



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Music (8MU0 02)

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Overview

The standard of compositions was broadly similar to that of the composition component of the previous AS specification.

The most popular brief by far was that for film music – music for the trailer of a film about pirates. The majority of candidates chose to offer a free composition, the remainder choosing to offer one of the other briefs. Some examiners commented that the second piece tended to be slightly inferior. It was quite usual for candidates to offer two pieces on similar themes, for example the film music brief coupled with another piece of film music to a free brief.

The standard of brief-based submissions and free submissions was similar;

The mark schemes

Grid 1 – creating and developing musical ideas with coherence.

This grid had similarities with the coherence criterion in the previous specification and shared some of the descriptors. To earn a mark in the higher levels it was necessary, as it has been in the past, to arrive at a sense of wholeness resulting from a balance between unity and variety. The grid also covers the development of ideas, the ability of the candidate to extend and build upon an opening idea. As in the past, less successful pieces relied on excessive use of copy-and-paste at the computer, or suffered from unvaried accompaniments.

Grid 2 - creating and developing musical ideas with expressive control.

This is a new grid and refers to the response to the brief. It also covers the expressive qualities of the composition – the sensitivity of the text setting, for example, or the ability to create moods and atmosphere. Some of the briefs were more exacting than others; a song about travel offered fairly wide scope whereas a fusion of reggae and samba was far more specific.

Some candidates lost marks because of an inappropriate response to the demands of the brief; examples included composing an instrumental for the vocal music brief or not providing three contrasted sections for that relating to film music.

Grid 3 – creating and developing musical ideas with technical control.

This grid covers the musical elements of harmony, melody and rhythm as well as instrumentation and texture. Marks were often a 'best fit' in cases where there were several strong features balanced against a weak one. Students who, in the past, were able to secure quite high marks by relying on their ability to compose confidently for their own instrument, did rather less well because

there are now fewer marks available with which to reward skill in writing for instruments.

The briefs

Vocal music

This was attempted by a small number of candidates but produced some excellent work with a third of them gaining marks at the highest levels. There were many interpretations of the theme of travel, in some cases extended to include adventures and discoveries.

Most submissions were classical in style, popular songwriters having tended to opt for the power ballad brief (it is worth noting that the two song-writing options together accounted for almost one-third of the entries). A common weakness was failure to provide enough variety in the accompaniment or reliance on a very narrow vocabulary of chords.

Instrumental music

The ground bass option was chosen by over a fifth of the candidates, making it the second most popular brief. Results were varied, with some excellent work at the higher level but there were also many less successful examples.

The demand here was to manage effective part-writing and the ability to create variety in a form that is fundamentally repetitive. Many students do not understand what is meant by 'exploiting instruments' and seem to believe that excessive use of scales and arpeggios meets that requirement.

Music for Film

This was the most popular option. Predictably, most students derived inspiration from the scores of Hans Zimmer. There was a very wide spread of marks from full marks to single figures. Many candidates lost marks because they did not provide three contrasted scenes as required by the brief or, in cases where they did, did not connect them together to form a logical flow.

Fusions

This was generally well done, but only by a very small number of the candidates. Nonetheless, they demonstrated a secure feel for the two styles with appropriate rhythmic energy and imaginative writing for the instrumental forces.

Popular music and jazz

The key to this brief was to compose a strong chorus and some candidates found it difficult to create a structure that effectively set the chorus up and gave it a sense of formal climax.

A narrow harmonic vocabulary was a common weakness and this often had an inhibiting effect on the development of the song. Even so, the candidates who opted for this brief produced some memorable submissions, many based on the work of Adele.

New directions

Even fewer candidates attempted this brief. Given the potential demands of technology it was, perhaps surprisingly, the simpler approaches that worked best –often a solo instrument manipulated by a range of effects. Guitarists adding waves of distortion post-production tended to be less successful because the overall effect lacked shape and development.

Administration

There were isolated instances of candidates submitting work that did not meet the length requirements. There were also several centres that submitted briefs from the previous 6MU02 specification. Some centres submitting their works on USB did not provide vocal identification of the tracks. The preferred file type for these submissions is .wav.

