MUSIC

> **Paper 8663/01**
> **Listening**

Key messages

- Write clearly, both in terms of English and handwriting
- Use specific musical examples that are clearly recognisable
- Read the question carefully and make sure the response is entirely relevant
- Follow the instructions on the paper

General comments

The general standard has shown a continued improvement. Some impressive papers stood out at the top end of the mark range but most candidates knew the music, understood significant points about it, and were able to describe, in their own words, what they were hearing. A good number of papers delved straight into answering the question, where others unnecessarily included much irrelevant information in lengthy introductions or conclusions, which did not add anything significant to the response. It is also unnecessary to write the question out at the beginning of the response, and any planning should be crossed out.

Handwriting was generally legible and the standard of English was mostly good. A small number of candidates answered more than one question from each section, ignoring the rubric of the paper. An equally small number did not indicate the question number addressed, or wrote what was clearly the wrong question number, causing Examiners to make a best guess.

The tendency for unasked-for 'blow-by-blow' commentaries was reduced this session, with candidates managing to highlight significant features instead. Section A, with its requirement for a more detailed familiarity with the set works, was sometimes less well-answered than Section B and C questions. In some cases, the brevity of responses (e.g. fewer than three sentences) prevents some candidates from being able to demonstrate sufficient familiarity; there were also some longer responses which avoided relevant points, or discussed completely unrelated (non-musical) matters.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

This section requires close familiarity with the prescribed works; the best responses used vivid commentaries and well-chosen examples to answer the question relevantly. Candidates should be reminded that referring to timings on recordings is to be avoided, as the Examiner will not necessarily have access to the same recording; relating examples to where they sit in the overall structure, as well as in relation to each other, will make references perfectly clear.

Question 1

This question was the most popular in Section A. The variations were mostly well-known, with a few candidates providing very detailed and technically correct commentaries. A small number of responses became very confused over the numbering of the variations, clearly referring to the wrong music. There was a lack of clarity in some responses, which could have been improved by using musical terminology clearly and accurately. For example, some candidates could have been clearer when referring to the melody (sometimes, this obviously did not refer to the principal theme), or conveying the difference between 'staccato' and 'pizzicato', or 'dotted' and 'staccato', which were also sometimes confused.

Question 2

A relatively small number of candidates chose question 2. Of those who did respond, the best answers clearly described the structure, and focussed on ways in which the principal theme has been used. Other strong responses described all the sections, including instrumentation and differences, giving a clear commentary. Weaker responses could have been improved by being clearer about the structure (it is primarily a Rondo, with some variation of the A section, not a Theme and Variations movement).

Question 3

This question was not generally answered well. Many candidates were unable to enumerate the composition of each orchestra convincingly. Some were able to paint the broad differences, perhaps referring to specific instrumentation. Very few managed to illustrate their account of the orchestras with specific examples drawn from various movements of the two pieces. Others gave a commentary of the two pieces, often referring to irrelevant features. This highlights the importance of reading the question.

Section B

Although close familiarity with Core Works is to be commended, the strongest candidates showed familiarity with a wider range of repertoire where it was required by the question. In order to show a well-developed understanding, candidates need to relate musical features and techniques to their effects.

Question 4

This was the most popular question chosen for Section B, with the two most popular movements chosen for description being II and IV. Candidates clearly responded well to the programme, although some only had a general understanding. The very best answers had a very clear understanding of the programme and how it was reflected in detailed musical examples. Often, the detail of the programme was known better than the actual music. Of particular relevance was the use of the *idée fixe*, which many mentioned without explanation or exemplification; equally, identification of the instrumentation in each iteration was elusive for some.

Question 5

The best responses showed a clear understanding of different types of recitative, illustrated with reference to specific musical examples from core and non-core works, and contrasted this with arias, again with clear examples. Weaker answers became confused between 'aria' and 'recitative', often referring to inappropriate examples. Although many mentioned word-painting, very few candidates exemplified this, instead offering vague descriptions of what word-painting *might* look like: specific examples from repertoire and an explanation of their effect should be given.

Question 6

Although there were some strong responses to this question, which addressed all elements convincingly, a good number described both death scenes from the core works, where the question asked candidates to choose one scene and compare it with another similar scene from another opera or musical. The description of the death scene was, for most candidates, clear, with musical features related to the tragic mood. However, very few candidates offered a suitable scene for brief comparison, with some choosing the other core work, some choosing film music (especially when this was instrumental), and a few others offering Pop examples.

Section C

The best candidates organised their thoughts logically and presented them in an orderly essay, point by point, each illustrated by reference to relevant musical matters, drawn from study of a wide range of repertoire and personal experience.

Question 7

This question was very popular, although not often done very well. A small number of candidates showed very good contextual knowledge of 18th/19th-century Viennese concert life, but needed to give more detailed comparisons with the modern day. Others still had little knowledge of Viennese concert life, but gave many convincing examples of modern concert life. In particular, details of public/private concerts were somewhat lacking. A narrow view of modern concert life restricted the achievement of some candidates. In general,

the weakest responses ignored the prompts in the question, or focused on patronage and composers without relating these to concert life. This indicates that some candidates did not read the question carefully.

Question 8

It was evident that most candidates choosing to answer this question were a little confused about the two terms. Nonetheless, some still managed to provide articulate responses with reference to a number of well-chosen examples. Weaker responses needed to go beyond definitions and lists of genres.

Question 9

Along with question 7, this was a very popular choice for candidates, some of whom were able to draw on significant personal experience to illustrate their answers. A small number referred to a wide range of examples, but many did not consider a wide enough range of issues. The best answers considered the question from a variety of perspectives, from conductors' or performers' choices, to cover songs or technical ability. Weaker responses needed to refer to more specific examples and focus on how performances of the *same* piece might sound different.

Question 10

A small number of candidates chose to answer this question, with a good number doing very well. The very best answers gave detailed information about the construction of the double bass, as well as a variety of techniques (beyond the obvious 'pizzicato' and 'arco'), and specific examples illustrating a range of performing roles. Weaker responses gave very brief details of the parts of a double bass and limited discussion of performing roles to a vague description of 'supporting', with no detailed examples; these could have been improved by referring to the numerous examples in the set and core works.

MUSIC

**Paper 8663/06
Investigation and Report**

Key message

A Report in the form <u>only</u> of a series of 'Listening Logs' may not be sufficient by itself to provide evidence of reflection and critical thought.

General comments

Overall, there has been a significant improvement in the performance of candidates in this component. Most Centres had advised their candidates well by encouraging them to focus on an appropriate, manageable, body of music. There was a wide range of topics ranging from those focusing on currently popular albums, musicals, films or video games, to wider assessments of the work of individual composers or performers, as well as the development of an instrument's playing techniques and repertoire, the history of specific genres or styles, and non-Western traditional and folk musics. A few candidates tackled very wide topics, e.g. 'Analysis of the Composition and Evolution of Noise Music,' 'Ethnomusicology,' 'Classical Music's Influence on Modern Composition.' All of these were potentially daunting undertakings. They required a fairly advanced level of musical knowledge and experience, a wide range of relevant listening and reading, and the intellectual ability to assimilate and make sense of a great deal of new material. In the first discussions between the Centre and a candidate about what might be a suitable focus and methodology for the Investigation, a realistic assessment of what the individual might be capable of needs to be made. This will avoid candidates embarking on an over-ambitious project that might overwhelm them. In the event, some proved themselves very capable of carrying out such an Investigation and produced very convincing Reports, which were clearly based on through research into both literature and relevant bodies of music, while others found it harder to move towards independent conclusions.

Some Centres, as in other recent sessions, had suggested that candidates begin by listening carefully to quite an extensive range of music, using Copland's categories to record their immediate perceptions. Many wordy, narrative commentaries resulted, often piece by piece throughout an entire album, describing 'who does what/where.' This resulted in very extensive 'listening logs' that gave much evidence of attentive listening, many candidates did not move on to reflect further. Often weaker candidates just showed their admiration of the subject. The Report needed to go further than 'this is what I hear' to explain 'this is what I make of what I hear.' To reflect, after recording their initial perceptions, the candidates who showed that they had made further progress often chose a handful of specific pieces (perhaps 4 or 5 out of a total of 9 or more) to explore comparatively from the whole album (or film/musical). In such cases it was not necessary to include the listening log – it had been overtaken and a higher level of understanding demonstrated.

The most successful Investigations followed two patterns. Some candidates had a point of view to start with which they wanted to explain. Others pursued the answer to a sensible question about the music such as something that intrigued them - 'why does it work so well?' for example. Having thoroughly explored each piece, they were able to make general observations about style and technique that they could support with well-selected examples drawn from <u>across</u> all the separate pieces. Those candidates who reached a convincing conclusion about common stylistic features, or what bound the pieces together into a satisfying unity, were in the minority, but some of these produced very strong Investigations. The best of these were also careful to identify exactly which moments in the music they were discussing by giving track and timing references. Such precision almost invariably supported and strengthened the argument. Conversely, many CDs containing 45 minutes or more of music, sometimes as many as 15 whole pieces, were enclosed without any attempt having been made to identify each one, neither in a Track List nor cross-referenced in the text.

Most candidates showed at least a basic understanding of common technical terms but many descriptions that set out to discuss, e.g. texture, went on to describe dynamics and tempo in the same paragraph. A few were successful in identifying vivid examples of 'text-painting' but many were confused about what the techniques were, some describing unconvincing examples of 'tone-colour', or 'timbre'. In a few cases, although terms were used to organise the Report, there was little understanding of how to apply them in listening to the music, e.g. 'the melody goes up and down all the time.'

Contextual aspects were often confined to a very brief biography and a listing of Grammy Awards and album sales. This was unfortunate as it was clear that candidates usually knew their genre well. Only those who had really thought about the purpose of their Investigation were successful in 'placing' their chosen repertoire in a wider perspective. Although sources are more rare for the most recent pop music and musicals it should still have been possible for candidates to define the genre more precisely, compare with contemporaries or immediate predecessors, or trace influences.

Most candidates who chose a focus with a range of scholarly literature available had read well and selectively. Having assimilated it, they were able to apply their learning independently to what they were hearing. Some were less confident and too tentative to try to apply the judgements offered in their sources to the music for themselves. While being very careful to acknowledge all quotations very precisely, their Report almost took the form of a 'collage' of the opinions of others. The process of selecting and presenting these will, to some extent, indicate understanding but it falls short of demonstrating that the candidate has made the knowledge their own.

Many Reports lacked both a bibliography and a discography as well as a CD of relevant examples. These are all requirements for this component and without them the script is incomplete. Candidates are also required to sign (and their teachers to endorse) a statement that they understand what plagiarism is and that their work is entirely free of it. Most Centres had advised their candidates well in this respect (and, to some extent, the reliance on personal listening logs may have been a way of avoiding it). However it seems that it is not always clear to candidates that citing a source in a footnote does not mean that the precise words, phrases and musical examples need to be carefully indicated in quotation marks when used. Not doing this, and systematically substituting a synonym for one of the source's words is not acceptable.