

Moderators' Report/
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Feedback



Summer 2016

GCE Music (6MU05) Unit 5:
Composition and Technical Study

KEY POINTS

There was a small improvement in the standard of the compositions; 94% gained over half marks compared with 92% last year. 43% were placed in the excellent band, compared with 37% last year. This led to a rise in the mean mark from 53.9 in 2015 to 54.3.

The gap between the marks for compositions and technical studies closed this year. 88% gained better than half marks compared with 94% of compositions. However, there were fewer examples of excellent work in the technical studies.

COMPOSITIONS

Brief 1 - A pair of contrasted dances

Most submissions were in a baroque or classical style although there were some excellent examples of Latin American dances, demonstrating rhythmic vitality and imaginative instrumentation, particularly in the handling of percussion. The requirements for contrast and the implied binary form of pieces based on baroque dances were generally handled well.

Brief 2 - An instrumental study

As in previous years there were many successful pieces submitted in this brief, the most successful by students writing confidently for their own instrument. 52% of candidates were placed in the excellent mark bands. There was a number of compositions for electric guitar, the live examples tending to fare better than those sequenced using MIDI software where the instrumental writing tended to be a little stiff and unidiomatic.

Brief 3 - A trailer for a TV current affairs series

Again, a disappointingly small take-up given the popularity of this topic in previous years, but this was perhaps due to the lack of models - most current affairs introductions last a matter of seconds and tend to lack contrast. There were, however, many opportunities to develop the brief and to take inspiration from the variety of news and documentary channels. Predictably, many candidates opted for high drama items drawn from the current news such as refugees, Syria and terrorism. As in the past, the more successful candidates demonstrated an ability to depict a seamless succession of images suitable for film and television.

Brief 4 - A contemporary dance entitled *Noah's Zoo*

A number of examiners commented that this particular brief seemed to be more popular than in previous years. There was a wide spread of marks.

Many candidates opted for a neo-classical style and produced some very convincing work including some inventive treatments of the 'two-by-two' aspect of the story with duetting animals. There was a tendency in some of the pieces to follow a programmatic approach (depicting the storm and the flood, for example) rather than demonstrating a feel for dance and the theatre.

TECHNICAL STUDIES

Technical study 1 - baroque counterpoint

Take-up and standards have been similar to previous years although there was a slightly wider spread of marks suggesting that weaker candidates are increasingly opting for this task. The most common weakness occurred in passages where the candidate added their own figuring and where the figures contradicted the added

material or, as in some cases, had been omitted. Many examiners commented that an elegant sense of line was often hard to achieve: whilst the harmony was secure this could be at the expense of melodic shape.

Technical study 2 - Bach chorale

Numbers were greater this year but far fewer marks lay in the excellent bands. There are clearly a number of high-achieving centres but the weaker candidates had particular difficulty planning a suitable scheme of cadences and modulations. Generally, more attention was needed in the construction of the bass line so as to facilitate a convincing progression of chords, avoiding angular and unvocal leaps and, in particular, second-inversion chords. Many of the less successful submissions were compromised by errors of basic harmonic grammar, rather than a failure to follow Bach's stylistic procedures.

Technical study - popular song

A slight fall in numbers this year. Marks were bunched in the middle, a typical mark being 25/26.

Of the three technical studies this is most frequently underestimated in terms of its demands. The greatest challenge in this option (although this is also true of the others) is the ability to deduce a structure from the given material and to create convincing joins with the added material. As ever, most achieved well for identifying and realising the chords correctly even though the progressions may not have been handled convincingly nor led to an elegant melodic line. Where the addition of chords is required to complete passages the weaker candidates tend to rely on primary triads in root position or, when adding melodies, providing a succession of broken chords that fit the underlying harmony but which lack vocal shape.

ADMINISTRATION

Few problems were reported by examiners. Some centres continue to send their composition coursework *and* their performances to the same examiner.

Candidates using computer software to prepare and print their technical studies should be reminded of the importance of entering the original question accurately. This applies particularly to the baroque counterpoint question which, with its figuring, represents a formidable typesetting exercise given the time available with many potential pitfalls.