

MUSIC

Paper 9703/03
Performing

General comments

Most performances for this component were of a good standard and there were some outstanding recitals by pianists, singers, an electric guitarist and a violinist. A few candidates presented music which was either underprepared, or beyond their technical capability. Centres are reminded that the assessment criteria are centred on the quality of the performance and that there is little to be gained from attempting music which is too difficult for the candidate to perform well.

The majority of recitals were of an appropriate length. Some candidates performed in front of an audience and most were ably accompanied, where applicable. Much time had clearly been spent in preparation with accompanists, thus enabling candidates to perform to their best advantage in the examination. While the suggested timings are only guidelines, recitals which are too short run the risk of preventing the candidate from accessing the highest mark bands because of failure to demonstrate a wide range of techniques.

The majority of candidates had chosen an appropriate focus for their performance. These ranged from those based around a period of music to those that worked with aspects of technique for their instruments. Centres are reminded that candidates should be exploring a genuine focus – there were some very tenuous links between pieces this year.

The standard of spoken introductions varied greatly, though overall they were more successful than in recent sessions. Candidates who had a real focus to their recital were able to speak about their repertoire with genuine understanding. Those for whom the focus was rather vague, found some difficulty in stating more than merely the names of the pieces they were about to perform. It is essential for the introduction to describe the overall focus and to indicate briefly how it is reflected in each item of the performance. The relevance of the spoken introduction and the extent to which its content is reflected in the performance is taken into account in **Section E** of the Assessment Criteria: Stylistic Understanding. Centres are once again reminded that candidates are not able to access the full range of marks if no introduction is presented and this results in an unnecessary loss of marks.

Centres presented their candidates' work on CDs or DVDs of high quality and all had taken care to ensure the candidate could be easily identified. The majority of Centres had packaged the work in a way that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork including photocopies of the music performed.

MUSIC

Paper 9703/04
Composing

Report to Centres

This report will provide feedback from this season's examination, highlighting positive aspects of the work submitted by candidates and giving guidance for the preparation of future candidates in composition.

General

The syllabus requires the submission of a single composition lasting between 8 and 12 minutes. It has been pleasing to observe an increase in the number of candidates who are comfortable with working over a relatively longer time scale. For some, an extended composition presented many difficulties; some compositions lasted precisely 8 minutes where the 'finishing line' was an object in view but the 'journey' towards it was a faltering one.

Some candidates provided a brief, helpful programme note. This was useful given that the composing Examiner does not necessarily see any Investigation and Report work that may be of relevance to the composing submission. Several candidates wrote a short note explaining, for example, the programmatic element of the composing, the listening background and influences on their chosen style or reasons for their choice of medium. This is not a syllabus requirement but in some circumstances this information can provide a useful contextual framework for the assessment process.

Materials

Some compositions showed clear links with the listening component. The two movements from *The Planets* provided good models of combining tonality with dissonance and an adventurous approach to the crafting of rhythmic materials. There was also evidence of influence from the wider repertoire associated with 'Picturing Music', in particular the works of early 20th-century composers and these often gave rise to imaginative ideas. The range of rhythmic and melodic / motivic ideas was impressive albeit with some candidates less secure in their choice of harmonic language. Some candidates chose to present their ideas using tempi that were achievable using computer playback but seemed excessively frantic over too long a period with little opportunity for clear audition of the ideas presented. A Piano Concerto submission contained 10 minutes of ideas delivered at a whirlwind speed with massed percussion whose articulation could not be adequately distinguished in a sequenced performance. Candidates might carefully consider the need for moments of comparative calm or repose in their work.

In general, the range of styles explored, including the music of different cultures and traditions was most encouraging.

Structure

Successful candidates understood the need to work with a number of strong ideas capable of development, extension or other forms of manipulation in the outworking of the compositional process. Some candidates chose to work with a series of linked shorter movements and programmatic concepts were a popular way of achieving this. A three-movement work, for example, portraying Earth (modal, sparing use of instruments, sacred), Wind (free-flowing, sustained but with good bass movement) and Fire (interlocking counterpoint, ever changing) effectively combined musical representations of dramatic concepts. Candidates successfully presenting a single movement work were those who paced the ideas well or who were able to maintain interest by skilful use of a range of textures / instrumental techniques. They were able to use rhythmic and harmonic devices to fragment and extend their ideas to maintain consistency and variety in an appropriate balance.

Some under-weight submissions of less than 3 minutes duration, whilst effective in themselves, did not contribute to a high score overall.

Use of Medium and Texture

Several candidates chose to write for very large forces, particularly those taking a programmatic/ film score approach. Such a decision will almost always mean that a live realisation will not be possible. Candidates must, nevertheless, pay attention to the techniques of orchestration required when writing for large groups of traditional instruments. For candidates working with more traditional instruments the computer can appear to make all things possible, but cannot replace the need for a basic understanding of the principles of creating idiomatic textures. Working at the computer on electro-acoustic ideas, however, often allows the machinery and software to be an essential part of the creative process.

Those candidates opting to work with small ensembles frequently showed evidence of an understanding of orchestration techniques acquired from attentive listening and/or the study of scores. Candidates who understood the need to think of the instrument groupings in 'families' as well as for their individual sonorities created some effective dark woodwind writing or savagely articulated, rhythmic string passages, for example. Candidates should be wary of the overuse of particular percussion instruments or 'effects' and note that effectiveness is often related to economy of use.

Some candidates wrote well for voice in a 'popular' style, writing idiomatically for instruments as well as voice. Some attention to more effective extended writing for instruments within 'bridge' sections or the way in which a group of shorter songs might be linked and presented as a whole was needed in some cases.

Notation and Presentation

The majority of scores were professionally presented with attention to a high degree of performance detail. Candidates must ensure that the level of detail is consistent throughout the score – occasionally candidates produced a detailed opening page which subsequently deteriorated into a score with no phrasing or expressive detail. Some candidates made effective use of text to indicate points of programmatic interest on the score.

Centres are reminded that in the absence of a score, a detailed commentary must be provided. The submission of an 'ambient music' recording with no written account to explain the choice of existing sounds or 'instruments', the creation of original sounds / detailing of processes / discussion of the technology used etc. does not provide sufficient evidence for effective assessment to take place.

Occasionally, candidates submitted both a 'live' and sequenced version of their composition, particularly if they felt insecure about the level of accuracy achieved in a live performance. Of primary importance is the need for performances to reflect the expressive and creative intentions of the composer. The 'flawless' yet lifeless presentation of a poorly edited sequenced recording will often communicate the composer's intentions far less effectively than a performance with some 'live' input, irrespective of occasional errors. There is no need for the inclusion of a sequenced recording when the live version is so utterly compelling as was the case in one submission for flute, clarinet, bassoon and piano.

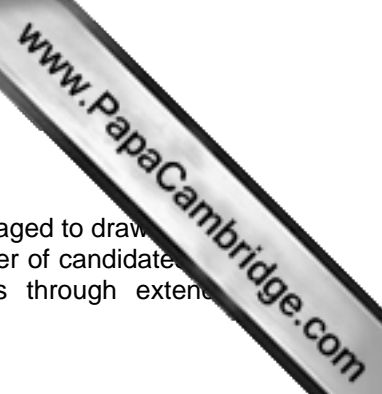
Using notation software such as 'Sibelius' can lure candidates into writing extreme articulation/ expression markings in order to make the programme 'sound' as authentic as possible during playback. This is not how final scores should be presented, however, and candidates should reflect accepted performance practice as their guide to marking up scores.

Candidates are reminded of the need to check the score and recording before presenting the folio for examination. One recording 'skipped' badly on playback and in another instance, a score had not printed 'two-sided' as intended with the result that only alternate pages were available to the Examiner. In both cases there was enough evidence for marks to be awarded that were not compromised by these over-sights but poorly presented materials are clearly to be avoided.

Candidates are reminded of the need to present an individual recording for their composing folio as part of the documentation to be assessed. It is not appropriate for centres to send a single CD containing the work of all candidates.

Concluding Remarks

Many Centres are to be commended for the way in which candidates have been encouraged to draw on their own listening and performing skills to inform their composing. For an increasing number of candidates, the extended composition component is providing a valuable opportunity to express musical inventiveness through extended composition.



MUSIC

Paper 9703/05

Investigation and Report

There was an overall improvement in the general standard this year. A number of submissions were particularly impressive in the range of listening undertaken and the level of aural perception and understanding of compositional processes that they demonstrated. Most candidates had taken the process of investigation seriously and had listened to a wide range of relevant music. For one candidate, linking her performance of a concerto to a study of three others, learning the solo parts of these three had also been an integral and active part of her investigation.

Some candidates had done interesting, useful work and learned a great deal but had not made their link with either of Components 3 and 4 explicit. In a few cases this was deducible from remarks in the text but in the others it was not possible to determine in what way the investigation had supported other work. Making the link clear is essential to the fourth category in the Assessment Criteria.

Candidates whose link was with their composing work were usually the strongest in applying their analytic skills to the music of other composers. Performers who explored the often historical background to the genre of a piece they were performing in their recital were often not quite sure of the significance of their examples, both in the way in which they supported a point in the text and in any discussion of their characteristic features. A general weakness in the identification of tonal relationships was evident. While an understanding of tonal processes is not required in Component 1, candidates who proceed to A level need a thorough grounding in this if they are to be able to explore music from the 17th to 19th centuries confidently. In order to equip candidates with this knowledge and to give them opportunities to apply it to a variety of styles and genres perhaps Centres might consider providing a taught course designed to be supportive of the analytic aspects of this component?

The standard of presentation was generally high. The best were meticulous not only regarding details in their bibliography and discography but in acknowledging sources of quotations via footnotes and cross-referencing text and MSS examples to tracks on their CDs. Some candidates, particularly those who prefaced their examination of the music by a substantial account of history or relevant background, relied too heavily on their sources, quoting definitions *verbatim* without acknowledging the source, and paraphrasing from them too closely. One was a *pot-pourri* of paragraphs which relied heavily on the candidate's sources but selected and ordered in such a way as to betray a lack of assimilation and understanding.

Many accompanying CDs, particularly those demonstrating different interpretations of short passages, contained a substantial number of carefully-considered extracts of exactly the right length needed to support the point made in the text. There were a number, however, in which the relevance of an extract (other than as an identifier or 'highlight') was left to the Examiner to deduce. Where commercial sources were lacking, some enterprising candidates had filled the gaps by making their own recordings. The number and length of audio extracts did not necessarily reflect the depth and focus of a candidate's report. The inclusion of recordings of whole pieces was rarely helpful or justified. One candidate included two CDs containing, between them, 120 minutes' worth of music in 14 extracts without providing a list of what each track was or any reference to it in the text – nor was there a discography. Other than providing incidental evidence of accessing (and, presumably, listening to) some of the music discussed, the CDs were not made relevant to the presentation.