

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCSE

GCSE Music 1426/03

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1426/1A Performance

As in recent years, this year has shown a wide range of performances. Generally the performance of most candidates was of a good standard with only a very few scoring the lowest marks. However, a few centres still submitted ensembles that were really solos. It is important to read the updated specification and centres are reminded that failure to present correct ensembles will result in no mark being awarded.

This year there was a significant increase in the number of vocal performances and the trend continues towards non-orchestral instruments. Indeed, the increase in vocal performances showed a similar increase in poorly prepared and out of tune singing, which affected the final marks. The piano was the most used instrument for both solo and ensemble performances and this was followed by female singers and guitar. The flute continues to be the most popular orchestral instrument. Woodwind and piano/keyboards have reduced in favour of the vocal performances. Interestingly, while wood wind shows a decrease, everything else is broadly unchanged.

Ethnic instruments have increased by only 0.5% over the past three years, and this has been mainly through the development of African drumming ensembles. Good performers still excel in all disciplines, yet there were fewer really fine performances. There were many instances of work being presented that had not been practised or well enough prepared. The pupils who gain full marks still do so through the level of difficulty grid rather than through their own diligence. Many candidates used Rock School pieces, especially bassists and drummers, and the standards of playing has increased here too. A table is included showing the breakdown of instruments performed through the survey that has been carried out over the past three years.

There continue to be problems with the quality of some pianos used in accompaniments to solo items. They do nothing to support the musical intentions of candidates and the very worst cases hindered any notion of producing a truly musical performance. In vocal performances, great care is required to ensure that the singers are supported in the best possible way.

A few candidates submitted performances using improvisation skills. These were not as successful as in previous years. The stimulus was either not challenging enough or not developed sufficiently. Only a handful of students submitted the Directing an Ensemble option but, where they did, the work had been well prepared.

The new criteria for ensembles presented schools with a new challenge. It was pleasing to hear some effective work. Piano duets provided the answer for many schools and on the whole these were very successful. With singers it is important to provide true duets rather than just a few bars in an otherwise solo, this disadvantaged the pupils greatly.

There were some issues of second solo performances being presented as an ensemble, but on the whole centres had taken on board the change. Ensemble performances overall showed a greater understanding of the submitted coursework, highlighting the candidate's strengths. For example, Rock Group performances demonstrated strong ensemble techniques obviously achieved through regular performance, also wind band or orchestral performances demonstrated the same maturity of ensemble technique. Instrumental duets and small group ensembles did

not expose such highly developed ensemble skills or sensitivity of rapport. It was a pleasure to hear a couple of a capella vocal ensembles and jazz bands.

Teachers provided helpful, pertinent comments which were generally fair. While the general standard of marking is good, there is a tendency to overmark performance. Intonation however was quite often not considered. It may help for the teacher examiner to assess the recording rather than the live performance.

Presentation of coursework was on the whole very good indeed. Teachers had sent off the work as requested, which makes the moderation process very efficient for the moderators. However, there are a worryingly large number of centres who clearly sent work late and incorrectly prepared.

The work should be presented, ideally in one media type (CD, Minidisk or tape. DVD/video is used only for those taking the Directing option). A track list is essential to ensure that the correct pupils are being listened to. Modern technology makes the presentation very easy, and very few centres provided work on tape; the vast majority using CD. However, this year, centres seemed to be happy to provide a variety of media on which the recordings had been made, splitting up candidates, in every combination possible. Incorrectly sent recordings will be returned to centres next year for reformatting.

It is stated in the specification that the scores are required. This year, a significant number of centres have been penalised for failing to provide an effective score. It must be pointed out that a lyric sheet with a few chords is not acceptable for vocal performances.

The majority of the recordings were clear with a good balance. It is hoped that for next year, centres will pay better attention to the requirements for coursework. All the information is on the website.

Summary of results of Instrument Survey for 2006 to 2008

| Group | % | Group | % | Group | % | Group | Change |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------|--------|---------------------|-------|---------------------|--------|
| Piano/ keyboards | 24.35 | Piano/ keyboards | 27.03 | Piano/ keyboards | 28.35 | Piano/ keyboards | -4.00 |
| Strings | 5.99 | Strings | 6.72 | Strings | 6.32 | Strings | -0.32 |
| Woodwind | 12.78 | Woodwind | 14.46 | Woodwind | 14.78 | Woodwind | -2.01 |
| Brass | 4.40 | Brass | 4.49 | Brass | 4.39 | Brass | 0.02 |
| Drum kit | 7.94 | Drum kit | 6.35 | Drum kit | 6.78 | Drum kit | 1.16 |
| Guitars | 19.64 | Guitars | 18.83 | Guitars | 17.80 | Guitars | 1.84 |
| Percussion | 0.89 | Percussion | 0.78 | Percussion | 0.97 | Percussion | -0.07 |
| Ethnic | 0.67 | Ethnic | 0.45 | Ethnic | 0.36 | Ethnic | 0.31 |
| Voice | 22.14 | Voice | 19.93 | Voice | 18.99 | Voice | 3.15 |
| Other | 0.97 | Other | 0.97 | Other | 0.97 | Other | 0.00 |
| | 99.78 | | 100.01 | | 99.70 | | |
| 2008 | | 2007 | | 2006 | | 2008 - 2006 | |

1426 / 1B Performance with Music Technology

Although this was the first year of examining the revised (February 2006) specification, there were very few changes made to the performing paper. The most significant of these was that candidates are no longer required to perform one of their own compositions. There are still a number of centres sending outstanding examples of sequenced performances and multi-track recordings, but the majority of centres use this option as a method of submitting a performance for some of their weakest candidates. As such, the mean mark for the option is significantly lower than that for traditional performing.

The majority of submissions include sequenced performances of a candidate's own composition. It should be noted that the mark scheme for this option is different from the mark scheme which should be used if the candidate has submitted a sequenced performance of a piece written by anyone other than themselves (the former uses the mark scheme on p46 and the latter, p45 of the revised specification). This is used to avoid any issues which may arise when assessing the accuracy of the performance when the only available material to compare the piece to is a print-out of the same piece, thus rendering the process meaningless. Most centres understood this, making it more likely that the teacher-examiner marks remain unchanged, but several centres missed this addition to the specification.

There are an increasing number of computer packages available to candidates allowing them to input sequences in a variety of ways. Cubase and Sibelius are still by far the most popular packages, although several centres seem to be adopting the Mac and Logic combination. The choice of program does play a significant role in the likelihood of success of a sequence, but all the main programs include enough editing facilities to allow candidates to achieve the full range of marks. Programs which will not allow candidates to achieve the full range of marks include those packages which only allow the placement of pre-recorded loops. Submissions of this type are still inappropriate for this specification and will achieve no credit for this paper. It is still possible to score some marks for the piece as a composition (although the available mark range will be limited) but, since the candidate has not actually input the notes themselves, it is impossible to award them any marks for accuracy. This means that compositions which have been complete on a package of this sort will be inappropriate for submission as a performance as well. Candidates who choose to do compositions of this type should perform another piece for this paper which involves inputting notes in a sequencing package.

It becomes increasingly difficult to prohibit specific computer packages as they continue to develop additional functionality. Some packages that started life as loop-only software have now incorporated some MIDI functionality. If it is possible to input individual notes, edit them for accuracy of pitch and duration, change the velocity of each note individually, change the exact placement of the note in the timeline, edit the dynamics of the notes over their duration, place them appropriately in the stereo field and layer them in multiple tracks, then the program is acceptable at this level.

Performances which involve technology only insofar as a candidate has plugged their instrument into an electricity supply i.e. electric guitar or electronic keyboard performances, are considered to be traditional performances and should be submitted for paper 1A.

Even though it has been explicitly pointed out in each report for the last few years, many centres still submit sequences (and multi-track recordings) without any panning

present in the piece. Several centres even submitted work for this option which had been recorded for the final CD by means of holding a microphone to one of the computer speakers, thus negating any attempt on the part of the candidates to include any panning in their performances, and also making it very difficult to hear any of the interpretative nuances in the piece.

It should be noted that submitting work on cassette is inappropriate for this option, especially in the case of multi-track recordings where the signal to noise ratio is a factor in the mark scheme. Candidates who are following a music technology route should be encouraged to produce the best quality recordings they can with the equipment available to them. As such, this option is seen as a possible entry route for AS and A2 level Music Technology.

Please note that sequences are considered to be solo performances. Under no circumstances will a sequence be accepted as an ensemble performance. Multi-track recordings are considered to be ensemble performances i.e. submissions which contain recorded audio instead of or in addition to MIDI tracks.

It is possible for candidates to submit one traditional performance and one performance using music technology. It does not matter which of the solo or ensemble performances uses which route. However, the comments in the report for paper 1A also hold true for this paper with regard to traditional ensemble performances: in performances where there is a soloist plus accompanist, only the accompanist may consider the piece an ensemble performance, the soloist must consider the performance to be a solo.

It is very useful for moderators when the name of the software package used is recorded on the MUS100 forms, especially if the package is less common. If there are any doubts about the suitability of a software package, advice should be sought from Edexcel before entering the work.

It is absolutely essential that scores (or the original professional recording) are provided in order to assess the accuracy of a performance. It is insufficient to provide a screenshot from the sequencing package as this contains little detail of use to the moderator. As a rule of thumb, a score (or detailed commentary) is acceptable if it contains detail of pitch and rhythm and the structure of the piece. A screenshot may be useful in addition to a traditional score or detailed commentary, but not in lieu of it. In the case of submitting the candidate's own sequenced composition, this is not as important since accuracy is no longer assessed, but a print-out of the piece should still be included to assist in the assessment of the work. Submissions which do not include scores will not be moderated.

Multi-track recordings seemed to be more popular this year with the level of work continuing to steadily improve. The common mistake of trying to record too many tracks was less frequent this year, with many centres having taken on comments from last year's report. Please note that multi-track recordings must involve the capture of audio tracks by the candidate themselves. Simply layering keyboard performances is not acceptable. Also, in performances which mix some sequencing and some audio recording, the candidates must sequence all the parts themselves since the accuracy of the sequence is assessed (mark scheme on p55 and 56 of the specification).

There were many instances of missing scores, missing recordings, unplayable CDs and inaccurately completed MUS100 forms and OPTEMS. It should also be noted that the

Levels of Difficulty grid has changed from 2008 onwards (see p42 of the specification) so half marks should no longer be awarded. There were some examples of extremely well presented submissions, with one, clearly labelled CD per centre (or sometimes an additional CD with stimulus material clearly labelled), MUS forms in candidate number order with detailed teacher-examiner comments including language from the mark schemes, clearly supporting the marks awarded. In these cases it is much more likely that the marks will remain unchanged by the moderator since the teacher-examiner marking almost always proves to be more accurate when comments are taken from the mark scheme and marks awarded according to the comments rather than the other way around, so it is hoped that submissions of this type will increase next year.

1426 02 Composing

Brief, overall impressions of the external moderation process

The coursework content of this component is much more 'settled' now and the requirements are understood by teacher examiners. Adjustments were made when the sub-sample was found to be 'out of tolerance', this was usually due to over generous assessments. However, there were occasions too, where marks had to be raised through initial severe marking. Further improvements were noted in the quality of teacher comments this year and many centres just required the sub-sample to be moderated.

Suitability of approach/topic/titles

The favourite topics prevailed again this year, especially Area of Study 1 (ternary/ground bass and variations/rondo). Good work was seen from Area of Study 2 in serial and minimalist pieces, but much fewer experimental/electronic submissions. 'Songs from Musicals' continue to dominate and the standard improves year on year. The new topic of Britpop was the greatest success for this component. Dance music too was popular with some varied submissions. In Area of Study 4, there were fewer pieces but where these occurred they tended to display real character. 'African Drumming' still proved to be the most popular. It was disappointing that the new African topics (choral singing/music for balaphon/kora/mbira) occurred only once or twice. Of these four, choral songs were popular.

Standard of student performance compared with previous year(s)

The general consensus of opinion is that student performance has improved this year compared with previous years. There appears to have been less enthusiasm for the 'new' topics (Britpop being the exception).

The quality of writing at D: Understanding the Brief has improved.

Centre performance including administration

In most cases, internal standardisation was satisfactorily carried out where two or more teachers taught the specification.

The administrative details were adhered to and authentication, correct sample (including highest and lowest candidate), was pleasing.

1426 03 Listening and Appraising

Overall, candidate responses were less successful this year. There were more specific questions directed by key words to assist candidates in locating the knowledge required. These generally were well answered but there are still problems in the open-ended questions where a specific number of points need to be mentioned. A large proportion of the Specification requires memory of the details of the topic bases within the Areas of Study. This is the weakest area of responses. Candidates need to develop a knowledge base for the topic contents.

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

Question 1

The tonality choice within this entire Assessment Objective is always either major or minor and in this case, most candidates recognised the minor tonality of the extract. The music device question was to help them to focus on choosing one of the three main devices that come under this heading (sequence, imitation or pedal). This was a pedal but generally there were many inaccurate responses for this. It was an alternating octave set of notes and many called this a ground bass. Because of the repetitive nature, ostinato was also credited in the mark scheme. A ground bass normally has 4 bars of different notes, not one beat being repeated and many candidates made this misjudgement.

Quite a few candidates correctly heard the interval of the fifth and were aware that it was staccato for (b)(iv). The bassoon was not that frequently correct. The naming of any orchestral instruments has become more problematic over the past years. Most managed one or two of the orchestral families (they had three to choose from).

A different approach was tried for the dynamics in (d) and a large number of the candidates heard the gradation from soft to a louder repeat and finally to a very loud ending.

Some candidates knew the coda for (e) and most correctly identified the perfect cadence at (f). The form question (g) was quite well answered with the first structure being the correct one. It is important to have candidates plan which playing they will attempt this type of question on and then approach any future ones with the same system. Most correctly identified the time signature but the period and composer were less successful. There were a lot of Baroque periods and Bach as the composer; however some did manage the Romantic and Tchaikovsky.

Question 2

The accompanying instruments were the harpsichord and the cello. Most managed the harpsichord. The type of voice was more problematic but a range of responses was allowed within the mark scheme and most managed some credit here. The musical device was aimed at focussing the responses as mentioned in question one - this was imitation, but many did not manage this. There was a poor response for (d)(i) because so many candidates opted for the ground bass answer in question 1, they did not answer in this manner for this question. Many however did manage to mention that the bass part was repeated throughout for (d)(ii). However, even with this correct response, many candidates did not make the connection with the ground bass. Many of the candidates managed to describe a feature of the word setting - the responses ranged from repetition to melismatic. There were several other

accurate responses within the mark scheme. The major tonality was mostly successfully identified as was the tempo which was allegro. Quite a few managed Purcell but there were a large number of Beethoven responses and also ballrooms rather than the royal court.

Question 3

There was large misjudgement on the style of the music in this question. Quite a large number of the candidates identified this as an example of either expressionism or serialism. The features that they described had nothing in common with the sound of the extract. It was very difficult to understand this but the fast tempo apparently was one of the factors which made the inaccuracy occur.

The piece was minimalist and those who recognised that, managed to list some if not all of the musical features. The mark scheme had some twenty possible correct responses for this. The rhythmic features were syncopation which often was correct and there were also cross rhythms. The features of the orchestration were very poorly answered with most simply listing orchestral families and nothing else.

Those who did attempt to answer this managed such statements as a wide range of colours, high range of the woodwind, emphasis on the percussion and the brass playing the melody. Many knew the composers for (d) and although the response at the top was for serialism then responded with minimalist composers. The most common were Glass and Reich and the misjudgements were Cage, Webern and Schoenberg.

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

Question 4

Many candidates correctly identified the piano for (a) and could give an adequate description of the timbre of the ondes martenot stating such things as eerie, ghostly and wavering. Most managed to name at least one of the percussion instruments, the most common being the gong. Quite a few mixed up the glockenspiel with the xylophone. The devices or features often had incorrect responses of accelerando, canon and fugue. Quite a few managed to hear the arpeggios, glissando, imitation and the trills. The dynamics of the end section was becoming louder or a crescendo. The whole section was not loud - some gradation was needed here.

Question 5

The woodwind instrument was the flute or piccolo. There were also a lot of clarinets and the occasional brass instrument as well. The mark scheme had some seven possibilities for the playing technique, and of these the trill was the most commonly correct response along with the glissando. The most obvious of the string techniques was pizzicato and arco which many candidates wrote albeit with the words plucked and bowed which was fine. This type of music tends to have a different range of words needed to describe the melodic or rhythmic features. Within the melodic aspects were such words as fragmented, angular, spiky, jerky and points such as no real melody, random or unpredictable. All these and other points were given credit. The rhythm had such words as complex, syncopated, jagged, free time, irregular, all of which were acceptable. Many managed to write dissonant, clashing or atonal for the harmony/tonality.

Area of Study 3: Popular Song in Context

Question 6

Many candidates managed to name the style of this extract and wrote some if not all the correct features for (a)(ii). This extract had very clearly the characteristics of house music and quite a few wrote four on the floor, the off beat high hat pattern, the loops the heavy bass line, the use of the drum machine and the fact it was sample orientated. There were more options available in the mark scheme. The technological effects and/or processes also had a reasonable response. Most commonly correct were the looping, layering, sampling, reverb, panning and EQ. Again other options were available within the mark scheme. The four sections were new to this area of study and the correct responses were mix in, main section, breakdown and mix out. Other alternatives were also credited and these were intro, verse, chorus or reprise and outro.

Question 7

This question, as a whole, was answered fairly well. Most candidates heard that the first chord was minor and quite a few also noticed the chord change was in bar 3. The correct option for the notation was (ii) and many also had the correct tempo of 92bpm. The melodic dictation this year moved all by step and had a series of repeated notes. It was very much a long the line of the given score in the examination paper itself. A number of candidates managed to score maximum marks here and most managed to gain some marks. Quite a few noted the guitar driven band, little use of technology, the structure of verse, chorus and middle eight as well as traditional chord sequences and references to the songs of the 60's. There were also more valid reasons which were acceptable.

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

Question 8

Many of the candidates knew that this was taken from the Alap and also could name two of the other sections. The most common choices were the Jhala and Gat but the Jhor or the Bandish in place of the Gat was acceptable. There were problems in naming the instruments - quite a few named the tambura but not many wrote the sarangi. The sitar was by far the most common inaccurate response. Quite a few of the features were successfully answered for (c). Amongst these were the slow tempo, note bending, drone, improvisatory nature and the lack of tala. There were also other correct answers to this part. The way the music developed had some correct answers - the most common were the tempo changing to be faster, basic pulse being added, addition of more instruments and the fixed composition at the end. As a whole, the candidates knew some of this, but few obtained full marks. This was all within the original knowledge base of the previous specification.

Question 9

This was part of the new aspect of African music in the specification and responses were rather mixed with few candidates achieving maximum marks. The mark scheme has some 15 possible answers for the features of the singing. Amongst the most obvious responses managed by the candidates were the use of repetition, all male voices, being unaccompanied, use of harmony, call and response and a master singer. The role of music in Africa is taken from the information given in the specification.

Many of the candidates wrote for the use of communication, or celebrations, rituals or entertainment. There were also other viable responses.

Question 10

As in previous years, if the opportunity is given to candidates to write the culture/tradition in the fusion extract, then this should be a successful way to gain marks. Within the new Specification, the fusion is stated as only African or Indian with other cultures and this other culture is always Western.

Unfortunately, if candidates try to qualify the type of Indian or Western music, this can lead to problems. All they need to respond with is the keywords: African, Indian or Western. The instruments were quite well answered, particularly the Indian ones. Many wrote the tabla, sitar or dhol with a few writing the Bansuri or flute which was also acceptable. The most commonly identified instrument of the Western culture was the keyboard or synthesizer. Some managed to hear the strings or flute but a lot responded with the drum kit, which was not there.

Amongst the points noted in the final section was the fast tempo, the vocal interjections, the strong beat and the repeated phrases/patterns or bars. There was a very large range of acceptable answers as a great deal was going on in the music. It is important candidates are able to focus on the interplay aspects of the two cultures.

General

To help candidates understand the nature of the questions and points expected, it is very worthwhile going over previous papers with the relevant mark scheme with them. Candidates should always check the number of marks for each question part, which will indicate the number of responses required. Please note that candidates should only provide the number of responses as required by the question. If a single response is required please be aware that if candidates write two options this will negate their mark.

The listening paper works through the four Areas of Study and candidates should learn the specialist knowledge/vocabulary that belongs in each of these areas.

Grade Boundaries

| Grade | Max Mark | * | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | U |
|-------------|----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Lower Limit | 100 | 83 | 74 | 64 | 55 | 46 | 37 | 29 | 21 | 0 |

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