

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01

Listening

Key messages

- Commentaries should be tailored to address the thrust of the question
- Familiarity with a wider repertoire beyond Core Works expands the choice of questions for candidates

General

The tendency of Centres to treat the Core Works of **Section B** as ‘Prescribed Works’ constrained candidates’ choice of questions. There was little evidence of exposure to a wider range of repertoire – a requirement of the Syllabus. Only a tiny handful of candidates felt confident enough to tackle **Question 6**.

In other respects, candidates were very well-prepared indeed. They were able to write fluent commentaries that showed detailed knowledge of the music, and also showed a better understanding of 18th/19th century contexts than in previous sessions. The most able coped well with the challenge of questions posed from a perhaps unexpected angle, e.g. **Question 5** regarding Mussorgsky’s handling of the *Promenades*.

There were some outstanding answers, and few really weak ones. Where a particularly low score for an individual question was recorded, it was usually because the question had not been fully understood.

Section A

Question 1

Many candidates were unequivocal in their statement that the form of the music is ‘Theme and Variations’ and, consequently, found themselves in some difficulty explaining the nature of bars 30 – 46. The most adroit answers flagged the structural ambiguity by defining it as Rondo (or Ritornello) form, with a principal theme that was subject to variation. There were a number of very detailed, perceptive commentaries in which the events referred to were clearly recognisable. Others, having begun well – and often ending with vivid details of the last 16 bars of the movement – became much vaguer in their discussion from bar 94 onwards. Identification of instruments was only rarely secure: oboes, bassoons and horns were usually described *en bloc* as ‘woodwind.’ Where specific instruments were named, there was a disappointingly widespread belief in the presence of clarinets. Trombones and flutes were also mentioned. Given such a small number of instruments, all candidates should have been able to identify those playing in bars 30 – 46, and at the end of the movement.

Question 2

Few candidates chose this question, but their answers showed a good level of familiarity with the music, an appreciation of the differences in mood and effect between the sections, and a fairly well-developed ability to describe ‘who does what.’ In all cases, discussion of the *Adagio* was the least secure part of the answer, few candidates showing any awareness that it, too, shares the same structure and underlying harmonies as the theme. Not everyone was clear that each of the five instruments in the quintet is played by a single performer, i.e. that this is not orchestral music.

Question 3

Most candidates had a good general grasp of the outline structure of the movement and some awareness of the virtuosic nature of the solo part. A few gave very detailed accounts of the two expositions and were clear about themes (and their keys), transitions, closing groups, the cadenza and the coda. Explanations of the relationship between soloist and orchestra were sometimes less convincing, some answers referring to the

soloist as 'leader' and leaving it at that. Several candidates assumed that the cadenza on their recording was composed by Beethoven.

Section B

Question 4

Roughly half of the candidates chose this question and they were nearly all well-prepared, particularly in their detailed knowledge of Vivaldi's poems. The best answers, though, were ones that resisted the temptation to focus on examples of aural realism, such as chattering teeth, and managed to keep their focus firmly on 'weather', rather than people and birds.

There was much enthusiasm for Holst's *Mars* and most candidates attempted to relate his use of instruments, rhythm, dynamics and dissonance to the depiction of war. Weaker answers were those that hovered over potentially relevant points, but then referred vaguely to 'tension' or 'chaos.' That it was possible to make more vivid connections between the music and images of war was well-demonstrated by more thoughtful candidates.

Question 5

The best answers showed a good understanding of the linking function of the *Promenades* and were able to demonstrate convincingly how this was effected. Most candidates did recognise its changes of mood and how these reflected aspects of neighbouring pictures, but many were only able to describe the music in terms of tempo, dynamics, key, texture, without always keeping what was happening to the theme itself in focus.

Question 6

Very few candidates had sufficient knowledge of any relevant repertoire to be able to answer this question confidently.

Section C

Candidates showed a preference for questions in which their opinion was sought, e.g. **Question 9**. Wider knowledge of the Prescribed and Core Works, beyond their structures or what they express, was very patchy, and knowledge of wider repertoire beyond these and the candidate's own performing pieces was disappointingly thin.

Question 7

The eighteenth-century patronage system was much better understood than in previous sessions. More candidates also showed a clear grasp of the changing social context. The best-informed were able to get beyond generalities, explaining knowledgeably, sometimes in accurate detail, how these changes affected the working lives of the principal composers whose music they had studied in **Section A**.

Question 8

Only a small number of candidates chose this question, most of whom focused principally on the best-known traditional Asian musics: Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Indonesian, and African, although two answers discussed less obvious examples – traditional jazz, and music in Mongolia and Scotland. Accounts concentrated mainly on instruments and scales, but the most perceptive answers showed a thoughtful recognition of the role of culture more generally, including even the influence of physical geography.

Question 9

Many candidates seized on this question with enthusiasm and expressed a strong view, usually along the lines that old music should be played as the composer envisaged it, but that contemporary music is open to reworkings. Detailed argument to support these assertions was rare, evidence even less so, and only a handful of answers discussed any relevant examples convincingly.

Question 10

Candidates were all aware of the general expansion of the orchestra and most were confident about the nature of Vivaldi's ensemble for the two concertos. Thereafter there was a great deal of vagueness about the make-up of the woodwind, brass and percussion sections in the pieces cited. Very few answers identified Ravel's use of saxophone and tuba.

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Paper 9703/02
Practical Musicianship

Key messages

- For Element 1, candidates should choose a range of repertoire which enables them to demonstrate their technical skills
- Centre assessors should give detailed comments on the working mark sheet for Element 2
- A clear indication of the course undertaken must accompany folios for Element 3
- Submissions for Element 4 should include a short written commentary

General comments

Candidates achieved a good overall standard of work in this component. There were some outstanding examples of performing in Elements 1 and 2, interesting exercise folios in Element 3, and well-crafted compositions in Element 4. Most candidates offered either Elements 1 and 2, or 1 and 4, but a number presented Elements 1 and 3, 2 and 4, or 3 and 4. It was evident that most Centres had ensured that candidates presented combinations of elements which allowed them to demonstrate their individual skills to best advantage.

Almost all candidates presented **Element 1**. Most had prepared well for their performance, choosing repertoire which enabled them to demonstrate both their technical skill and their understanding of a range of styles. These aspects are among those considered in the assessment criteria, and, if the selection of repertoire is too narrow, it may not be possible for candidates to access the full range of mark bands. Most programmes were of appropriate length and were recorded as a continuous performance, as required. Most candidates were ably accompanied on piano or guitar, where appropriate, and a number used effective backing tracks. Where a backing track is used, it must be audible on the recording. Where the music is designed to be accompanied, this accompaniment, or a reduction of it, should be included in the performance. Candidates are not able to demonstrate full stylistic understanding of such music if a solo line is presented without its intended accompaniment. The standard of spoken introductions was good, with most candidates showing real understanding of the music.

In **Element 2**, almost all candidates were able to demonstrate skills in two disciplines, as required. A broad range of music, genres and ensemble types was heard and there were some outstanding performances across all the disciplines. Most candidates made progress during the course, but care should be taken to ensure that the repertoire/disciplines chosen give individual candidates an opportunity to develop and extend their skills in a way appropriate to their own ability. Centres should also ensure that the work submitted for the two disciplines, and the nature of activities undertaken, are sufficiently different from each other. Most Centre assessors completed all sections of the working mark sheets. Identification of the chosen discipline, the composer/title of the repertoire performed, the candidate's role, and detailed comments in support of the mark awarded for all three assessments, but particularly the final one, are important aids to Moderators in making their judgment with full understanding of Centre intentions. From 2015, an additional discipline of 'Conducting and Rehearsing' will be available. Centres should consult the 2015 syllabus for details.

Candidates who submitted work for **Element 3** were able to show a good level of understanding of their chosen tradition. Folios were neatly presented and most exercises were based on actual music, and were of a suitable length to enable candidates to use the techniques they had learnt during the course. Most Centres gave a clear indication of the course undertaken, together with details of how the mark scheme had been applied where the chosen tradition was not 'western tonal harmony'. It is a requirement that this information is submitted with the folios for this element.

There were some outstanding compositions presented for **Element 4** and almost all candidates selected genres and instrumentation with which they were fully familiar. While most candidates demonstrated an ability to develop their ideas and had clearly refined their compositions, others needed to pay greater

Cambridge International Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level
9703 Music November 2014
Principal Examiner Report for Teachers

attention to these aspects of their submission. Most scores/detailed notes and recordings were carefully presented, though some lacked the precision required to access the higher mark bands. The majority of candidates included a short written commentary explaining the origins of the compositional thinking, listening influences, and the on-going compositional decisions, as is now required.

Most Centres submitted all the necessary paperwork for the Component as a whole and provided CD/DVD recordings of good quality. Centres are advised that, from 2015, all recordings for Elements 1 and 2 should be submitted on DVD.



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Paper 9703/03
Performing

Key messages

- Candidates should select focused repertoire that is within their current technical capability
- Candidates should provide a spoken introduction to their performance, outlining how the music relates to their chosen focus

General comments

There was a good level of work submitted for this component, with all candidates performing to at least a satisfactory standard. Some recitals – on clarinet, guitar, piano, violin and voice – were outstanding. Music ranged from Baroque sonatas to Latin-American dance styles. Many pianists chose repertoire from the Romantic period and a number of singers performed items from popular genres of the twentieth century. A number of candidates clearly relished the prospect of performing and entered into the whole event with great enthusiasm and passion for the music they had prepared. Performing to an audience often added further to the sense of occasion.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate their technical ability to good advantage through performing a programme of music which was within their capabilities. Some chose repertoire which was too challenging and were thus not able to show full aural awareness, stylistic understanding or a real sense of performance. A few recitals were very short, giving candidates limited opportunity to demonstrate a range of technical skill and understanding. Almost all candidates had given due consideration to the focus of their performance. Candidates had clearly learnt much from researching their chosen focus and this was reflected in their spoken introduction and in the performance itself.

Preparation of a short spoken introduction is an important aspect of the candidate's study for this component and its content is assessed as part of Assessment Criterion E – Stylistic understanding. The best spoken introductions gave details of the chosen style and specific examples of how this was reflected in each of the pieces performed. Candidates may read their introduction if they prefer, rather than speaking from memory.

Most Centres provided competent accompanists and suitable venues for the performance to take place. Backing tracks were used to good effect where appropriate live musicians were not available. Where a backing track is used, it must be audible on the recording.

Almost all Centres submitted the work in a manner that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork as well as copies of the music which had been performed. Work was presented on CDs or DVDs of good quality and Centres had ensured that individual candidates could be readily identified. It is important to consider the placement of the camera to ensure that performers' fingers/instruments are clearly visible. Centres are advised that, from 2015, all recordings for this component should be on DVD.

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Paper 9703/04
Composing

Key Messages

- Centres are reminded that it is now a requirement to include a short commentary to accompany the composition
- The composition should be 'no more than 8 minutes' but the submission should reflect an amount of work commensurate with an A level qualification. A submission of 4 minutes or less is unlikely to fulfil all the assessment objectives
- The level of variety in Candidate response is commendable

General Comments

This report will comment on the many positive aspects of candidates' learning in regard to Composing. The report will also offer general responses to the work and more specifically in relation to assessment areas.

Many candidates submitted their portfolio of composing work with an accompanying commentary according to the syllabus guidelines. This more recent requirement allows Examiners to understand the rationale for composing decisions. It often makes useful connections with research and learning in other units of the syllabus and outlines the listening background that may have been relevant to the formulating of initial ideas or influencing the process of composing more generally. The commentary should be written and not recorded. The commentary need not be lengthy but is an opportunity for the candidate to concisely share the fruits of their research with Examiners.

CDs have been more easily accessed this session and Centres have responded well to requests to make recordings using mainstream formats. Thank you. Please write all identifying details on the CD itself rather than the casing alone.

Some Centres encouraged candidates to fully reference the sources of quotations in commentaries and provide comprehensive details of music listening. This is good practice.

Most submissions were appropriate in meeting the syllabus requirements. The variety of self-determined tasks and the imaginative way in which ideas were formulated showed a willingness to engage at a level of sophistication appropriate to the course. Programmatic writing was a popular choice.

Materials

Centres may find it instructive to have a sense of the varied levels of response seen overall in this year's submissions. These included:

- Orchestral compositions – programmatic responses to conflict
- Chamber ensemble – working in a historical setting with imitation of a style/genre using idiomatic rhythmic and melodic materials effectively
- Working in an 'ambient' setting, using harmony as the primary component in materials
- Song settings in a popular style
- Sets of short linked pieces based on concepts from the natural world or travel
- The use of a pre-determined structure
- Descriptive compositions – themes included 'Night' and 'Water'
- Electronic dance music/electro-acoustic soundscapes
- Compositions influenced by the genres of animated film and games.
- Compositions for a single instrument (piano) or single instrument with piano accompaniment
- Focus on a 20th-century compositional style, e.g. minimalism

Teachers should be able to give guidance and suggestions for a range of relevant listening to support candidates in the exploration of their ideas.

Candidates should take care not to model their ideas too closely on a single distinctive piece.

Compositions that contain improvisational elements should outline the basis of their ideas in notation where possible. Candidates should be reminded that the improvisational contribution of performers other than the composer cannot be credited to the candidate. Some candidates found a powerful effect in the use of simple ostinati and drones in their compositions but when used for an entire composition, this seemed to betray a lack of more sophisticated harmonic understanding.

Use of Materials and Structure

Where the language of western tonality is used, candidates should be encouraged in their use and understanding of modulation to generate change and interest in the outworking of their ideas.

Some candidates successfully used a pre-existing structural idea as their starting point. This seemed to assist in the framing of an overall design in which to place the ideas and subsequent development. Candidates should be aware of becoming too constrained by some structures: theme and variation requires a well thought out theme in order to lend itself to successful variation and candidates often underestimate the importance of this.

Whilst content rather than length is a vital consideration, compositions of a duration of less than 4 minutes are unlikely to meet the assessment objectives at this level of study.

Use of Medium and Texture

Many candidates displayed a secure understanding of the instruments they were writing for. Some candidates could improve their understanding of variety in piano texture, for example, by studying a range of suitable piano compositions as research to their composing work. There was evidence of some restrictive practice, such as melody with broken chord accompaniment for an entire composition with no variation.

When candidates present their work in sequenced realisations they should be clear as to the precise nature of their choices. Electronic sounds should be distinguishable from acoustic ones; a string quartet should be discretely identified rather than a string section if this is the intention.

Notation and Presentation

Examiners evidenced some strong presentations of composition that were accompanied by a commentary where an alternative form of notation was genuinely appropriate. Clear explanation of processes of invention and recording/layering of tracks was essential in communicating the intentions of the composer.

Some candidates had been powerfully influenced by their research in other areas of the course, and links to this expressed in the commentary were most useful.

Some Song submissions with incomplete notation, nevertheless gave as much information as candidates were able to: notation of motifs/rhythms/bass line ideas/chord progressions/lyric sheets. Candidates received an appropriate level of assessment recognition here.

Candidates are reminded that a title to their composition displays a sense of 'ownership' of the creative process.

Some scores would benefit from closer attention to detail in expression markings and articulation/tempo indications. Many software programmes used by candidates have a 'Hide unused bars' facility and to access this would enable candidates to present their scores in a clearer and more professional way.

Concluding Remarks

Examiners are grateful for the support of staff, family and friends in helping candidates to perform their compositions in live recordings. There is a clear benefit for candidates who are able to experience the performance of their work in its intended context. Similarly, the level of technical expertise shown by many candidates in editing their sequenced performances or in using technology as a creative medium is testimony to the growing desire of candidates to present their work in the best possible audio light.

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Paper 9703/05
Investigation and Report

Key message

The foundation of a good Report lies in a wide range of listening.

General

The Examiners thank Centres for the prompt submission of Reports and careful documentation. Candidates themselves had also been careful: in listing and citing from bibliographies, and in detailing and cross-referencing audio extracts. Although technology has made many other formats available, it remains the case that extracts that are playable on a standard stereo-player are the most helpful to Examiners.

A handful of Centres had enclosed their own estimate of marks for each script. This is an examined, not a 'moderated', Component and the suggestion of marks by the Centre is inappropriate. It is particularly undesirable that these should be recorded, using red pen, on the first page of each candidate's Report.

9703/05

The overall standard this session was high. The best candidates presented evidence that demonstrated extensive learning in the course of an assiduous Investigation.

In some highly articulate Reports, a raft of intelligent issues for exploration was flagged at the outset, but the candidate's level of musical perceptiveness and understanding of performing/composing techniques was not always sufficiently developed, or secure, for them to be able entirely to fulfil the promise of their Introduction. This was particularly the case where an investigation of a composer's style demanded a wider understanding of, for instance, Baroque or Romantic techniques, if the candidate was to be able to identify what was significantly characteristic in the particular music they were investigating. Centres are asked to encourage candidates to be realistic in their aims: a simple enquiry, pursued methodically and logically, with close listening to a representative range of music to the point where what the candidate discovered had been thoroughly assimilated, sometimes achieved as much as, or more than, an over-ambitious quest which covered too much ground only superficially.

The proportion of entries linked to the Composing component (04) has increased, although those that linked to the Performing component (03) were still the majority. Overall, however, those linked to Composing were of a higher standard, in that candidates' observations were grounded in much closer familiarity with, and understanding of, a wide range of relevant repertoire. They were generally more knowledgeable. The two types of Report are discussed separately below.

Reports linked to Component 03

As in previous sessions, the most successful candidates were those who had set out to discover more about the genre of music from which their Recital pieces were drawn. Among those who chose to chart the development of their instrument and its repertoire, several were among the least convincing of the Reports, usually because not enough music beyond the pieces performed in the Recital was familiar to the candidate. Where the focus was on one substantial piece the temptation to drift into an account of its technical difficulties, with explanations of 'how I overcame these', was not always resisted. Some brave attempts at 'analysis' were no more than rather loose, intermittent commentaries. The more convincing of these accounts were those of candidates who had not only identified a question – a genuine 'problem' with the piece – that they set out to answer and had begun their Investigation by engaging in a great deal of reading, at a scholarly level, about it. This needed deft handling, because it was not enough for the Report to be a 'review of the literature' – the candidate's own learning had to be demonstrated.

Many candidates had listened to the interpretations of other performers, but hardly any made comparison of these interpretations the central purpose of their Investigation: the most successful were those who could cite significant differences as evidence in their discussion of a pertinent question.

Reports linked to Component 04

The range of repertoires discussed was wide, but a distinct trend this session was for candidates to be interested in techniques of composing music for films. Many of these did well, showing not only detailed knowledge of their particular topic but a wider understanding of contextual issues. The Reports of a few candidates, however, as with some Recital candidates who dwelt too much on technical difficulties and how to tackle them, were too closely tied to their own composition. It is now a requirement for Component 4 that a brief commentary on the composing process, decisions and influences should be enclosed with the composition: Component 5 should not duplicate the same material.

8663/06

There were very few AS Level Investigations in this session but there were signs of a welcome expansion of topics, e.g. thoughtful enquiries into local traditional musics.