

MUSIC

Paper 0410/03
Performing

General comments

Much of the coursework presented this session was of a high standard, and many candidates displayed performing ability well in advance of the expected level.

Where candidates offer programmes which are rather too long or consist of a number of individual items adding to an over-length submission, Centres should take care that all performances submitted are of a similar level of achievement. Otherwise a weaker “filler” performance may jeopardise the mark which would otherwise be achieved.

Attention should also be paid to the total duration of the submission – candidates are unlikely to qualify for high marks if the total duration falls below the syllabus requirements.

A further area of concern is where weaker candidates suffered through the presentation of an incomplete submission – Centres are reminded that both solo *and* ensemble performances are required.

Solos

Most solo performances were of a suitable standard and, in many cases, were well-chosen for the candidates’ individual skills. Weaknesses were most evident in vocal performances, where the music chosen was too often not performed at a comfortable pitch to suit the candidate’s voice – either the overall pitch was too high or too low, or the vocal range of the music was simply too great. Where candidates choose to sing, but have not received any formal vocal training, Centres should exercise care in awarding high marks for technical control which are not justified by, for example, the quality and matching of tone across the range, intonation, the breath control and phrasing displayed, and the quality of diction and projection. Many vocal candidates fell short of expected standards in these respects.

Ensembles

Moderators do recognise that there may be a number of restrictions on the repertoire and groupings available for ensemble use, but it is of supreme importance to the candidates’ overall achievement that the demands and opportunities offered by the chosen ensemble pieces are suitable for the candidates’ technical ability. In more than a few instances, candidates who had demonstrated advanced solo skills were disadvantaged by offering ensemble pieces which were either too short, or which lacked sufficient technical challenge and scope for expression.

Centres should also take care in selecting music for ensemble performance that the pieces are truly ensemble material. A performance on a solo instrument does not become an ensemble simply by the addition of an accompaniment – this is merely an accompanied solo, and this definition is universally accepted. Similarly, the addition of a rudimentary drum part to, for example, an accompanied solo song, does not offer adequate demonstration of ensemble skills by the vocalist.

Once again, the Moderators feel it necessary to reiterate the essential syllabus demands: “an ensemble performance should normally consist of three or more live performers; the candidate’s part should not be consistently doubled; the candidate should demonstrate true ensemble skills with the other players.” Where there is little or no scope for the candidate to demonstrate in the realisation of their part a *response* to the “live” actions and performance decisions of the other players, it is unlikely that they will be able to access marks at the higher levels, nor is this likely to be considered an ensemble piece. Moderators are looking for an extension to the skills demonstrated in the solo section.

Centres are asked to observe the requirement for “live” performance – it is not acceptable for a candidate to multi-track an ensemble. The syllabus credits interactive ensemble skills, not diversity of solo skills.

In both solo and ensemble performances it is expected that copies of the printed music are submitted. Moderators can accurately identify what the performer intends. Any intentional deviations from the scores submitted should be carefully marked – this is especially true in the case of downloaded scores, particularly guitar tab.

Assessment

Centres are once again referred to the distance training materials as the benchmark standard for this component. Whilst some Centres marked the coursework with care, there were many instances where even basic accuracy and fluency were lacking, but were nonetheless awarded high marks. Assessors are encouraged to consider carefully the individual mark descriptors in the syllabus. Comments should refer specifically to the performances submitted, not to the quality of any other performing during the course, nor to any progress made during the course, nor to the performance of the same pieces on a different occasion from that recorded.

Centres are asked to be particularly vigilant in transcribing marks: there were a number of arithmetic errors on working mark-sheets. More worrying was the transcription of marks to MS1s where, in a number of cases, the final recorded mark bore no resemblance to any of the marks on the WMS.

Some Centres use copies of the assessment grids from the syllabus on which to make their initial assessments. This is admirable in that it provides direct reference to the marking criteria, but it is absolutely vital that the marks from these sheets are correctly transferred to the WMS which will be submitted, and the five categories carefully and accurately correlated. A number of Centres had transposed the marks of some categories (as was clear from the assessment sheets also included). If other Centres are using a similar process, but not submitting the initial assessment sheets, they may also be making similar errors, but Moderators will not be aware. This may in turn inevitably lead to incorrect comments on the quality of marking.

Presentation of coursework

This was a particularly difficult session with regard to successful access to much of the electronic material which was submitted. In some instances as many as five different formats were recorded onto a single disc, and many types and sizes of disc were submitted. In other instances a vast array of separate discs of differing formats was submitted, often with little or no guide to their content and/or format.

Centres are reminded that all materials should be submitted in a single format. This format should ideally be CD, with cassette tape an acceptable substitute. DVD is also acceptable. In the case of CD / DVD, all discs must be correctly finalised to play in standard audio and video players. Discs should not be left in PC or Mac format.

The primary concern in coursework recordings for moderation should be that of audio quality. Mp3 recordings at low bit-rates (even when transcribed to CD) will not produce recordings of a quality which enables accurate moderation. DVD recordings on analogue cameras will almost certainly never produce acceptable audio quality without external microphones. In a number of DVD submissions the performances were all but inaudible over the recorded noise of the camera motors.

Submissions should be recorded on *new* media. Re-used tapes / CD-RWs had not always been adequately cleared of previous material. Several discs were received with considerable surface damage and/or accumulation of debris which necessitated a thorough cleaning and renovation process before they could be accessed.

Centres are reminded to check carefully that materials for composing and performing are correctly identified and submitted separately to the correct Moderator. Once again there were many instances of mixed coursework which delays the moderation process whilst the materials are identified and re-directed.

MUSIC

Paper 0410/04
Composing

General comments

The overall quality of compositions submitted in this session was not as good as last year. The standard of administration by Centres was also quite poor; in some cases the most basic instructions in the Syllabus had been disregarded, making the Moderators' work unnecessarily difficult.

Internal marking was almost always too generous, often by a considerable margin. A few Centres submitted accurate marks, but there were very few cases where the Moderators needed to raise the marks.

Individual Assessment Criteria

(a) Ideas

There were several compositions in which the ideas lacked imagination and creativity. In many such pieces, there was little evidence of aural perception skills being used to guide the work. Most candidates wrote for traditional ensembles, or for solo instruments (not only the piano but also various wind, brass or string instruments). The musical ideas in pieces for solo instruments did not take sufficient account of the particular characteristics of the instruments concerned. It is usually more difficult for candidates at this level to compose a piece for an unaccompanied orchestral instrument than to write for an accompanied instrument. It seemed to the Moderators that several candidates had chosen such pieces in the mistaken belief that the task would be simpler.

(b) Structure

Many pieces relied on formulaic structures such as Ternary Form. Ideas were often under-developed as the pieces progressed. On the other hand, some candidates had tried to write in forms that were too difficult for them to handle (Sonata Form, for example). Few pieces had the necessary amount of contrast to make a satisfactory structure.

(c) Use of Medium

Apart from the reservation mentioned above about pieces for unaccompanied orchestral instruments, most compositions were capable of being played on the instruments for which they were written. Some candidates did not specify an instrument, and it was not always clear (especially when the recording had been generated on a computer) which instruments were intended.

Some candidates wrote pieces for electro-acoustic sounds. In most cases these lacked the necessary attention to purely musical aspects of the composition, but relied on a certain degree of ingenuity in the manipulation of technology.

(d) Compositional Technique

The aspect of technique which was most often problematic was the harmonisation of melodic ideas. There were many instances where the harmony simply did not fit the implications of the melody. Poor cadence formation and over-use of 2nd inversion chords (often in inappropriate places) remain persistent problems.

(e) Score Presentation / Notation

Most scores were computer-generated, using a variety of notation programs. In general, scores were accurately notated as far as the notes were concerned, though some lacked comprehensive performance instructions (dynamic markings, phrasing, articulation, etc.). There were a few graphic scores.

Administration

The quality of administration was much poorer than in previous examination sessions. It is vital that Centres understand the procedures explained in the Syllabus and follow them carefully. The most common problems included the following:

- Composition coursework was included in the envelope for Performing or vice versa;
- Inaccurate addition of marks;
- Inaccurate transcription of marks from individual Working Mark Sheets to the computer Mark Sheet;
- Omission of important parts of the submission (recordings, scores, individual Working Mark Sheets, computer Mark Sheet MS1, etc.);
- Incorrect use of Internal Moderation.

In addition to those problems, there were several other matters which occurred in a smaller number of cases, including the following:

- Not recording all the compositions;
- Failing to include an accurate list of pieces on a CD, or to announce the candidate's name and the title of the piece as an introduction to the recorded performance;
- Submitting recordings in formats that depend upon particular computer software (e.g. iTunes).