

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE in
Music Technology (6MT02) Paper 1

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Publications Code US042227

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For Publication

General Issues

As always, candidates who had a substantial knowledge of both musical and technological topics, along with the appropriate vocabulary, were the most successful. Candidates were generally well-prepared by centres regarding the special focus style of Soul, but seemingly less so for Indie Rock, where there were many more generalised answers.

The overwhelming majority of candidates managed their time well and completed the entire paper.

Candidates should be reminded that the space allocated on the paper for answers is sufficient to attract the full marks if the response is focused and succinct. Most answers outside of the allocated space, or on continuation sheets, tended to be of a vague and general nature, and did not attract any further marks.

Centres are asked not to include additional sheets where possible, particularly where those additional sheets have not been used. This slows down the marking process considerably.

Candidates are reminded that answers need to be specific. General responses such as 'vocal effects', 'panned' or 'reverb' will rarely attract a mark; 'the vocal has been flanged', 'it has been panned far right' and 'there is heavy reverb' are much more specific responses.

It simply cannot be stressed enough that clear and legible handwriting is extremely important.

Specific questions

1(a)(i)

This was generally well-answered by those few candidates who read the question correctly, which asked specifically for musical elements. Psychedelic, sitar, vocal harmonies and references to Beach Boys and Beatles were the most common correct answers. Many candidates referred to production features such as Jangly guitars, large amounts of reverb, live recording etc. Often, answers referred to elements that were not specifically typical of 1967 such as 'backing vocals'.

1(a)(ii)

Candidates often referred to production features that may well have been present in a typical 1967 recording, such as clipping, extreme panning etc, but which are not present in this particular recording. Candidates should be reminded that this is primarily a listening exam. Other candidates referred to musical features such as the sitar.

1(a)(iii)

There was confusion with some candidates as to what technology was available in the 60's as opposed to the 80's. There were many vague, unqualified answers such as 'use of EQ' and 'panning' as opposed to flat frequency response or full use of stereo field. Many responses would have scored a mark in 1(a)(ii).

1(b)/(c)

About 50% of candidates were aware of the number of tracks available. Many overestimated both.

2(a)

The majority of candidates identified the minor/major shift.

2(b)

Candidates varied between triplet crotchets and triplet quavers.

2(c)

This was usually correctly identified.

2(d)

This was not generally well-answered. Drum fill, crescendo, accelerando, scratching and legato were all common wrong answers for this question.

2(e)

Most candidates identified the correct rhythm in combination with the open hi-hat.

2(f)(i)

Many candidates wrote about MIDI or sequencing. This is not how the sounds were recorded, but how they were generated. Others mentioned tape.

2(f)(ii)

The vast majority of candidates scored a full mark, although a significant amount mentioned sampled strings.

2(f)(iii)

Candidates often wrote about absolute volume rather than dynamic range, ie 'The synths are higher in the mix', or 'the strings are louder than the synths'. The question was about *relative* volumes. Candidates who failed to gain marks on this this question often answered 2(f)(iv) correctly, identifying compression as the solution, despite having answered this question incorrectly.

2(f)(iv)

This was generally well-answered, but a significant number of candidates wrote about balance rather than dynamic processing, which wouldn't address the wide dynamic range of the strings.

3(a)

A surprising number of candidates identified the solo instrument as an organ, whilst the candidates with the strongest knowledge of technology history and/or listening skills correctly identified the distinctive Fender Rhodes sound.

3(b)

The majority of candidates managed to describe the sound of the filtering, but were often unable to describe how this had been achieved. A considerable amount of candidates identified HPF rather than LPF. The rising cut-off was identified by many candidates, but very few mentioned ADSR.

3(c)

Most candidates fared well with this question, scoring at least two marks. Common answers were the length of the track, the long intro, the spoken vocal and the lack of a typical song structure.

3(d)

Many candidates referred to the effect rather than the hardware used to make the effect, when the question asked specifically for equipment. The keyboard instruments and drum machine were popular answers.

4(a)

The majority of candidates identified the correct tempo.

4(b)

A large proportion of candidates identified white noise. Some identified crackle, but some talked about scratching, which is a term with a different meaning. Vocabulary needs to be secure.

4(c)

This was well-answered by the majority of candidates. Sampling, rapping and scratching were popular answers.

4(d)

The overwhelming majority of candidates identified this effect.

4(e)(i)

Most candidates identified the polar pattern. The description of microphone position was somewhat less successful, with candidates often not specifying a distance from the amp. Higher level candidates described the use of an off-axis positioning or proximity effect. Lower level candidates wrote about recording the bass without an amp, aiming the mic at the strings; this indicated a significant lack of recording knowledge.

4(e)(ii)

The majority of candidates identified the microphone type correctly.

5(a)

This was mostly well-answered, but some candidates answered with a decade, or a range of years, rather than a specific year as the question asks. Dates ranged from the 1950's to the 1990's.

5(b)

This was generally well-answered, with few instances of candidates wearing headphones incorrectly.

5(c)

Call and response, soulful vocals, wide panning and strings were popular responses. However, there were many general responses such as 'reverb' and 'vocals'. The use of a horn section was a common wrong answer. Again, candidates should be reminded that this is primarily a listening test.

5(d)

This was well-answered by the majority of candidates, who identified either that previous Motown records were generally love songs or that this track was politically and socially motivated.

5(e)

Answers were generally vague and referred only to the Gaye album rather than its relationship to the Beatles album. Responses were often very similar to those for 5(c). Most marks were scored for recognising the ground-breaking nature of both works. Few candidates made mention of the fact that they were concept albums of the continuity of the tracks. There were often incorrect answers about anti-war songs.

5(f)

This covered a full range of marks. Many candidates failed to find the first two notes, but identified the last two.

5(g)

There were many good answers to this question. James Brown was most popular as a choice of artist.

James Brown

Candidates identified Brown's energetic performance / vocal quality, development of R&B and funk, use of call and response, and the use of a horn section. 'Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine' was a popular choice of track. 'Get On Up', 'Sex Machine' and other variations were credited.

Stevie Wonder

Candidates identified R&B and funk, and his ability to play many instruments but, surprisingly, there were few references to his extensive use of the harmonica. 'Superstition' was a popular choice of track. There were, however, many references to his blindness which, whilst true, doesn't describe his musical style.

There were also references to both artists' careers outside of the 1970's, which was specified in the question, particularly in the referencing of tracks or albums.

6(a)

Opposite panning was correctly identified by the majority of candidates. The answer 'panning' was not sufficient to gain a mark.

6(b)

This was extremely well-answered by the vast majority of candidates, with many detailed answers such as 'the bass is playing the root note of the guitar chords which are open 5ths.'

6(c)

Many candidates identified the correct panning of the backing vocals. Fewer identified the lower level in the mix, the higher reverb level or the different EQ.

6(d)

This was generally well-answered, with identification of the additional guitar, use of distortion, the 'four to the floor' feel and the use of backing vocals. Sometimes the language used was not specific. 'The bass line changes', 'There are more drums', and 'There's a vocal' were common responses.

6(e)(i)/(ii)

This was very well-answered by the vast majority of candidates. A few spoke of sibilance rather than plosives. Higher level candidates were giving three correct answers in a single response; use a pop shield, move away from mic, sing off-axis.

6(f)

There were many general answers of the 'It's better quality' type. Many candidates identified the shift from the 'jangly' sound to something more distorted and the faster tempo.

6(g)

This was generally not well-answered, with most candidates scoring two or less.

6(h)

The majority of candidates chose The Smiths rather than Blur, with the ratio being roughly 65:35. There was much less detail in the responses than for 5(g).

The Smiths

Popular answers concerned the jangly guitar, the controversial lyrical content, Morrissey's vocal style (which was described in many and various ways) and sparse production values. 'This Charming Man' and 'The Queen Is Dead' were common references. But there were many vague references to Madchester, the Hacienda, and Morrissey miming with a bunch of flowers on TOTP. There were also instances where a list of generic instruments was given, which accrued no marks.

Blur

Responses were not as detailed as those for The Smiths. The jangly guitar and Britpop were common responses. There were many references to the 'battle' between Blur and Oasis which accrued no marks unless Britpop was mentioned. Very few candidates referred to Blur's constant reinventions and changes of style. References to Albarn's subsequent work as a solo artist and with Gorillaz were not valid.

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