

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/11

Listening, Analysis and Historical
Study Sections A and B

Key messages

- Candidates do not need to judge which recording is more historically aware in **Section A** when the aural evidence shows that both performances demonstrate good awareness in this regard
- time management during the examination is very important; some candidates did not attempt the final question which carries the most marks in **Section B**

General comments

Section A was answered fully by all candidates and usually with a pleasing degree of success; a wider variety of achievement was displayed in the questions in **Section B** in particular, but it was clear that the majority of candidates understood the nature of the tasks. Some candidates appear to have run out of time and neglected to answer the final question in **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

Answers to this question were generally successful and aural perception was good, although the level of detail and ability to demonstrate an accurate understanding of performance practice varied. Most candidates noticed the difference in tempo between the two recordings for the *allegro* section, and many also commented on the difference in the *largo* too. Most commented on the different ways in which the performers elaborated the *largo* section; a fair number accurately identified the lute in Performance 2, although it was quite common for 'guitar' to be stated here. This was not a particular problem except for those candidates who went on to conclude that this was therefore not a historically aware performance. The differences in pitch were usually noticed and explained accurately, and most candidates could also perceive the differences in instrumentation between modern and historical instruments. Although there was much that could have been said about articulation by the flute in particular, this was an area which was often neglected. Ornamentation was usually accurately discussed, and dynamics were mentioned in general, although fewer candidates discussed the issue of balance in real detail, particularly in the passages for solo flute. Whilst it was clear that most candidates had a good awareness of issues surrounding performance practice, the ability to relate this to the actual extract was sometimes less successful. This was particularly noticeable in some candidates' discussions about the perceived inability of baroque instruments to sustain long legato phrases resulting in faster tempi for historically aware performances, where in fact there were no long legato phrases to sustain in this piece and it was the performance on modern instruments that was faster anyway. Some candidates are still too eager to pronounce one recording as being more historically aware than the other at the end of every sub-section of their essay, in extreme cases neglecting to acknowledge that Performance 1 was perfectly historically aware in every respect, but was simply played on modern instruments.

Section B, Topic B1 Instrumental Music

Question 2

- (a) The brass and woodwind sections were correctly identified by virtually all candidates.
- (b) Most candidates identified where the harmony changed (bar 15) and gained some credit for this, although fewer were able to accurately describe the change itself.
- (c) Most candidates gained at least some credit here, usually identifying the addition of timpani and/or the overlap with the faster section.

Question 3

The use of the same motif at the beginning of each passage was the most commonly identified feature.

Question 4

- (a) This question was answered well, with a good number of candidates identifying the bassoon.
- (b) Again, this question was answered well (D flat major).
- (c) A good number of candidates correctly identified the perfect cadence.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates gained at least some credit here, and many achieved full marks.
- (b) Some of the answers were rather imprecise, but in general candidates were able to at least partially describe the overlapping effect, and a number also commented the change in octave.

Question 6

- (a) The melody dictation question was well answered in general, and a number of candidates gained full marks.
- (b) This question was less well answered; many candidates failed to identify that this was the second subject although more were able to identify the key as being the relative major.

Question 7

The rhythmic error in bar 127 was spotted and accurately corrected more often than the melodic error in bar 137.

Question 8

There was a wide variety of achievement in this question. Some candidates discussed the context of the work as having a literary basis and made comparisons with similar pieces. Other common points of comparison in successful answers focused on the modest orchestra and conservative musical style, and again made appropriate reference to suitable pieces. Less successful answers tended to focus on small details, and tried to draw inappropriate generalisations from these; others displayed very little awareness of other repertoire from the period. A small number of candidates drew comparisons with chamber music, rather than orchestral works, and some appear to have run out of time before attempting this question. This question carries the most marks in **Section B** and candidates should try to ensure that they at least attempt it.

Section B, Topic B2 Vocal Music

Question 9

- (a) This question was answered reasonably well.
- (b) The most commonly relevant points made by candidates referred to the ascending interval (for hope) and the descending interval (for death). Not all candidates discussed the interpretation in the performance.

Question 10

- (a) Most candidates gained at least some credit by describing the arpeggiated pattern; others accurately identified the use of pizzicato but fewer candidates commented on the use of triplets for this pattern.
- (b) Only a small number of candidates accurately identified the augmented sixth chord.
- (c) Many candidates identified the use of the dominant seventh, but fewer accurately named the correct key.
- (d) Some candidates answered this question correctly.

Question 11

The melody dictation question was completed with varying degrees of success. Some candidates gained full marks; others went astray during the second bar, and a small number of candidates did not attempt the question.

Question 12

The turn was accurately identified by the majority of the candidates, and the diminished sevenths bar was also identified well; fewer candidates accurately placed the imperfect cadence.

Question 13

Most candidates gained at least some credit here, most often for recognising the use of the same melodic content, and for the addition of the voice in the second passage.

Question 14

Many candidates identified and corrected both errors accurately, but some did not attempt this question.

Question 15

The most successful answers were able to discuss the context of this extract being an example of bel canto opera, and made suitable comparisons with other works (most commonly by Verdi). They were aware of the importance of the melody and the lesser role attributed to harmony and orchestration (and could usually therefore describe the significant differences from the music of Wagner). Some less successful answers tended to write about other works without actually drawing a comparison with this extract, and a few candidates did not attempt the question.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/12

Listening, Analysis and Historical
Study Sections C and D

Key Messages

- Candidates need to be sure they make accurate references to the score in answers to questions about the Prescribed Works; In the **(b)** questions in **Section C**, candidates need to draw on a range of relevant repertoire to support the points they make. This range is sometimes too narrow to permit them to write a full enough answer to score high marks.
- Questions in **Section D** often require candidates to bring together information that draws on different aspects of the course. They often find this difficult and may need additional guidance in developing the skills involved.

General Comments

The majority of candidates answered on either **Topic C2: *The Origins of Opera*** or **Topic C3: *Modernism in France***. A small number chose **Topic C1: *English Church Music of the Late Renaissance*** or **Topic C4: *Jazz***.

In **Topic C1**, in addition to **Question (a)** there were more answers to **(b)(i)** than to **(b)(ii)**. This was also true of **Topic C2**.

In **Topic C3**, both of the **(b)** questions received a comparable number of answers.

In **Topic C4**, answers to all three questions were significantly less good than in the other topics.

In **Section D**, there were answers to all five questions, with none emerging as significantly the most popular.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section C

Question C1(a)

Candidates knew that the Head Motif occurs at the beginning of the Kyrie, Gloria and Agnus Dei. They were less secure in identifying places where it is used in the course of a movement, or in altered versions. Some candidates wrote about various subsidiary motifs as well, which was not required by the question.

Question C1(b)(i)

Candidates wrote at some length about the new genres of English church music, especially the Verse Anthem; they did not appear to be as familiar with the Service, or even with the evening Canticles. There was some confusion about chronology, too: for example, some candidates believed that Thomas Cranmer was responsible for the revision of the Book of Common Prayer at the beginning of Elizabeth I's reign, whereas he was no longer alive at that point.

Question C1(b)(ii)

Candidates were broadly familiar with the notion that music to English texts tend to be more syllabic, and music to Latin texts more melismatic. They knew that some pre-Reformation English polyphony was very complex, in contrast to pieces such as Tallis's *If Ye Love Me*, which was frequently cited as an example of a simpler approach.

In neither of the (b) questions did candidates mention any of the major English composers who escaped to the Continent (notably Peter Philips and John Bull). The number of composers they could name was really very small and most commonly restricted to Tallis and Byrd (there were a few references to Merbecke's *Booke of Common Praier Noted*).

Question C2(a)

Answers to this question summarised the structure of the Prologue quite well (a relatively simple matter), but were often not as good in their approach to the detail. The fact that the *Ritornello* is used at various points in the subsequent drama was often noted, although several candidates seemed not to know exactly where. Answers frequently ignored basic features of the music, including the key/mode, tonality and cadences, as well as the obvious word painting at the end. Some candidates wrote at length about dissonances, when what they were describing were simple anticipations.

Question C2(b)(i)

Several of the candidates who answered this question referred to writers such as Zarlino and Artusi. They did not always know exactly what Zarlino said in his *Istitutione Harmoniche* (the later *Dimostrationi harmoniche* was much less often mentioned), although they knew in general terms what he stood for. Galilei's *Dialogo* was also seldom mentioned, but the Artusi/Monteverdi controversy was well summarised. Candidates often found it difficult to define the difference between *Prima prattica* and *Seconda prattica*. It was often assumed, for example, that Italian madrigals belong to the *Seconda prattica*, mainly on the grounds that the amount of word painting they contain suggests that the words are more significant than the music. This, however, ignores the fact that the polyphonic techniques of the *Prima prattica* formed the basis of madrigal composition up to and including composers such as Marenzio and even Monteverdi. When candidates referred to specific pieces in their answers, the points they made were not always accurate.

Question C2(b)(ii)

The same point about a lack of clarity in distinguishing between *Prima prattica* and *Seconda prattica* tended to hamper the candidates who answered this question. They knew, however, that madrigals were most commonly in five parts and that monodies were essentially solo pieces with instrumental accompaniment. Among the best answers were those in which it was made clear that composers such as Caccini wrote monodies as independent songs as well as incorporating them into the new genre of *Dramma per musica*.

Question C3(a)

There was a wide variation in the standard of answers to this question. The best responses related the thematic content and orchestration to the action on stage and explained how the music suits a 'grotesque' dance. Of the three issues listed in the question, thematic content and orchestration formed the main focus of most answers. Few described the structure of the section as a whole (the macro-structure), but there were several attempts to describe bar-form passages in the micro-structure. There were some good accounts of the octatonic nature of the opening bassoon trio, but references to the harmony were otherwise scarce and often inaccurate.

Question C3(b)(i)

Many of the candidates who answered this question wrote with evident admiration for Satie's peculiarities. They mainly believed him to be both significant (particularly in his influence on Debussy and on *Les six*) and an influential eccentric (particularly in his curious annotations of his music and in his apparently nonsensical instructions to the performer). They wrote, often at length, about the *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes* and about *Parade* (although most of them did not seem to know that Satie was vehemently opposed to the extra-musical sounds in *Parade*). They knew about his connections with the surrealist movement.

Question C3(b)(ii)

Many candidates were also well prepared to answer this question. The two celebrated riots (at the premières of *The Rite of Spring* and *Parade* respectively) were duly mentioned, together with a variety of other pieces – *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* being the most frequently cited. There were some candidates whose knowledge of the topic, both in terms of repertoire and chronology, was insufficient for them to give an adequate answer.

Topic C4

This Topic was offered by a small number of candidates and was not generally well done. Answers were inaccurate to a substantial degree in many cases; some candidates made statements such as ‘by the 1940s people had lost interest in jazz’ (this about the big band era), or ‘Miles Davis used all the modes in one key’, or ‘African Rhythms developed through ignorance’.

Section D

Section D questions ranged from the positively brilliant to answers which did little more than restate the question. The quality of argument and of written English was not always good. Candidates who answered the questions which invited them to express an opinion often fared less well than those who answered the more explicitly historical questions.

Question D1

There were some very good answers to this question. Candidates referred to sources of information such as treatises (Quantz and Leopold Mozart in particular) and *Urtext* scores, and wrote about issues that included tempo, ornamentation and vibrato, pitch and the use of ‘period’ instruments. A number of candidates wrote about ‘treaties’ when they clearly meant ‘treatises’. The best essays related the information to personal experience of performances the candidates had heard or (better still) taken part in.

Question D2

Although most candidates demonstrated reasonable general knowledge of nineteenth-century music, some confusion was also on display here. The important word ‘not’ in the question was sometimes overlooked with some candidates writing about the composers who *were* attracted to the progressive tendencies of Romanticism, instead of writing about those who were not. There was confusion, too, about which composers belonged in which group: some candidates tried to show that Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms were the main progressive composers. On the other hand, the view of Brahms as a conservative was challenged by some, using Schoenberg’s *Brahms the Progressive* to support an excellent argument. Other excellent evidence of wider-than-usual reading included references to Dahlhaus on Mendelssohn and Robert Fink on the influence of Wagner’s *Tristan* on Brahms’s First Symphony.

Question D3

This was another question that a few candidates did not read carefully enough. They were asked to choose a single song cycle, and to give examples from that one work of how the music reflects the meaning of the poetry. Candidates who were able to answer the question in the terms in which it was put generally did well. Several took their examples from two, three or more song cycles, while others referred to individual songs that did not come from a song cycle at all. Nevertheless, most could show some of the ways in which the music relates to the meaning of the poetry – or at least to particular words or images in the poems.

Question D4

This question elicited some very discursive answers which were not always successful. One of the main problems was the evident narrowness of some candidates' knowledge and experience of music and their consequent difficulty in identifying which composers might be counted as 'major figures' and which as 'lesser figures'. The best essays came from candidates who realised that most composers began by imitating their teachers or mentors: there were many references to Mozart in this context, in relation to both Leopold Mozart and J. C. Bach.

Question D5

This question invited candidates to present two sides of an argument before coming down on one side or the other. Not all answers approached it in this way, however; some treated it instead as an opportunity to set out their views, backed up with little references to music. The majority thought that there was some point in studying music history, but the reasons given varied widely. Some saw the past as a source of techniques to be learned from and applied in new ways, illustrating the point with references to composers who had done exactly that (Brahms 4 was often mentioned here). Others, however, saw the past as a series of demonstrations of everything that a contemporary composer should avoid, because it had all been done before.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/02
Performing

Key messages

- The timings of the recital should be checked carefully well in advance of the examination in case changes to the programme are needed
- Music which is too difficult will usually lead to problems with accuracy and fluency, and a lack of musical communication

General comments

The Examiners once again enjoyed visiting Centres to hear the performances of the candidates, which covered a very wide range of instruments and styles. Arrangements were efficient on the whole, with copies of the sheet music usually available at the start of the session. It would be helpful if Centres could provide candidate numbers as well as names in advance of the visit.

There were some very fine ensemble performances this year, often involving younger candidates as well as other candidates, and it was clear how much rehearsal had gone into these pieces. Solo performances tended to be more variable; some performances were outstanding, although others were less secure technically. As always, candidates should choose repertoire which is within their technical capability at the time of the examination, so that they can perform with confidence and pay full attention to the expressive qualities of their recital. A number of recitals this year suffered from problems with accuracy and fluency; inappropriate choice of repertoire rather than nerves seemed to be the main factor in such cases. As in previous years, more attention to dynamics and characterisation of the performances would be welcome, in order to really communicate the musical intentions of each piece.

Centres are asked to check the timings of the recitals carefully with candidates – some fell considerably short of the minimum of 15 minutes performing time for **Section A**, and others were somewhat longer than the maximum time of 20 minutes. A recital which is too short restricts candidates' access to the highest mark bands, and recitals which are too long can impact on the examining schedule, causing unhelpful delays for subsequent candidates.

Improvising

More candidates offered improvising in **Section B** this year, between them using all of the available tests as a starting point. The resulting improvisations were in a variety of styles, and were often very successful indeed, using the stimulus material effectively to develop a performance with a good sense of structure. This option should certainly be considered by those candidates who wish to perform an advanced recital but whose second instrument is very much less strong than their first.

Accompanying

As always, the Examiners would like to thank all those who undertook the accompanying for these recitals; supporting the candidates in this way is not taken for granted.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

<p>Paper 9800/03 Stylistic Exercises and Composition</p>

Key Messages

- Centres and candidates are asked to take care over the presentation of their submissions. All stylistic imitation exercises should begin with an incipit in which the complete texture is given. This applies to Chorales as much as to the other options.
- Coursework exercises should normally involve the completion of approximately 24 bars (with the exception of Chorales, where somewhat shorter exercises are inevitable).

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A: Stylistic Exercises (Examination)

The majority of candidates chose the Chorale. There were too few answers to other questions for general comments to be made. There were examples of the string quartet, two-part and song accompaniment, but no more than one or two of each.

Some candidates' harmonisations were substantially better than their Coursework exercises. In other cases, the opposite was true. There was quite a lot of rather plain, hymn-like harmony. Modulations were not always secure (missing accidentals were very common); opportunities for transient or passing modulations were almost always missed; suspensions were rarely used; passing notes were often inappropriate. Nevertheless, most candidates seemed to have a developing understanding of this style, and there were a few really outstanding harmonisations.

Section B: Stylistic Exercises (Coursework)

The presentation of Coursework folios was not always as tidy as might be desired and sometimes work was not kept together by a paper clip which meant in some cases there was no order to the folio. It would be very helpful if Centres could encourage their candidates to arrange work in date order, and place it in a document wallet or something of the kind. The Examiners would be especially grateful if plastic pockets were *not* used.

(a) Chorale Harmonisations

This was again the most common option in Group A. In some Centres, the exercises did not appear to have been chosen with a view to increasing their difficulty or complexity as the candidates grew in confidence; the early exercises were just as difficult as later ones.

All exercises should begin with an *incipit* in which the full texture is given. This requirement is observed in every other option, but in the case of chorales is often ignored.

The inclusion of preliminary drafts of the submitted exercises is often very instructive. There were cases, for example, where the teacher's annotations (including MS examples of how to cope with tricky corners) were completely ignored and the original, incorrect, solutions were carried forward from one draft to the next. Sometimes there was an excessive number of drafts, up to an average of as many as eight for each exercise from some Centres.

(b) String Quartets

This option was chosen by a substantial number of candidates, but in general the standard was less good than the chorales. Candidates often attempted a beat-by-beat harmonisation, almost as if they were dealing with the chorale style. When they attempted to write more characteristic quartet

textures, they were often inadvertently led into basic mistakes of harmony. The alto clef proved very challenging to several candidates, resulting in the viola part frequently going below the cello, with incorrect inversions of the chords as a consequence.

Some exercises were unduly short. The syllabus suggests that candidates should complete approximately 24 bars after the *incipit*; some exercises fell substantially short of this – in some cases as few as eight bars. Exercises as short as that do not give enough scope for candidates to demonstrate the extent of their understanding.

While most candidates were happy enough dealing with diatonic harmony in the tonic and with simple modulations (e.g. to the dominant), chromatic harmony, more distant modulation and the correct identification of accented passing notes were recurrent problems. There was little firm evidence that candidates had experienced the quartet genre as living music rather than as dry, academic exercises.

(c) Two-part Baroque Counterpoint

There were too few examples of this option for general comments to be made.

(d) Early Romantic Keyboard Accompaniments

This option was taken in a few Centres, with mixed results. Sometimes the harmony was accurate enough, but quite basic, depending heavily on the given figuration with little or no addition or invention. Several candidates showed insufficient awareness of nineteenth-century harmony and characteristic chromaticisms were not generally very well understood.

(e) Music in Jazz, Popular and Show styles

There were too few examples of this option for general comments to be made.

Section C: Commissioned Composition

Commissions 1 and 3 were the most popular, accounting for the majority of candidates. Of the other options, **Commissions 4(a)** and **4(b)** were each chosen by a relatively small number of candidates, while **Commission 2** was the least popular.

Some candidates included commentaries. While short commentaries can sometimes be helpful, they should be kept in proportion. When candidates write long commentaries with closely-packed detail (sometimes as many as six sides of word-processed A4), they often seemed to have taken time away from the composing itself.

Some otherwise strong compositions were weakened by being in a single key throughout the whole piece.

a) Yeats: *The Everlasting Voices*

Settings of this poem were generally successful in creating a suitably expressive mood, with some good attempts to compose in a style reminiscent of Finzi. They were often less good in terms of structure, some consisting of several distinct sections that bore little relation to each other. Several were written for voice, piano and an *obbligato* instrument, but the extra instrument did not always add much to the song. A few had over-long instrumental sections, which in one or two cases overbalanced the composition.

Many of the recordings were of live performances, which were almost always done with a tangible sense of commitment to the music. In cases where the entire performance was synthesised (including the voice part), it was noticeable that the vocal writing was much less singable.

Among the weaker songs, there were some which were very brief; they often seemed too perfunctory to represent the culmination of two years' work.

(b) Lindsey Buckingham: *Slow Dancing*

Some of the settings were very sensitive to the mood of this lyric, but it was odd to find that some candidates had chosen to compose a piece in a fast tempo, with an upbeat mood. A number of

settings showed clear signs of being largely improvised, possibly using real-time input to let the music processor do the notation. These pieces invariably needed much more work to turn them into polished compositions.

(c) *Scenes from an Ancient Legend*

The requirement here was for a composition in two contrasting movements, not in a single movement with two contrasting sections. Not everyone complied with this instruction. Some candidates did not identify the scenes with movement titles, as the commission instructed them to do.

In most cases there was some quite assured writing here, but several candidates had trouble in composing movements that were thematically related, although they were normally contrasting. There was a tendency, especially among the less accomplished pieces, for the music to sound more like an accompaniment to a film scene than a piece of programme music.

(d) *Pitch and/or Rhythm Cells*

There were some very good responses to this commission, with several candidates demonstrating very secure technique in developing the given material. In this option again, as in the Art Song, a few compositions did not appear to represent the culmination of two years' work.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/41
Dissertation

The standard of dissertation submitted this year was generally high. Marking by teachers was usually slightly lenient, with occasional instances of severity, mostly within the appropriate bands for each criterion and only sometimes slightly outside the appropriate band. The most helpful submissions explained clearly how and why marks had been awarded; in some cases, perceptive comments were made, but these observations were not reflected in the marks awarded. Centres should send clean copies of dissertations, not versions with teachers' comments and observations.

More specifically, there could be an improvement in the application of some criteria. Criterion 3 (Analytic/investigative techniques and technical vocabulary) was often marked generously; teachers should consider the accuracy and fullness of analysis in reaching a mark for this criterion. Similarly, criterion 4 tended to be marked leniently, although this was more consistent than last year; *musical* examples should substantiate the candidates' independent judgements.

The best dissertations delved quickly and directly into the music; it is most effective to weave contextual understanding into conclusions based on musical evidence. It should be noted that Contextual Understanding (criterion 2) can include context *within* a larger piece, or between pieces, where appropriate, for example in dissertations that are primarily analytical.

Aural perception was most convincingly proven where candidates included a CD of excerpts (not whole tracks), and more importantly, where candidates were able to comment imaginatively, informatively and specifically on the effects that particular musical features created; this also demonstrated an ability to focus on *significant* features. Some dissertations needed to explain more thoroughly how musical effects were achieved. There was a good balance between score and aural analysis, the latter of which is particularly to be encouraged. The use of manuscript examples is worthwhile, but there should also be evidence that this music has been *heard*. In some cases, candidates would have made more convincing arguments by highlighting the relevant features of score extracts more clearly.

On the whole, candidates were receptive to suggestions to rephrase dissertation titles as questions, so as to make them more evaluative. Where candidates formulated a sensible question, a more convincing conclusion was reached. Teachers are reminded that the Assessment Objective of this component is primarily Critical Thinking, and this should be kept in mind when drafting proposals and providing feedback on drafts. Some candidates did not pay due attention to advice given in outline proposal feedback, which usually meant that dissertations were unable to meet the criteria for the highest bands.

The majority of candidates adhered to the word limit which demonstrated their ability to be selective, to focus on significant features, and to evidence critical thinking. No dissertations exceeded the reasonable bounds of the word limit. Shorter dissertations could have delved more deeply into careful analysis of music to reach the recommended word count and convey a more convincing argument.

Sources were generally well acknowledged, both in the text and in bibliographies, thereby avoiding accusations of plagiarism, although in many cases this needed to be done more thoroughly throughout the text. Footnotes were mostly used correctly; they should include the author's name, publication title, year of publication and page number/s. If not using in-text referencing – for example (Jones, 1998, 12–13) – then the conventions of Harvard style could be consulted as a guide for footnotes and bibliographies.

All dissertations included a bibliography, although some were too short to constitute a wide range of sources. It was helpful where teachers had included a copy of the original proposal, although this is not strictly necessary.

It is always worth repeating advice to teachers regarding the monitoring of work. The signed declaration is an important document, which states that the teacher has verified that the candidate's work is their own. Whilst it is clear that many teachers closely monitor the work of their candidates as a matter of course, it is

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recommended that teachers hold regular meetings with candidates to ensure that work is the candidate's own, and that the dissertation is on the right track in engaging sufficiently with *music*. The declaration may then be signed with confidence.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/42
Advanced Recital

Key messages

- The recital must be performed in front of an audience – the presence of only one or two people is not really within the spirit of this component
- The CD of extracts for the written project sometimes needed more attention

General comments

The Moderators enjoyed seeing and hearing the advanced recitals. The majority of the recitals consisted of a variety of shorter pieces creating a balanced programme, with the chosen repertoire being mostly well-suited to the candidates' abilities. As in the core performing component, some recitals would benefit from a more expressive approach and attention to dynamic contrast in particular.

There were few problems to report with the performances themselves, although there was a range of ability and some of the marking was on the generous side. The syllabus requires that the recital should be performed in front of an audience. Whilst it is obviously not possible to specify a minimum expected audience size, it was notable that some of the recitals were performed in front of very few people – sometimes, in fact, only one person. This is not the intention of this component, and some Centres are asked to try and encourage more people to attend the recitals – not least because they represent a significant undertaking for the candidates and are often at a very high standard indeed; it is therefore a shame when they are not heard by more people.

Written project

The written projects were generally successful, usually comparing well-chosen recordings of the selected repertoire. The best projects always focused on significant features of the performances, rather than getting stuck in the minutiae of small, and ultimately unimportant details. The candidates' own performing intentions were made clear in the text (and followed through into the recital itself) in these projects.

Not all projects were entirely successful in integrating the CD of extracts with the written text. Sometimes the ordering of the extracts was not always consistent or logical on the CD (making it far from certain which performance was being played) and sometimes the written text did not reference the CD accurately. In a few cases, the written assertions in the text were not borne out at all in the aural evidence on the CD. Candidates should allow sufficient time to check the CD in conjunction with the project, perhaps asking themselves if someone reading the project for the first time will know exactly what they are listening to and why.

In the most successful projects, the CD contained a range of focused extracts which directly contrasted the two performances, one after the other, with the performers also appearing in the same order. The tracks were clearly referenced in the written text, and fully supported the arguments.

Marking

Any adjustments which were made were to ensure a common standard across all Centres, and feedback on the individual marking has been sent to Centres as appropriate. Some of the marking was rather generous this year; the mark schemes and grade boundaries are designed to allow for differentiation at the top end, and recitals which are objectively good, but not consistently strong in all areas, should not be given the very highest marks available.

DVDs

The DVDs worked much better this year, and the Moderators would like to thank Centres for ensuring that the submitted discs all played correctly. Centres are reminded that the ideal camera angle is one which shows the recital as a whole, rather than being zoomed in too closely on the candidate – but please ensure that the instrument (particularly the keyboard for piano recitals) is fully visible.

PRINCIPAL COURSE MUSIC

Paper 9800/43
Free Composition

General comments

The entry for this component was relatively small, but an interesting range of work was submitted. All candidates fulfilled the syllabus requirement to send two compositions, a recording and commentary. The compositions are expected to be contrasting in style; the degree of contrast in some of the submissions was rather small, and candidates should be encouraged to ensure that they fulfil this requirement. Notation on the whole was rather good, with virtually all scores produced using computer software and well edited. Some pieces in jazz styles left large sections open for improvisation. It is acknowledged that this is normal practice within this style, but nevertheless, this is an examination and no credit can be given for improvised sections where the solos represent the ideas of musicians other than the candidate. It is important that Centres guide candidates towards appropriate pieces which will allow them to demonstrate their skills as appropriate to the assessment criteria. A small number of pieces were less ambitious than might be expected in this section of the course; the assessment weighting for this component is one quarter of the whole Pre-U course and to gain high marks the scope of the work should be commensurate with this, representing a substantial extension of the composing skills demonstrated in Component 3. Feedback on assessment has been sent to individual Centres.