

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01

Listening

Key messages:

- Candidates should extend the repertoire studied in **Section B** beyond the Core Works
- Candidates need to develop their understanding of the context of all music studied
- Candidates should ensure all answers are relevant to the question
- Under no circumstances may scores may be used in the examination room

General

Overall, candidates were very well-prepared. It was evident that the Prescribed and Core repertoire had been studied closely. Whilst answers were structured well, candidates should aim to ensure that they are answering the question asked rather than pouring out all they know. Care must be taken to be selective and address the question in a more precisely-focused way.

Many candidates approached the Core Works from **Section B** as though they were Prescribed Works, which limited their ability to demonstrate wider knowledge of other repertoire. In **Section C**, candidates need to demonstrate a full understanding of the context of the music they had studied. This did not seem to be fully understood.

The aim of the Syllabus is to develop a keen aural perception and appreciation of music. The ability to read a score and memorise bar numbers is not a requirement. However, Centres may add score-reading as an additional skill to their course, if they wish. **Scores are not allowed in the examination room.**

Where making a reference to the music, recognisable descriptions of musical passages almost always provided a more worthwhile demonstration of familiarity and understanding than bar numbers, e.g. 'in the slow section of the movement where the oboe has the melody', or 'the crescendo that accompanies the dominant pedal build-up to the recapitulation'. Bar numbers were often misquoted resulting in a confused answer.

Section A

- 1 Several answers were more loosely about 'variety' than 'variation techniques'. Many others gave close commentaries on appropriate movements but without singling out specific, relevant features for discussion. The best answers summarised what the candidate considered to be the principal techniques that they had met, illustrating these selectively and carefully with clear references to the music.
- 2 Most candidates mentioned that greater skill was needed on the soloist's part, and almost all were able to cite the frequent use of higher registers than those required in the orchestral part. The accompanimental role of the orchestral violins was usually mentioned. Although memorable moments such as the *pizzicato* playing of the timpani motif were described, candidates found this difficult to discuss. Few could get further than contrasts of dynamics. Excellent responses mentioned the structural roles of both violin parts. Other responses needed to develop more detailed answers with specific references to the music to gain higher marks.
- 3 Candidates were secure and clear in their explanations of Sonata Form. More work was required to offer similarly convincing explanations of Rondo.

Section B

It was in this section particularly that the tendency to come armed with prepared answers was most evident.

- 4 This question was about the 'music' (not only the accompaniment) and 'moods' (rather than scene-painting). Most candidates showed a satisfactory level of familiarity with, and appreciation of, the songs. Excellent answers demonstrated more subtle awareness of the relationships between text and music. They also displayed an ability to pinpoint and describe vividly, the specific techniques used. Other responses concentrated too much on the pictorial aspects of the accompaniment without addressing the nature of the vocal line.
- 5 Candidates found it difficult to define the term 'word-painting'. Whilst many recognised Purcell's treatment of words like 'shake', 'languish', 'storm', and some could point to Verdi's orchestral illustration of '*tuoni*', answers drifted to discuss 'mood' and 'character' rather than word painting itself. Some candidates explained in detail how the piano accompaniment in the Schubert songs 'paints the scene' rather than analysing word-painting.
- 6 Most candidates were able to make relevant points about the role of the orchestra in Verdi's *Otello*. However, care needs to be taken to ensure candidates are directly referring to the question. Too often candidates wrote all they knew about the piece of music rather than accurately referring to 'supporting action on stage'. Candidates need to improve upon supporting their arguments with a musical passage and precisely identifying musical examples. Candidates can also improve by referring to other works studied rather than just the Core Works.

Section C

- 7 The more confident candidates showed good contextual understanding in their answers. Others approached it in a deductive way, following a logic determined by the resources required for different works: broadly, the more performers, the bigger the venue. Little was said about audiences other than that they were 'rich'.
- 8 Some thoughtful answers showed understanding of the changing nature of the term 'classical', as well as detailed knowledge of current sub-genres of popular music. More care needed to be taken to discuss the term 'folk' sensibly.
- 9 Candidates seized with enthusiasm the opportunity to talk about the application of a range of twentieth-century technologies to their favourite music. Only a few, however, were able to illustrate their answers convincingly by describing how these are used in specific examples. References to 'at least one acoustic instrument' sometimes felt forced and hurried, although a handful of candidates went in the opposite direction by devoting almost their entire answer to a detailed account of the evolution of playing techniques on their own instrument. A balance needed to be struck.
- 10 Answers to this question were generally very vague in their understanding and explanations. Again, care should be taken to support answers with well referenced musical examples.

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<p>Paper 9703/02 Practical Musicianship</p>

Key messages

- For Element 2, candidates should be clearly identifiable in DVD submissions
- For Element 3, exercises should be of sufficient length to enable candidates to demonstrate a full range of skills
- Candidates should submit two **contrasting** compositions for Element 4

General comments

There was a good standard of work submitted for this Component, with some outstanding examples of performing and composing. Most Centres chose a range of combinations of Elements thus allowing individual candidates to demonstrate the highest possible level of skills in areas appropriate to themselves.

Almost all candidates offered **Element 1**. A wide variety of repertoire was presented by the large number of vocalists and pianists, and a range of popular music styles was played on the electric guitar, bass guitar and drums. Some fine string playing was heard. There were fewer performances on wind and brass instruments than in previous sessions. Most candidates chose appropriate repertoire which enabled them to demonstrate their technical skills and understanding. It was encouraging that very few candidates attempted music that was beyond their current level of ability and many were thus able to show true musicality in their performance. The vast majority of candidates gave good spoken introductions, which offered Moderators a real insight into the music that had been prepared. All Centres provided suitable locations for recordings to take place and most candidates were skilfully accompanied where necessary. Some candidates opted to be accompanied by guitar or a small combo where this was appropriate to their chosen repertoire and some used very effective backing tracks. Where a backing track is used, it must be audible on the recording. A few guitarists and drummers presented just their own part from a popular song without the vocal or other instrumental lines. This does not facilitate candidates' ability fully to demonstrate their stylistic understanding and is, therefore, inappropriate.

In **Element 2**, the majority of candidates had chosen suitable repertoire for their two disciplines, thus enabling them to demonstrate a full range of skills. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that the music selected for 'accompanying' and 'improvisation' is appropriate to the individual candidate and instrument. Centre assessors had taken time to produce detailed comments on the working marksheets, enabling Moderators to have a clear understanding of how marks had been awarded. Ensemble performances should be submitted on DVD and it is essential that Centres clearly identify individual candidates.

All candidates who submitted work for **Element 3** had followed suitable courses covering a range of appropriate knowledge and techniques. Centres should ensure that exercises submitted are of sufficient length to enable candidates to demonstrate full understanding of the techniques they have learnt during their course. This is particularly important, for example, in the study of Western tonal harmony, where knowledge of techniques of modulation is concerned.

Element 4 requires candidates to submit two contrasting compositions, each written for two or more instruments/voices. Most candidates selected genres and instrumentation with which they were fully familiar and there were some outstanding outcomes. The contrasting nature of the two compositions enables candidates to demonstrate a range of invention and composing technique. Some candidates submitted two very similar compositions and this often prevented them from accessing the full range of marks. Scores were generally well presented, though some would have benefited from being reduced in font size to enable more bars to appear on each page. A detailed commentary is required where a score is not submitted. Some candidates were able to submit live recordings of their compositions, while other presented well-edited sequenced versions. Where vocals are included, candidates should aim to record these live, possibly over computer-generated instrumentation, so that the recording is a true reflection of the composer's intentions.

Most Centres submitted all the necessary paperwork for the Component as a whole and provided CD/DVD recordings of good quality. Care had been taken in the application of the assessment criteria and helpful comments were included where appropriate.

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<p>Paper 9703/03 Performing</p>

Key messages

- Candidates should select repertoire of suitable standard appropriate to their technical capabilities
- Candidates should present a focused spoken introduction to their recital. This may be read, rather than spoken from memory, if preferred.

General comments

The majority of candidates had prepared thoroughly for this Component and most achieved well, with some recitals being of an exceptional standard. There were outstanding performances on violin, cello, piano and voice, with music ranging from Baroque to Twentieth Century Impressionism and Musical Theatre. A number of candidates offered electric guitar, bass guitar or drums, with genres including various aspects of jazz and the music of contemporary bands.

Many candidates chose repertoire which was within their capabilities and showed their technical ability to good advantage. Others may have benefitted more from choosing slightly less demanding repertoire in order to have the opportunity to show thorough understanding and a real sense of performance. A few recitals were extremely short and did not give candidates adequate opportunity to demonstrate a range of technical skill and understanding.

Almost all candidates chose an appropriate focus to their recital and provided the required spoken introduction outlining features of the focus and how these were reflected in each item to be performed. The best introductions had been well prepared with candidates demonstrating real insight into the music. It is wholly acceptable for candidates to read their introduction if they prefer, rather than speaking from memory.

Some candidates performed in front of an audience and most were competently accompanied, where applicable. Most candidates demonstrated that they had had sufficient opportunity to rehearse with accompanists or ensemble members during their preparation for the examination. This, together with the use of effective backing tracks where appropriate, makes a real difference to candidates' ability to display the full range of their skills during their performance.

Most Centres presented their candidates' work on CDs or DVDs of good quality and all had taken care to ensure that individual candidates could be readily identified. Camera positions were usually appropriate, enabling Examiners to gain a full impression of the performance.

Centres submitted the work in a manner that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork as well as copies of the music to be performed.

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Paper 9703/04
Composing

Key Messages

- Please show care and attention to detail in the administrative aspects of presenting and packaging work for Examiners
- Candidates should submit a single composition (or a group of shorter related pieces conceived as a whole)
- Centres are to be congratulated on the range of research, invention and performing of compositions that they support in candidates' work

General Comments

This report contains responses to the range of work seen this season and it is intended that this should be a means of supportive feedback to teachers. Additionally, some aspects of the administrative process involved with this syllabus will also be discussed.

- Candidates should always check the recordings of compositions before the final submission of their portfolios. CDs should be playable on standard audio equipment; DVD and data submissions are not permissible. A significant minority of recordings presented difficulty of access.
- Please provide a track list for the recording, remembering that each candidate should have a separate recording.
- Unlike Component 2 Element 4, this composition task is an examined option and teachers are not required to assess the work of their candidates.
- Examiners are very grateful for inclusion of the attendance register and correct completion of the details on the front of the grey delivery bags.
- 'Crystal' CD cases do not always survive transportation – a thin paper or plastic wallet, wrapped in bubble wrap within the portfolio, is often safer.
- Candidates must ensure that the composition demonstrates the ability to work with related materials over a length of time, up to eight minutes in length. Successful candidates sometimes submitted a single piece or a group of clearly related smaller movements / pieces. Weaker candidates chose to write small pieces that were unconnected stylistically, musically or by medium. This does not fulfil the syllabus requirements.

Comments on Specific Portfolios

Materials

There was a significant range of ideas explored by candidates with a corresponding diversity of timbral resources employed. There were several instances of the use of conventional structures such as the Requiem setting and sonata form. Programmatic ideas such as journeying, indigenous legends and folklore or paintings, formed convincing starting points for some candidates. It was helpful when candidates supplied visual or text appendix material (when appropriate) in support of their work. The choice of style overall ranged from conventional western approaches across a range of time and genres, to rock, jazz and swing as well as cinematic and more experimental ideas. Indigenous influences were also present. Strong candidates were keen to credit the sources of their influences and remembered to include the names of the author of any words they used when they had not written their own lyrics.

Use of Materials and Structure

Candidates should ensure that the initial construction of a melody, for example, to be worked in a Theme and Variation context, contains the potential for insightful development and variety. They may be helped in their understanding here by researching the work of other composers who have composed in this way.

Strong candidates were able to skilfully control the way in which the initial materials were worked through or developed. There is some flexibility shown by Examiners in regard to the overall length of the submission. A 14-minute piece that shows little regard for re-shaping and honing of ideas will not compare favourably alongside a 6-minute work that is much more tightly controlled and refined.

In a minimalistic work, the pacing of the rate of change of ideas is extremely important. Successful candidates ensured they worked with good quality motifs, ideas or harmonic materials in order to sustain interest over the time allocated.

Some less secure submissions, using tonal materials, did not demonstrate a clear understanding of basic technical principles. It is important to understand, for example, why the inappropriate use of consecutive second-inversion chords produces a sense of harmonic instability. Stronger tonal submissions not only demonstrated a thorough understanding of tonal vocabulary and language but also attended to voice leading in an insightful and musical way.

There was successful use of sonata form in compositions for large ensemble, or solo instrument plus piano.

Weaker structural consideration was seen where ternary form, for example, was used with no modulation throughout including an exact repeat of the opening section to conclude the piece.

Use of Medium and Texture

Many candidates worked with instruments with which they were familiar as performers, yet the number of recordings that included elements of live performance was comparatively rare. This was disappointing because weaker submissions conceived at the computer or using medium specific software (guitar software in particular) often had variable aural connection to the world of the instruments chosen. Whilst some textures were idiomatic and playable, others could only be realised in a non-acoustic setting due to the impracticalities or impossibilities of the writing. Several candidates wrote for combinations of guitar and drums, for example, and bringing their performing skill to the task would have enhanced their presentations.

Particular points to remember here are:

- Changes of sound quality / use of effects (such as palm muting) in guitar writing should always be indicated on the score. This is one way to demonstrate a wider understanding of the potential of a variety of instrumental techniques
- Take every opportunity to think in a nuanced and sophisticated way when considering the use of electronic sounds in electro-acoustic submissions; there are many ways to make slight but significant alterations to the sound when editing
- Keyboard effects should be precisely documented, for example, the use of flange effect. Often the sound and score do not correspond if insufficient care is taken
- If a composition that appears to be for acoustic instruments is not intended for live performance, this must clearly be stated
- Candidates with strong orchestration skills have taken time to learn from scores of established composers and also connect their learning in other areas of the syllabus with their creative work

Notation and Presentation

It is often through the presentation of the composition that candidates are able to demonstrate an understanding of what can be achieved on instruments. Care should be taken to establish a realistic tempo marking, particularly when recordings are taken from the sequenced 'performance'. Some string double stopping, for example may not be possible if an over-ambitious tempo is chosen.

A summary of important points to be noted from the evidence of this year's submission is useful here.

Scores

- Scores should show all instruments on the first page and should be named
- Subsequent staves should show abbreviated names for instruments
- When using specialist guitar notation software, it is essential that correct key signatures and clefs are used
- Rhythmic editing may be difficult but it is essential to achieve the higher marks for notation
- Correct rhythmic grouping proved to be problematic for some candidates
- An opening performance direction or tempo should always be provided
- In drum-kit notation, some simple patterns are self-evident but others appear to be written at the keyboard; if a key for the drums was included it might alert the candidate to an unplayable / unrealistic part etc.
- In order to avoid over cluttering when writing for full orchestra, consider notating two woodwind parts per staff, stems up and stems down, for example.
- Remembering the importance of woodwind articulation / phrasing and string bowing, for example, on rapid semi-quavers. This may be done by marking up one bar correctly, then writing *sempre legato*, for example
- Always check enharmonic 'spellings', e.g. D sharp moving to E not E flat to E natural, in the key of E minor
- Beware of bars empty of notes but full of rests
- Consider carefully when a commentary rather than score might be appropriate. A score can be a barrier to accessing the composer's intentions in some genres

Recording

- Always consider performing some of the composition if at all possible. Computer programmes do not always represent multiple lower brass sounds, for example, without considerable expertise in software editing.
- Some experimental / ambient music needs more careful editing; lower sounds can be much more obtrusive than the treble which may need boosting to get the desired balance

Concluding Remarks

There is considerable praise to be given to both teachers and candidates for the supportive way in which an impressive range of compositional ideas are worked through in preparation for the submission of portfolios.

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<p>Paper 9703/05 Investigation and Report</p>

Key Messages

- An equivalent amount of time to Component 3 or 4 should be spent on the Investigation
- The 'link' to the other component should be treated as a catalyst for broader enquiry, not confined to a narrow focus on work assessed in the other component
- Candidates need to be more careful with footnoting and fully referencing quotes. Precise references to examples are essential.

General Comments

There was both a wide variety of topics and a similarly wide range of achievement. It was very pleasing to see that there were some outstanding Investigations which considerably extended each candidates' understanding of a significant body of repertoire. They had read sensibly (including scholarly books), listened widely and reached their own personal conclusions which were expressed coherently.

Linking the Components

The Examiners were concerned that the 'link' to the other component being taken at the same time was often interpreted too narrowly. Those taking Component 4 (Composing) usually avoided this by explaining specific aspects of some of the repertoire that had influenced them, thus broadening beyond a straightforward commentary on their composition.

The danger was greater for those taking Component 3 (Performing) where a unifying 'theme' is a requirement for the separate items of their Recital, together with a brief spoken commentary introducing it. Too many candidates in this session wedded their Reports much too closely to these commentaries and showed relatively little evidence of further, sustained 'Investigation'. The temptation to explain technical difficulties and 'how I tackled them' must be resisted. Some of the most successful candidates avoided this danger by first analysing selected aspects of the compositional techniques in the pieces performed and then compared interpretations by professional performers. Others had explored very fully the developmental history of the genre from which their pieces came and could show that they had listened to a great deal more than only those in their Recital programme.

An exploration of the history of the development of the candidate's instrument was only worthwhile when it went beyond details of changes in its construction to a consideration of what new techniques of playing became possible and how these were then exploited in new repertoire.

Presentation and Researching

Skilful use of word-processing techniques and other software makes it possible for Reports to be presented in very attractive formats. While these made for ease of reading, the time given to producing something that looks polished and scholarly should not have been allowed to occupy the lion's share of the candidate's attention. In several cases it was clear that much less effort had been put into research than into the appearance of the Report, with consequent loss of genuine learning. There were no marks for sophisticated presentation techniques.

In a very few cases, comments and marks had been written on the Report by the teacher. As this is not a teacher-assessed component the candidate's script should be submitted free of annotation by any other person.

Candidates should aim to spend an appropriate amount of time researching various types of sources. Candidates also need to allow time for the information to be digested, assimilated and applied to musical examples that the candidate has chosen for themselves. It is in this way that the report needs to demonstrate that the first three Assessment Criteria have been met: aural perception, contextual understanding, and use of appropriate analytic/investigative techniques.

Referencing

Nearly all the Reports contained a bibliography and a list of CD tracks. Only a few candidates offered a proper discography.

Careful discographies identified exactly where (e.g. on youtube) their many audio extracts came from, However candidates should also remember to acknowledge who the performers were. Several candidates had transferred such extracts straight onto their CD of audio examples. The ability to listen critically, to select and explain examples chosen independently of other commentators is a key feature of the process of learning which should take place during these Investigations. A small number of Reports (at both AS and A levels) contained no audio examples at all. It is a requirement of the Syllabus that they should.

While Centres are rightly on their guard against outright plagiarism, the Examiners would suggest that more explicit warnings to candidates – and subsequent supervision – needs to be given regarding paraphrase, intentional or not. It has been pointed out many times that changing a word here and there does not absolve the copier from acknowledging that they are, in fact, quoting. Footnotes at the bottom of the page referring the reader to a specific title in the bibliography frequently failed to indicate precisely enough the extent to which the candidate was actually quoting. Exact quotations of another's words must be signalled by the use of quotation marks. Close paraphrase should be introduced explicitly by a phrase such as '*Tovey suggests...*' and might continue '*...that the use of a 'y' chord here is typical of...*' The exact extent of dependence on the observations of others must be made clear, not left to Examiners to consult the sources for themselves.