

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

Listening

Key messages:

- Refer to specific musical examples as precisely as possible
- Avoid repeating points using the same examples in different sections of the paper
- Show secure knowledge of instrumentation
- Listen to music from a wider range of repertoire than just that of the Prescribed and Core Works.

General

A considerably-increased entry demonstrated the widest possible range of achievement. A number of impressive candidates scored exceptionally high marks in all three sections of the paper, other candidates were very creditable and the rest mostly solidly satisfactory. Where there was weakness it was only in a very few cases evident across the paper as whole; more often, one poor third answer significantly depressed an otherwise promising overall mark. Answers reflected a high level of preparedness and only at a very small number of Centres did candidates appear to be unfamiliar with the music (especially that of **Section A**).

Most candidates read the questions carefully and answered relevantly. Some insisted on overlong preambles in which they wrote out all they knew before getting to what the question really required them to address. This tendency was particularly noticeable in answer to all three questions in **Section A**. Several candidates who had struggled with the prepared repertoires of **Sections A** and **B** responded well however to the challenge of reflecting more broadly on issues in **Section C** and were able to illustrate their answers with knowledgeable references to a range of different repertoires.

Technical terms: the number of technical terms that candidates are expected to use correctly in this Syllabus is quite small. The use of everyday language that communicated clearly what had been heard, and explained effects convincingly, is wholly acceptable. However candidates should avoid using the word 'song' when referring to purely instrumental music (symphony, concerto, quintet etc) in **Section A** repertoire: this demonstrates a lack of engagement with the nature of this repertoire.

The technical terms 'dynamics' and/or 'tempo' were frequently confused: a common error was to describe the tempo as 'louder', or the dynamics as 'faster'.

Section A

The majority of candidates answered **Question 1**. The standard of commentary-writing has improved every year and this is a skill which has clearly been well-taught. There was, however, a danger of relying too heavily on this increased facility when answering other types of question, particularly those that ask for a 'comparison', or to 'explain similarities and differences' between two works: sometimes very accurate commentaries demonstrated familiarity with the music but left Examiners to do the work of drawing conclusions about its significant features. In all three questions, many answers were vague about instrumental resources.

- 1 There were some very well-informed, detailed answers worthy of full, or almost full, marks. Most candidates could describe 'who did what' in recognisable terms but a secure understanding of the variation process was less frequently evident: only the best answers referred to the consistency of the harmonic framework.

Some candidates spent too long at the beginning of their answer describing in detail the structure, instrumentation and harmonic features of the Theme, without subsequently incorporating this information and making it relevant to their discussion of the variations.

Common errors: (i) a large number of candidates understood 'Variations I, II and III' as 'movements' I, II and III; (ii) references to 'the orchestra', as well as to multiple instruments ('cellos' were frequently referred to), showed a weak grasp of the nature of chamber music; (iii) although the use of shorter note-values may make the music appear to go 'faster', this is a matter of a change in 'rhythm', not 'tempo'; (iv) 'staccato' was sometimes termed 'pizzicato'. CD timings were not adequate reference points (all recordings differ).

- 2 This question was poorly answered. Few candidates knew which instruments were used in each of the orchestras though some had a sense of bigger/smaller, louder/softer. There was a great deal of irrelevant information (e.g. about heroes and schoolteachers), several answers even suggesting that the woodwind instruments represented 'chattering' candidates. Some candidates did recognise the use of the strings as the driving force, and one or two made special mention of horns, but few accurate examples of the use of any other solo instruments were offered. Several candidates believed timpani to have an important role in both pieces, others mistook oboes for clarinets in Haydn's orchestra.
- 3 This was the least popular question in the section. Although most candidates understood that the presence of a solo instrument in a concerto changed the nature of the musical interactions, few were able to demonstrate its more virtuosic role convincingly: this could have been done by a simple comparison between the technical demands of its part with that of the orchestral violins. More tangible similarities/differences, such as the number and nature of movements (the lack of a Menuet and Trio in the concerto, for instance), the two-fold exposition in the concerto's 1st movement or improvised cadenzas, were often overlooked.

Section B

- 4 Candidates who chose this question were usually comfortable with it. Very good, close knowledge of the music was demonstrated. Differentiation rested on the degree of specificity with which points were supported. Several answers expressed reservations about what was perceived as the 'limitations' of the instrumental accompaniments (perhaps an implied comparison with the more vivid role of Verdi's orchestra). This could be a tenable view but few who held it actually examined the contribution of the ground basses. Word-painting in the vocal line, however, was generally understood in principle, and examples chosen as illustration of the point were potentially relevant. A few answers gave convincing explanations of such examples, but the general run of answers was rather vague, leaving the singer's text to speak for itself. Some of the weakest candidates were enthusiastic in their responses to the tragedy, sympathising with Dido's 'pain', but focused too much on narrative, quoting extensively the words of songs without at any point describing how these were expressed by the music. Others gave detailed appraisals of vocal quality and effective use of dynamics in the performance they were familiar with, a slight misinterpretation of the meaning of the question; there was also a tendency to understand 'music' as referring only to 'accompaniment'. Several answers strayed into discussion of other parts of the opera, particularly recitatives and choruses (another instance perhaps of today's loose use of the word 'song', here taken to mean 'any type of movement' in the opera).
- 5 The underlying narrative of the songs had generally been appreciated and most candidates understood the piano's contributions to their moods as well as to its descriptive role. Differentiation lay principally in the extent of each answer's exploration and explanation of examples. There were many very full, perceptive answers.
- 6 Very few candidates chose this question. Their examples were well-chosen, mostly from musicals, but the exploration of "musical features" was generally superficial, focusing principally on tempo and dynamics. It was a surprise that so few even mentioned the love-duet in *Otello* but several believed that there was one in *Dido and Aeneas*.

Section C

Many brave attempts were made in **Questions 8, 9 and 10** to pin down sometimes elusive concepts. The best answers always came from candidates who had a wide range of listening experiences on which to draw and were able recall relevant details of what their attentive ears had noticed. Where asked for, opinions were offered but supporting 'arguments' were not always convincing.

- 7 A very small number of candidates chose this question. They were usually able to give an adequate definition but the discussion of actual cases was often very sketchy and too many simplistic

comparisons were made between their status as subject to 'patronage' or 'free-lance'. Centres are urged to do more to help their candidates understand the contexts in which music comes into being, particularly that of the 18th and early 19th centuries.

- 8** Candidates relished this question. Many were able to make sensible comparisons between the sounds of the voices of named pop and opera singers, and to offer convincing practical reasons for the differences. Quite a number of excellent answers showed a very advanced understanding of the anatomy and mechanism of the voice, and explained in some detail the effects of different types of technique.
- 9** Most answers showed a lively awareness of the danger of 'homogenisation' in today's music. Candidates with direct experience of both a traditional music culture and Western music were able to cite stimulating examples of composers attempting to bring the two together in ways that acknowledges and respects both. Few, however, went on to explain in any detail how this marriage was manifest in the music.
- 10** On the whole answers demonstrated a good understanding of the role of tempo in a wide range of music, candidates often drawing on their own experience in performance. Some had reflected on interpretative issues and showed insight into the problem of determining 'intention', the best-informed of them being able to discuss knowledgeably changing concepts of tempo over time. A few thoughtful candidates explored cover versions, in which new performers adopted different tempi from the originals for expressive purposes. Many, however, probed no further than straightforward contrasts of slow/fast, the former usually being associated with sad/peaceful and the latter with 'excited'. It was unfortunate that a small number of candidates fell back on examples they had already discussed fully in answers to earlier questions (several returning to the role of tempi in establishing the moods of the songs cited in **Question 5**).

MUSIC

<p>Paper 8663/06 Investigation and Report</p>

Key message:

Centres are advised to study the requirements for both 9703/05 and 8663/06 carefully, particularly in the following respects:

- Candidates must complete the form supplied in **Section 6** (of the Syllabus) to certify that their Report is their own work.
- The core findings of the candidate's investigation must be supported by an accompanying cassette/CD of recorded examples, carefully chosen and explained. (**Section 4**)
- A full bibliography and discography must be appended. (**Section 4**)

General comments (both levels)

In some cases, teachers had not signed the candidate's form, potentially casting doubt on the independence of the work and, in a few, no form at all was enclosed. The inclusion of a CD of judiciously-chosen short audio examples is not only a very valuable way for candidates to substantiate their judgements and demonstrate their understanding of the music, it often also contributes significantly to the evidence that the work is, indeed, independent of other commentators (Assessment Criterion 4). It is not acceptable for candidates simply to direct the Examiner to YouTube clips, as some did. Where the purpose of the Investigation was to compare multiple interpretations of a single, substantial piece, unless audio examples were enclosed, Examiners lacked crucial evidence to verify the accuracy of the candidate's judgements. There were also many Reports that offered neither a bibliography nor a discography and several that quoted sources without acknowledgement. If extensive, the latter practice constitutes plagiarism which is treated as dishonesty. Changing a few words here or there, or paraphrasing closely, is equally reprehensible. When counter-signing the candidate's declaration that the report is all their own, independent work, teachers are affirming that they have reason to believe this to be true.

The full title of the component should also be noted: Investigation and Report. While the last of the five Assessment Criteria explicitly rewards Communication, it is as a measurement of the candidate's effectiveness in communicating the findings of an investigation conducted over a sustained period of time. Work in both components should represent half the total time spent on this subject during the year, i.e. it is equal in its demand and weighting with whichever other component is being studied. It is not, therefore, a piece of work that can be executed satisfactorily in a few days, in the form of a desk-bound Internet trawl. There was a noticeable difference in achievement between candidates who had visited a handful of websites over one or two days and those who had actively sought out appropriate books, articles and other sources of learning, including recordings. The report should reflect the learning developed by reading and listening over a sufficient period of time for familiarity with a body of music, reflection and understanding to grow to the point where a convincing point of view can be demonstrated.

9703/05

There were some impressive Reports which reflected breadth and depth in their investigations as well as, in some outstanding cases, considerable intellectual maturity. Some included evidence of wider reading and listening in the form of the notes they had made as they gathered their information and responded to what they heard. Quite a number of candidates, however, had lacked the initiative to extend their enquiries much beyond the introductions they had prepared for their Recital in Component 3. Some of these, while promising in other respects, tended to dwell overlong on aspects of technical and practical difficulties to be overcome in performance. While some of these discussions were enlightening, sometimes showing how technique had been consciously harnessed to interpretive intent, the assessment of success in these matters must rest on the actual performance presented for Component 3. It was not relevant to the investigation of

the music itself. In some of these instances the urging of the instrumental (or vocal) teacher's voice was also strongly felt.

On the whole, candidates who discussed a wide range of repertoire, which had informed their approach to their composition for Component 4, presented convincing evidence of real development in listening, understanding and critical reflection. Some of these had worked patiently and intelligently in pursuit of off-the-beaten-track repertoire to fulfil what was communicated as a quest of very personal significance.

8663/06

A wide variety of topics produced an equally wide range of achievement. Most candidates had chosen wisely. In some cases it was obvious that the chance to explore and explain repertoire for which there was already a history of personal enthusiasm had been seized energetically. A small handful of topics overlapped with aspects of the repertoire for **Section A** in Component 1. The Syllabus expressly warns against such duplication:

...extend skills and ...understanding by applying them to music from a different repertoire or tradition from the ones studied in Component 1 (**Notes on teaching the syllabus**).

While interest in the music of Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven may have been stimulated by the study of **Section A** repertoire, it is advisable to steer candidates away from this period, even where the intended focus is a slightly different genre, because some of the essential contextual background will almost inevitably duplicate what is properly the province of Component 1. Although many of the candidates that did overlap in this way showed a fairly good level of analytic understanding, matters that pertained directly to **Section A** could not be credited, e.g. a paragraph outlining the principles of Sonata Form, or Haydn's employment at Esterházy. The ability to apply this knowledge and understanding independently to other repertoire, however, could be rewarded.

A great many candidates wrote knowledgeably about specific aspects of jazz or popular music. Some, however, who probably did know the music very well, were not able to be as convincing because their discussions centred too much on lyrics, leaving the music itself unexamined. A few others strayed too far from their examination of the music into eulogistic reminiscences about first encounters with the repertoire/performer and effusive accounts of how important the music had become to them.

Most of the Centres new to this Component had fulfilled the requirement for audio examples to be enclosed with the Report, some of their candidates doing so generously and appropriately. Examiners listened carefully (and often very appreciatively) because the extent to which a musical example demonstrated the point in the text threw significant light on the level of the candidate's understanding, aural perception and analytic skill. Conversely, CDs that contained complete pieces of music that were not explained in the text (or, in some cases, even referred to) could make no contribution to such assessment. In a few cases the examples were not identified, either in the text or a discography. A very small handful of CDs proved to be blank.