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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Music Technology (8MT0)
Paper 03

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General Comments

It was clear that, in general, students were well prepared and had practised with past papers and suitable resources.

As always, it is important for candidates to take note of the command words used in the questions as well as the mark tariffs so they ensure they can access the highest marks available for the question.

It is always better if candidates keep their responses within the space provided; there should be sufficient space provided underneath each question for a full mark response, accommodating even the largest handwriting. As such, for those with smaller handwriting, there will probably be more space provided than is necessary. In this case candidates should not continue writing after they feel they have fully answered the question as this can often lead to contradiction and repetition. When candidates wish to alter their responses they must clearly indicate that they have rejected (part of) a response by crossing it out and replacing it with new written text.

There continues to be some misunderstanding regarding the term “production techniques”. As will be seen in the comments on specific questions, candidates tend to respond to this prompt with answers that would be more suitable in a Music paper rather than a Music Technology paper. It must be stressed that it is impossible to do well in questions that require a discussion of production techniques without clear and detailed reference to the technology being used and its effect on the sound or perception of the listener.

Specific Questions

1ai Many correctly identified the tape delay, but many incorrectly selected slapback delay which could not be accurate due to multiple repeats.

1aii Many responded with “longer” delay which was considered too vague to be creditworthy i.e. longer delay implies a longer time, not necessarily extra repeats.

1bi Those who understood the term “ambience” answered this question correctly, but many clearly did not understand the term, giving responses unrelated to reverb.

1c This question was generally well answered by candidates with almost all identifying at least two correct pan positions.

1d Quite a few candidates understood the concept of “bouncing down” within a single multi-track tape machine but some thought it meant recording from one device to another. The mark scheme allowed for some credit, even if candidates misunderstood the process to some extent.

2a Many single word responses (or lists of single words) were given to this question. While “delay” and “autotune” were sufficient, the old favourites such as “compression” and “EQ” required more detail to be creditworthy e.g. the lead vocal had a brighter EQ. Many spoke about reverb despite it being prohibited in the question rubric.

2b The best responses to this question immediately recognised the LPF, identifying it and then describing the descending cut off frequency. Very few candidates spotted the resonance. Many talked about the panning, with mixed success. Wrong answers included describing the filter gradually changing from HPF to LPF (or vice versa), demonstrating a misunderstanding of the concept.

2c A very wide variety of responses were seen for this question. Some correctly spotted the missing elements of the kit while others answered along completely different lines.

2d A mixed response – some recognised the 3 mark tariff and answered with according depth, while many others waffled, sometimes hitting on one or two of the available marks.

2e Most candidates correctly identified compression (or limiting), but a surprising amount answered along the lines of “turn all the parts up”.

3a Many candidates recognised the scenario being painted and imagined a group of musicians huddled around a single mic. Responses were very varied, although those who understood the concept often scored 3 or 4 marks. The key concept here was the single mic being used to capture an entire ensemble rather than the recording medium.

3b For this question, a table was used to help guide candidates to set out their responses in a suitable way. Generally this did not work out in practice as responses were often written in the order they occurred to students with additions added around the boxes etc. The table was meant to encourage spotting the AO3 elements and then explaining or elaborating with the AO4 elements (much as candidates are often clearly prepared to do for question 5). The command word “explain” requires this, as set out in the command word taxonomy in the specification. Strong responses were generally succinct with an appropriate capture method in the left-hand boxes and a brief explanation in the right-hand boxes. Weaker responses either discussed things other than capture (e.g. mixing) at some length or repeated the same one word responses in multiple boxes.

4a Very few candidates knew how a Fender Rhodes works. Some scored a mark for recognising that it needed to be amplified. Many mistook it for a Mellotron, or had answers relating to samples.

4bi This question was very well answered with almost all candidates understanding the concept. The most common incorrect response was to align things in the DAW after the event.

4bii This question was also well answered with most candidates mentioning at least one or two legitimate reasons for recording the sections separately.

4c This question has been in past papers, so was expected to be answered very well. While it was answered correctly by about half the candidates, many went off in a different direction entirely.

4d This question was poorly answered in general. Last year's report for the same question said:

"The focus is on music technology rather than the instrumentation itself. Candidates should be directed to listen to the effects, dynamic processing, balance, panning etc. of the instruments rather than simply identifying them. Having isolated the technological aspect (AO3), candidates must then give an explanation of what this does in the context of the mix or what effect it achieves on the perception of the listener (AO4)."

Sadly, very few centres have picked up on this or candidates are unable to focus on the music technology aspects rather than just instrument spotting. As a result, many candidates scored zero marks for this question with very few achieving full marks.

5 The same points made for question 4d hold true for question 5 in that the marks are split into AO3 and AO4, where the AO3 marks are generally observational and the AO4 marks are for elucidating on the observation. It was interesting to note that many candidates wrote an acronym on their answer books to direct their attention to the subheadings in the mark scheme such as "capture", "instrumentation" and "effects" etc. This generally had a positive impact on the quality of the responses and highlighted the good preparation that is being done in centres. Candidates also often created brief essay plans before embarking on writing their proper response. When this was done it encouraged concise, well-structured responses that were less susceptible to repetition. However, as with question 4d, few candidates went into any detail about the actual music technology central to both recordings, concentrating instead on the instrumentation and structure, much in line with a GCSE Music response. To access the top mark band candidates must go into detail about the music technology – the effects, processing, mixing techniques etc. and discussing the impact this has on the listener or what it does to enhance the recording.