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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE Music Technology 6MT04 (01)

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General Introduction

I am pleased to report that centres were well prepared for the new examination. Compared with the previous Specification MIDI exam, there were very few technical difficulties and nearly all scripts arrived with complete CDs. Some were damaged in the post, so please wrap them carefully. The most common mistake was burning a data CD instead of an audio CD.

There was a clear distinction between centres that had prepared well using mock papers and thoroughly researched music technology theory, and centres that had seemingly spent no time on the theory and had probably not run a mock examination. The latter centres would not be able to access the higher grades because there would be insufficient detail in their answers.

Q1

(a) Surprisingly few candidates identified the key of A minor. Many candidates stated C or A (with no mention of minor).
(b) During this task, many candidates lost marks unnecessarily, as they did not read the question properly. Many candidates circled more than one note. Examiners cannot credit multiple answers, even if one is correct.
(c) Many did not notate the whole bar for part c, carelessly loosing marks by not answering the question. On average, candidates tended to perform better in the rhythmic dictation than the pitch. The majority of bars did add up to four.
(d) Almost all pupils correctly identified the bassline as MIDI sequenced, and were able to state that pitch bend was used for the note slide. d(iii) produced more variable results, with many candidates simply referring loosely to 'EQ'. Although many candidates did mention the higher cutoff frequency, a few candidates linked this to velocity.

Q2

(a) The majority of candidates scored full marks for this task. Some candidates considered breaths as 'unwanted noise'. Occasionally, this was achieved musically, but it often resulted in clipped breaths or phrases (particularly 'THE door was open so wide'). Some candidates edited out the noise at the start, but left traces of the paper rustling.
(b) Some excellent answers. Again, many candidates scored full marks. However, some candidates vaguely mentioned turning the vocals up or down without mentioning relative volume of loud and quiet sections.
(c) Candidates showed an excellent understanding of compressor parameters. Candidates could easily look in their software to identify three compressor controls. Some candidates lost marks by not providing enough detail in their answers (eg "Ratio: How much compression there is"). Some candidates confused compressors with synthesis or gating, perhaps due to the attack and release. 'Hold' was a common incorrect answer. Many answers to this question seemed very similar suggesting that centres are using a common book or text for their learning.

Q3

(a) DI was correctly answered by most candidates. About half of candidates answered that a DI box would be used for recording a guitar. Many answers

were not specific enough for A2, eg "plug into computer/mixer" and did not mention what type of input would be required for a guitar.

(b) Nearly all candidates had difficulty with this question, not giving any detail or exact answers. The majority of candidates correctly selected the cardioid polar pattern, but it was very rare for a candidate to score two marks for the reason. To reduce ambience was the most common reason given. For the placement, many candidates correctly identified the distance from the amp, but then qualified this with vague descriptors (eg "for a clear sound", or "to pick up the distortion"). A few candidates incorrectly thought that close microphone placement would create the distortion effect, perhaps confusing the guitar effect with the product of clipping.

(c) Nearly all candidates managed to assemble the parts in the right order, but it was very rare that a candidate achieved full marks, as very few candidates crossfaded the parts/removed the glitches. Other common errors included failing to include the bar of silence at the start. Sometimes candidates did not do some of the repeats. A minority of candidates layered the parts over each other, or just included the fade portion of the guitar part.

(d) Nearly all candidates completed the fade successfully. The most common mistake was beginning the fade too late, or having a fade that was too long, so that is was not fully faded before the hiss began. Other common mistakes included chopping off the end of their fade.

Q4

Question 4 carried the most diverse range of marks. Some candidates answered the question brilliantly, achieving 16 marks with ease. Many candidates wasted time and space with overlong sentences and repetition, making very few valid points. Some candidates missed the technical point completely and wrote a two page essay about the influence of the sampler/electric guitar on popular music and consequently picked up only a few marks. I read one lovely detailed essay about hardware sequencers which answered neither question which unfortunately failed to score.

QWC was acceptable on the most part with only a couple of candidates spelling key words incorrectly, thus affecting their mark.

There was a small, but significant number of blank Q4's. For a question worth so many marks, a blank Q4 would make a difference of several grades.

(a) The sampling question was the least popular. On the whole it was less successfully answered than the electric guitar option because candidates did not give any detail on how a sampler worked referring to technical specifications and its development as requested by the question; they focused on how samplers are used in songs instead.

(b) Candidates who gained the most marks clearly showed an understanding of how the guitar worked, referring to electromagnetic induction, and its relevant features. Less successful essays were discussions about their favorite rock guitarists.

Q5

(a) Candidates commonly scored 2 marks by putting some kind of compression on the vocal part. The music was designed to test the candidate's awareness of the huge dynamic range of the vocalist compared with that of the guitar. There was usually some evidence of compression, but often the final phrase could not be heard over the distorted guitar. Serious over compression was very rare; a minority of candidates showed no evidence of compression at all.

(b) The majority of candidates scored 3 marks, with a few candidates applying an extreme boost, or filtering out all low frequencies. A few candidates showed no evidence of EQ.

(c) Many candidates struggled with this section. Only a handful of candidates scored three marks for this task creating a wide stereo picture which sounded like two guitarists playing. So it seems that nearly all candidates did not know how to create an ADT effect.

(d) On the whole this was well answered. In about a third of responses, too much reverb was applied. A significant number of candidates applied cavernous reverb.

(e) Balance was usually successful. Common mistakes included the vocals being too quiet and the guitar being too loud.

(f) This question was put in to illustrate to the candidates that they should consider presentation of their final mix more carefully in light of coursework submissions that we commonly receive which are distorted, or very commonly have chopped endings. A lead-in of more than a second was relatively common causing candidates not achieving easy full marks. The bass was usually faded successfully. Incidences of distorted mixes were more common than noticeably low output levels.

Statistics

Unit 4 Analysing and Producing

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	69	64	59	54	49	45
Uniform boundary mark	80	72	64	56	48	40	32

A* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade.

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark:
The minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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