a mark of 3 out of 5. However, it was pleasing to observe that many candidates were able to demonstrate 'proportion and development' through variations of standard conventions, or by the addition of introductions, linking passages, cadenzas etc. Only a relative few of the candidature were thought to have only 'attempted to control' structural devices and again a mere handful were awarded the lowest mark of a 'limited attempt' to control structural devices.

D Understanding the Brief

There was a significant improvement in the quality of the writing. More candidates produced responses which included justifications as well as an extensive use of apposite musical vocabulary. As one Moderator observed, 'quantity was generally, though by no means universally, matched by quality.'

Optional Criteria

The most popular of these were E 'Melody', G 'Texture' and H 'Rhythm'. F 'Harmony' was the next most commonly employed. Only where there appeared little to credit in other areas did teachers select I 'Dynamics' and J 'Technology'. However, technology was wisely and effectively used in some of the topics centred round the use of technology. It should be pointed out that the use of Sibelius alone is not grounds for selecting this option. It is pleasing to report that Teacher-Examiner assessments were considerably more accurate again this year in the optional criteria and Teacher-Examiner comments often quoted from the descriptors to support the marks awarded

Teacher-Examiner Comments on MUS Forms

There was a marked improvement in the quality of the comments this year, though many still say little or give very bland statements (or sometimes none at all) rather than supportive descriptors using criteria wording to substantiate initial assessments. Many teacher-examiners still fail to clearly identify which Area of Study is represented by each composition.

Scores and Commentaries

The presentation of scores varied from the excellence of a meticulous minority, often supplemented with detailed commentaries, to the very good and thus to the poorest. This latter group often failed to provide a title, tempo marking, key signature, time signature or even the medium for which they were written. Many of the commentaries presented the musical details with some accuracy, but several were inadequate, giving no useful or relevant information about the musical thought behind the compositional process. It was also regrettable that several centres failed to submit scores or commentaries with the expectation that 'Understanding the brief' would suffice.

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.

Administrative Matters

There were again cases of missing or incomplete submissions. The list of common problems remains virtually the same as it did last year, but still needs to be highlighted. The main causes for concern were:

- Late work - sometimes up to a month after the closing date
- 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

As always, many Edexcel centres managed to present the coursework and recordings in a clear and concise format year on year. Those that presented all of the centre's work on a single CD or Minidisk with a clear track order are to be particularly commended. This is often the most efficient way to present candidate work to the best advantage. Edexcel realises that all this requires a considerable amount of work at a busy time in the school year. However, the care taken by many centres is greatly appreciated by the hardworking team of composition moderators.

1426/03: Listening and Appraising

The overall response across the ability ranges this year was very disappointing. There appeared to be insecurity in many of the Areas of Study and also in understanding and responding to the normal key words which occur in the listening paper every year. Words such as device, tempo, dynamics, instrument names and tonality had a very mixed response of answers which often did not relate to these features at all. An example of this is dynamics where quite a few candidates wrote words such as 'fast', 'imitation' or 'smooth'. The confusion this year was much more obvious than in previous years and is a great cause for concern.

There are two essential aspects of the paper to emphasize. Firstly, not always is the correct technical name required, an adequate description of the sound can obtain the same credit. Secondly, the questions are meant to be obvious and therefore the more able candidates have to realise this and not look for alternative answers. The paper is set across the ability range and therefore must be accessible to all.

Tactics, as mentioned in previous reports, are essential. The candidates need to be aware of what information belongs in each Area of Study. They know the paper has 12 questions and goes through each of the AOS in turn. Responses can often be single words, bullet points or short phrases. Sentences are not required. Lastly, they should deal with each question as it comes and when it is over not think about it and move on to the next one. Worrying about some element in a question clouds the issue as they come on to the next question on the paper. They can always leave a mark next to the problem aspect and return to it at the end. Candidates can make notes to themselves at the bottom of the question paper and then put adequate responses next to the relevant parts on the paper. All these tactics should hopefully improve the candidate responses for next year.

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

Question 1

As in previous years, 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 a one more detailed part requiring a justification for the period. In part (a), many candidates correctly stated that the opening melody started with a downward broken chord and then moved by step and most also managed the major tonality. The melody was played legato but a surprising number of candidates opted for tremolo. Nearly all the candidates heard and knew the piano but the moderato tempo had a great mix across the options. The ternary form was often called a rondo or theme and variations. Most managed the quadruple time signature for (g) but quite a few opted for the compound time. The date was more problematic as many opted for 1738, saying that the piano was invented then. Some managed the correct 1838 with occasional words like Romantic, references to the rich or chromatic harmony or stating that the piano was a favoured instrument of the period. There were other valid answers in the mark scheme. Overall, few candidates managed to obtain full marks in this question.

Question 2

There were mixed responses in this as well. The fact that the recording had some early background sound was not a problem in answering these questions. It did contain a very clear definition of what was being asked and was the best choice out of several possible recordings. Quite a few heard the sequence in (a) but there were quite a lot of fugues and alberti bass options as well. The violin was mostly correctly identified but the differences in the B section were very mixed. Quite a few heard the minor key but then did not make reference to the return to major which would have been another credit. The other secure response was stating that it was louder. Just saying the dynamics are different is too vague - the answers need to have a focus. Some heard the accompaniment being more chordal and others spotted the different melody and could describe it. The stronger bass line was also spotted by some. There are a few more options in the mark scheme. Many managed the softer dynamic at (d) but Haydn was very frequently opted for as Purcell. The final perfect cadence was another generally successful set of responses.

Question 3

The movement answer for (a)(i) was often called a ground bass or ostinato which belonged to the second part of the question. Some managed to write chromatic or semitone, others the words descending or chromatic/semitone which were also a viable answer. Some candidates managed full marks in (b) and most managed some credit. Most of the notes moved by step with a small leap and there was a repeated note as well. The soprano was often correct but quite a few had tenor with some opting for alto. The ornament was a trill and this had many responses which were not ornament related at all. The tonality was clearly minor but there were quite a few majors as well as words not relating to tonality at all.

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

Question 4

This AOS mostly contains music that requires quite intense listening. The extracts taken are carefully chosen to try to make the points on the paper very clear in the hearing situation without any possibility of explanation which would occur in the classroom situation.

The beginning had a series of semitones which many identified as fourths or octaves. The imitative part entries at (b) were often listed as descants or pedals. The string quartet was often responded to with the words 'violins' or 'strings' or other instruments that were not in the sound at all. The polyphonic texture was frequently identified as either Heterophonic or Homophonic. The extract had many dynamic contrasts hence the four marks for the question. These could have been covered by saying it started very soft, that there was a crescendo at the start, that it suddenly went quiet and was quieter at the end without touching on the many things that happened in the middle. The large range of options is listed in the mark scheme. What candidates wrote here is partly mentioned at the opening of this report. There was a surprising number who wrote nothing about dynamics at all which is a major source of concern. It appears that the key words are not being remembered. Part (f) was another problem as the music sped up towards the end of the extract and then slowed down. The piece was Serialist which frequently was opted for as Minimalism.

The two reasons were therefore a problem as the initial choice at (i) was frequently wrong. At this stage, if they had heard correct things in the sound and described them, they would have had the credit. Amongst the correct answers was the use of the note row or any named treatment of it, atonality or lack of tonality and the angular melody.

Question 5

Part (a)(i) asked the instrumental family which gives the candidate one of four choices only. These families should be known. Where candidates did hear the percussion family, answers such as drums was being written. Playing techniques also have expected known information and many things were written which was nothing to do with this. Amongst the correct answers were a roll, glissando, shaking, scraping or striking. This was possibly by sound either experimental or electronic and both these were acceptable answers. Again there were a large number calling this minimalist. The features were about why this was a twentieth century piece of music and many candidates suddenly went down the technology path and there were copious things as reverb, echo, looping, mixing, delay etc. None of these were evident in the sound at all. What was being looked for were such things as lack of predictable rhythm, no sense of tonality emphasis on timbre, much use of percussion and electronic sounds. There are some more points in the main mark scheme. Needless to say, this was a poorly answered question across all ability ranges.

Question 6

The opening started quite loud or ('loud' was acceptable) and the articulation was either accented or staccato. Candidates had problems coping with these key words with the result there was a variety of responses which bore no resemblance to what was being asked. The composer option, particularly stating in the next part that this was a minimalist piece, should have helped to focus the response. Unfortunately Glass did not appear often and there were a large number of Poulenc responses. The importance of knowing the minimalist techniques has been emphasised over the years. They are listed in the specification under the topic. Amongst the most obvious of these are ostinato/repetition/looping (all one credit), phase shifting, layering, melodic and rhythmic transformation. This particular extract also contained polyrhythms or cross rhythms as well showing the influence of word music. More possible answers are in the main mark scheme. Quite a few candidates managed three of these and some even managed all six which was very pleasing.

Area of Study 3: Popular Song in Context

Question 7

There were some reasonable responses in this question but, as in others, quite a few misjudgements. The pattern in the bass is somewhat specific to the style and was a walking bass or could be described as broken chords. Some candidates responded with nothing to do with this aspect at all. The guitar playing techniques also proved awkward for quite a few. Some could identify the sliding or bending, whereas others commented on the plucking or picking (which was acceptable). Other techniques such as pull offs, hammer ons, and palm muting were there also. Guitar techniques have been asked over the past years and it is hoped that candidates would become familiar with the sounds of these. In part (c) quite a few candidates managed to score full marks and most managed something. Occasionally responses here were nothing to do with what the question was asking. The most obvious of these were the use of blue notes, the blues scale, the 12 bar chord pattern, syncopation, the AAB structure and lyrics about feelings and fears, etc. There were additional possible answers in the mark scheme. Quite a few had written the word 'improvisation' in this section whereas it is a skill that is developed within the style and was being asked for part (d).

Question 8

Most candidates managed to score over half marks for this question, with quite a few gaining maximum credit. Most knew that it was Reggae and could give some of the reasons for this. Amongst the acceptable answers were the emphasis on beats 2 and 4 or backbeat, syncopation or off-beat rhythm, use of riffs, use of a vocal backing group and quadruple time. Other answers were possible as well. The three topics were often well managed. The most common correct responses were peace/love/brotherhood, politics/social awareness, poverty/social injustice, personal experiences and religion/Rastafarianism.

Question 9

Unfortunately this turned out to be a weaker answered question. The musical device should have triggered the essential words that belong to this particular set of wording, namely, sequence, imitation, pedal or ostinato/riff. Part (a) was an example of a riff or ostinato. Some responses had ground bass forgetting, in any case, that this is AOS1 and would not be tested elsewhere. The bass was very clearly staccato but many had either glissando or tremolo which was a surprising response. The interval of a fourth was identified by about half the candidates with others opting for either second or third. The time signature was very poorly answered with many writing quadruple time rather than triple. Either crotchet or quaver beats were acceptable. The form of part (e) was mostly answered with ABA (whereas this was AAB) only managing therefore to score one of the three available marks. The dynamics, where these were what the candidates wrote about, often had the crescendo which was one of the two marks. If it is a two mark question, they must always start by saying it opens/begins/starts....and then state what happens for the second mark. The opening of this was soft. For the final part (h) the question had two marks and the word two was bolded on the paper to emphasize this. Many only marked one of these. What was evident in the extract was sforzando and the muted trumpets. These options did not occur very often, with many tremolos and some rubatos being more common.

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

Question 10

The specification lists cultures or traditions that are covered in this AOS. Predominantly they are Indian, African or Balinese merged with Western. The paper has just one culture/tradition merged with Western which will always be the case. It is too difficult on a core paper to look at assorted cultures without the Western influence. The wording was meant to help them, but caused some problems. The other part was that the instruments had to relate to the culture. Many wrote African with assorted percussion instruments related to this and others wrote Gamelan and went down this list of instruments. If there is an Indian fusion (as this was), there will always be a sitar and tabla amongst anything else to help the candidates to focus. This extract also had a tampura. The European/Western instruments were the flute, piano and double bass. It was not envisaged that candidates would have problems naming these instruments, but they did. The next part was equally a problem. A great deal was going on in the music and the main mark scheme actually lists 23 possible answers. Unfortunately very few candidates obtained full marks in this question, with some managing no credit worthy response at all. Amongst the most common accurate responses were the scale at the opening, the glissando, the imitation of the different instruments, the jazzy feel to the melody and the repeated rhythm on the tabla.

Question 11

Over the years, it has been felt by teachers that this particular topic never gets detailed questions and that all the time given to learning information is not tested. This particular paper attempted to address this situation with very mixed results. There were a few who managed to score maximum marks and a large spread of marks in-between. Part (a) asking the type of ensemble should automatically have the response of Gamelan, not the part of the world from where it is taken. The teaching should have made distinctions between the Balinese and Javanese. Quite a few did recognise this as a Javanese example but the reasons often proved to be problematic. Essentially, the music has a more melodic than rhythmic development. Part (c) was looking for specific instruments that were played rather than the generic three types. Quite a few know the Gender, Gambang and the Saron. Other instruments heard in the extract are listed in the mark scheme. Because this was a Javanese extract the core melody is called the Balungan which some candidates knew. The above questions were more challenging within the overall paper but the final two parts (e) and (f) were more straightforward. The scale or tuning system in this was clearly Slendro as the five notes were evident throughout and the question that frequently is asked in this particular area is the texture. This is a word within the specification that basically only belongs to this topic and is heterophonic. This needs to be emphasized to the candidates.

Question 12

Quite a few candidates managed maximum marks in this question with most scoring at least some marks. Within the topic knowledge part (a) was focusing on the Master Drummer and asking about how he sets/keeps the tempo, leads the section changes and leads the call and response. There were many other ways of saying this and those options are in the main mark scheme. Unfortunately part (b) had a series of inaccurate responses as the candidates did not read what was being required. It asked for five musical features NOT playing techniques and a lot went down this inaccurate path. Where they were thinking clearly, many wrote some of the key features that belong in this particular topic, namely cross rhythms, polyrhythms, syncopation, repetition/ostinati, rolls and also call and response. There were other correct features as well.

General

As was mentioned in this report last year, it was hoped that with a greater focus on the sixteen bullet point topics within the four areas, the candidates could improve their responses for next year. Knowing the key listening words within both the specification and the AOS is very important. The questions try to relate to this detailed information and the importance of noting the emphasis of the question and the clarity of the answer is highly significant. It is hoped that these points may improve the responses for next year's paper.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Lower Limit	100	81	71	61	52	44	36	28	20	0

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