

Examiners' Report
June 2014

GCE Music 6MU06 01

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Introduction

It is pleasing to report a further improvement in performance. Standards have been maintained in the Music in Context and Continuity and Change in Instrumental Music Sections, but responses to Question 1 (Comparison) were perhaps less secure this year. The dictation section of Question 2 also seemed much weaker, though answers to (b) were stronger on the whole.

In the case of Question 3, the most popular option proved to be section (c) on Horner's score to *Titanic* (1997): 'Take her to sea, Mr Murdoch', followed by section (b) on Haydn's 'Quoniam tu solus' from *The Nelson Mass* and then (c) on Wagner's *Prelude to Tristan und Isolde*. Edexcel's guidance notes on prescribed works were apparently used to good effect, and there were fewer responses in the lower mark-ranges. While organisation of essays could still be haphazard, there was very little irrelevance or evidence that candidates had misunderstood the thrust of the question.

Question 1 (a)

Though a reasonable number of candidates scored full marks in this section, the question highlighted an inability on the part of some students to hear and comment perceptively and succinctly on features of the excerpts.

In section (a), most candidates noted that it required a choir, but few that it was in five parts and was performed unaccompanied.

Many remarked on counterpoint and imitation.

This was an answer that gained full marks.

1 COMPARISON

The following questions require you to compare and contrast two excerpts of music. The excerpts are taken from different works by the same composer. You will hear each excerpt **three** times in the order A, B; A, B; A, B. The playings will be separated by pauses and the length of each pause will be announced.

(a) Describe the forces and textures used in Excerpt A.

(3)

An unaccompanied choir sing excerpt A.
The piece excerpt begins with weaving, contrapuntal texture and finishes in unison with homophonic texture.



ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

The candidate made three valid points: unaccompanied, choir and contrapuntal.



ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

It would have been possible simply to write down the three credit-worthy terms for full marks. In Q1 avoid extensive descriptions.

This was a less successful response.

1 COMPARISON

The following questions require you to compare and contrast two excerpts of music. The excerpts are taken from different works by the same composer. You will hear each excerpt **three** times in the order A, B; A, B; A, B. The playings will be separated by pauses and the length of each pause will be announced.

(a) Describe the forces and textures used in Excerpt A.

(3)

The texture is antiphonal, with usage of counterpoint between the voices. Sequences can be heard between voices as well, and the harmony is not in the style of Classical music. However, there is a perfect cadence in the end.



ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

It gained 1 mark for counterpoint, but was largely irrelevant, making mention of sequence and perfect cadence.



ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

Stay focused on the demands of the question.

This answer gained one mark.

The excerpt uses a choir of soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices, and is entirely homophonic in texture. The texture is also very full and rich throughout. ⁽³⁾



ResultsPlus
Examiner Comments

The one credit-worthy comment was that it was for choir.



ResultsPlus
Examiner Tip

Avoid generalisations such as 'very full and rich throughout'.

Question 1 (b)

Few made the obvious contrast with Excerpt A by observing that it was for solo voices. Relatively few realised the instruments were viols, the alternatives proffered including harpsichord, string quartet, organ and accordion.

Question 1 (c)

In responses to this question about melody, many candidates wrote about where they thought the melody was located, and thus deviating into the realms of texture. The melody lines in the viols were frequently ignored altogether, as were the more subtle points (eg diminution).

In section (d), candidates often selected the correct time-span, and in section (e), many linked the excerpts to Byrd, although all the other alternatives were frequently offered.

This answer showed little understanding of the question.

Both excerpts have a vocal line as the melody. Excerpt B however has two parts sharing the melody line, whereas excerpt A has only one part (the soprano) singing the melody line.



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Examiner Comments

The candidate was concerned only with location of the melody.



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Examiner Tip

Questions on melody require information about the shape of the melody, whether conjunct or disjunct, whether major, minor, modal or chromatic.

Question 2 (a)

This part of the examination continues to pose considerable challenges to candidates. There were very few candidates gaining high marks, and attempts at the dictation question were weak, especially given the slow tempo of the performance.

(a) The opening leap evidently caused difficulties, and another frequent error was the inclusion of a dotted rhythm at the end of bar 17, perhaps by analogy with bar 30 on the skeleton score. The relatively successful attempts usually involved a mainly correct rhythmic scheme and an attempt to work out the pitches backwards from the end. Many candidates failed to make the most of the skills they demonstrated at identifying keys in section (b), and finished wildly off key. A very few seemed not to understand that the test was in 3/2 and tried to apply common time.

Question 2 (b)

The cadences were almost invariably correctly identified. Key descriptions were not so reliable, and a significant number of candidates gave appoggiatura instead of suspension.

Question 2 (c)

Chord description continues to be problematic. Although the diminished seventh was quite often correctly identified, it was only on rare occasion that the tonic first inversion was correctly described.

(d) The composer was more often than not identified, although both Haydn and Sweelinck were regularly and incorrectly given.

(e) Given that candidates studied the Bach concerto grosso this year, it was disappointing that all the remaining options were frequently selected.

Question 3 (a)

There were many good, detailed responses to this question, with candidates providing considerable detail on leitmotifs as well as features of Wagner's harmonic language. Occasionally motifs were muddled up, eg 'grief' confused with 'glance', or else simply not located. The rising sixth at the start was sometimes not fully described, and there was evidence that though many had a reasonable idea about the significance of Wagner's harmonic innovations, the question of lack of resolution was not fully understood. Less successful answers tended to focus on details of the plot, and there were many cases where candidates had evidently prepared an answer involving texture and orchestration, and were clearly not to be deflected.

Question 3 (b)

This question was frequently well tackled. Candidates should realise, however, that they sometimes have to persist with a line of enquiry to gain the extra mark or marks. Many were aware that the performing forces played a significant role, but failed to specify the presence of the clarini. Similar problems arose in discussions of tonality where not enough attention was paid to how the key of D was reinforced, and also how and where Haydn departed from it. Textural descriptions could also have been expanded in many cases: many additional marks were to be gained in descriptions of the fugato by also referring to subject, answer, counter-subject and stretto.

Question 3 (c)

The question on *Titanic* proved to be the most popular of the options in this section, and those who answered often demonstrated a good knowledge of the links between the screen images (engine rooms, dolphins and the like) and the music. Candidates were generally well-aware of the exciting effects of the rising scale, the Lydian inflections, tertiary shifts and increases in tempo, as well as the striking augmentation and open fifth chord at the close. Information on the various textures was, however, imprecise.

Question 4 (a)

There seemed to be an increasing tendency, especially in option (a), to give a string of basic points, without offering much in the way of substantiating illustration. Although it is possible to earn a reasonably good mark using this tactic, it should be remembered that the highest mark bands will not become accessible.

(a) The question on melody and rhythm proved to be significantly more popular than option (b).

For most candidates, it proved more challenging to write effectively about Debussy and Webern than Ellington.

In the case of Debussy, more marks were usually secured on rhythm than melody.

Indeed, it seemed that many candidates almost considered the Sarabande to be devoid of melody as it was so harmonic or chordal.

In discussions of Debussy's work, the term conjunct was frequently misused, often being applied to the gapped melody line of bar 1. Candidates were often well prepared for certain aspects of the Webern, and could give details of the three rhythmic cells and also some locations of uses of inversion, retrograde and retrograde-inversion of the row.

There was less confidence when it came to giving specific examples of angular melody lines (intervals were rarely described and located) or such features as Klangfarbenmelodie.

In contrast, *Black and Tan Fantasy* was often described fully and accurately, though not every candidate could give a correct location of syncopation or a blue note. As a general rule, marks are not given out simply for quoting what can simply be read off the score, so to say that the Ellington was in 4/4 gains no marks, whereas to say it is in quadruple time will gain a basic mark.

Quality of written communication: Most responses were written in continuous prose and there were many examples of excellent, well-organised writing.

Question 4 (b)

There were some excellent answers to this question, with a full and thorough examination of the three specified works.

Those candidates who fared less well were usually less persistent in pursuing their analytical commentary to the end: for example, for really high marks in the *Brandenburg Concerto*, it was essential to give full details of all appearances of the ritornelli along with the keys they were in. In general, there were many good accounts of the Sweelinck *Pavana Lachrimae* showing a good understanding of the tonal workings of the piece. Descriptions of the extracts from *Kinderscenen* were also full if not totally accurate.

Structures were usually correctly described, although analysis of the keys was not so secure, with some progressions involving secondary dominants being mistaken for modulation. Candidates should be reminded that when structural divisions are glaringly obvious on paper, for example the double bars and repeat signs in the Sweelinck and Schumann, there are no marks to be earned by identifying bar numbers.

The situation is clearly very different in the case of the *Brandenburg Concerto* where no such breaks occur.

Quality of Written Communication:

There were again many excellent responses. Less successful answers usually dealt with structure and tonality separately. This sometimes led to particularly awkward accounts and some duplication of points (especially in the case of the Bach).

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- in Q1 comparison questions, be sure to indicate the excerpt of music you are writing about
- in Q1, write only on the lines provided, the amount of space provided gives some idea of the quantity of information required
- questions 1 and 2 draw on music which has some connection with the works you have studied for the Music in Context and Continuity and Change Areas of Study, ie genre, structure and/or historical period
- the 2014 paper included questions on Byrd because of Taverner, and Handel because of the Bach concerto, bear this in mind when selecting dates of composition, types of work and possible composers
- in 2 (a), take care to count the pulse to help you estimate the length of the longer notes, it goes without saying that you will have noted the time signature on the skeleton score
- in Q3, you can answer in bullet points, and should avoid an extensive introduction
- in Q4 it may be helpful to set out your lines of enquiry briefly, but again extensive introductions will probably not gain many marks and may well lead you to waste time
- keep to the point and avoid repetition
- keep listening to your set works, but also make sure you explore the works of other composers in the same genre.

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