

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.

General Comments

The general standard has improved, especially amongst candidates taking the paper for the 8663 syllabus. 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 recognisably, in their own words, what they were hearing.

Handwriting was generally legible and the standard of English was mostly good, which greatly aids Examiners' understanding. In rare cases where meaning was unclear, it was not possible for Examiners to award full credit; this highlights the importance of clarity.

There was a widespread tendency to believe that a 'blow-by-blow' commentary answers the question sufficiently. However, many questions asked for more critical thought and reflection. At best, a commentary might demonstrate a particular level of familiarity with the music, but will not necessarily answer the question. Also, when asked to 'describe,' weaker candidates resorted to enthusiastic accounts of dynamics, which is only one musical element. Generally, **Section B** was much more confidently answered than Section A, with some particularly fine observations about Ravel's orchestration in **Section B**.

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 futile, as the Examiner will not necessarily have access to the same recording.

Question 1

A good number of candidates were able to identify at least some of the principal features of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5, 3rd movement*. The four-note motif was the most commonly recognised feature, and many candidates attempted to outline the structure in its basic form, although not always explicitly. The strongest responses were very precise in describing changes in instrumentation in relation to the structure. Some did know the difference between Minuet and Scherzo but hardly any could identify 'Trio.' Few candidates identified the fugal section, and many focused on dynamics, which was not sufficient.

Question 2

This was the most popular question in this section. Most candidates responding to this question were able to give very clear information about the Schubert, yet struggled to describe the Haydn in as much detail. It seemed that the structure of the Haydn, and of course his use of variation techniques, was not well-understood. The best responses provided an overview of techniques with accompanying musical examples.

Question 3

The best responses for **Question 3** focused on comparing the two different forms, rather than comparing two of the pieces more generally. Stronger candidates used supporting evidence from the prescribed works (demonstrating close familiarity with them) to answer the central question. Few candidates seemed really clear on double expositions and cadenzas.

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.

Question 4

There were many responses with engaging personal responsiveness to the music, and the very best were also clear in how these effects were achieved through musical techniques. Some candidates struggled to link the music and effect to lines from the sonnet, which was a specific requirement of the question. Many candidates strayed into matters of performance interpretation (relative speeds and dynamics), rather than the bare bones of Vivaldi's original composition and its relationship to the poem.

Question 5

This question was generally well-answered, insofar as three pieces were discussed with some level of personal responsiveness and an understanding of musical techniques. A pleasing number of responses gave a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the chosen pieces; some very strong responses wrote persuasively about the 'monotonic' limitations of the piano in contrast with the superior range of colour and power of the orchestra. Quite a few candidates were unaware that what they were describing was a feature of Mussorgsky's original piano composition, and not an enhancement on Ravel's part.

Question 6

This proved a popular question with the best responses referring to a range of repertoire and specific examples linked to these. Holst and Mussorgsky/Ravel were popular Core Works to discuss, and these responses could have been improved by reference to works outside the syllabus as well as more musical detail within the discussion. It was disappointing that candidates clung to the safety of the Core Works.

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

Most candidates understood that this question was essentially about patronage and the changing nature of musicians' work. A few candidates were able to give a very balanced response, including specific examples from modern times, but most could have improved their response by including more specific knowledge of Haydn/Mozart/Beethoven/others and a wider range of comparisons with the **working lives** of 21st century musicians. Occasionally, candidates were able to refer to the fact that record producers and albums aren't necessarily the way that most musicians earn a living, and that live concerts have once again become a main source of income.

Question 8

This was a less popular question with candidates. Most responses managed to point out the basic differences between acoustic and electric, with only a few being able to expand upon these points and make a more nuanced argument (i.e. beyond a simple argument of authenticity). The very best drew upon personal experience and/or specific examples of performances/artists.

Question 9

It was pleasing that candidates were able to refer to two performances they had heard. Answers could have been improved by considering a wider range of performance choices and circumstances. One response differentiated between analogue and digital electronic devices with full and detailed explanation. Many answers, legitimately, rooted themselves firmly in the 21st century: there were some very convincing detailed comparisons of different versions of commercial popular music (even different recordings by the same performer), and of music that had been heard live in the Centre, e.g. jazz and concert bands. There was little evidence, though, that many candidates had heard more than one recording of any of the Prescribed or Core Works.

Question 10

Some candidates had difficulty with this seemingly simple question; to begin with, a definition would have sufficed. Differentiation thereafter depended upon the depth and range of examples provided and explored. The subsequent discussion usually made clear that the candidate knew well what 'dynamics' are. Most focused on different levels of 'loud' and 'soft,' but few considered the possibilities of crescendo or diminuendo.

MUSIC

Paper 8663/06
Investigation and Report

Key Messages

Check the syllabus regulations and other requirements. Has each candidate:

- read, signed and enclosed an Authentication Form?
- chosen a topic that does **not overlap** with **Sections A** and **B** of Component 1?
- enclosed a CD of audio extracts (not on memory stick or as youtube. references)?
- included full bibliographical information and a discography?

General Comments

The Examiners found a very wide disparity in the standard of work. There was some increase in the proportion of Centres that did observe all the requirements and, among these, some outstanding work had been achieved. Centres that may perhaps be disappointed by poorer results than they had expected should check whether their candidates had, in fact, met all the requirements. In some cases, it seemed that the instruction and guidance given to candidates had been less than clear and, in a few, it was even doubtful whether the syllabus had actually been read: signed Authentication Forms had not been included; no audio extracts at all were enclosed; many Reports were lacking any indication of what sources had been read; some topics focused solely on one of the Core Works, others were too closely related to **Section A** or **B**; in some cases the total listening that the Investigation was based on was as little as 5 minutes. Usually, such poor outcomes were demonstrably the product of a couple of evenings' work trawling a few internet sites. Some Reports were perfunctory, well below the suggested approximate word length. A sincere, serious Investigation needs a sustained period of time for listening, reading and reflection to take place, time for the candidate's own understanding to develop, and conclusions that can be supported by examples from the music to be explained.

Choice of Topic

The syllabus sets out the scope of the Investigation as:

'....a single focus for detailed study, a further body of music **not** represented in Paper 1.....it should not be drawn from the 18th or 19th century Viennese tradition, nor be associated with the *Picturing Music* topic.'

While Examiners were glad to find such enthusiasm for some of the Prescribed and Core Works that candidates wanted to write fulsomely about them, they regretted that, within the terms set out above, such topics could not be credited.

A great many candidates chose to study an aspect of jazz or popular music – there were impressively knowledgeable enquiries into a wide range of genres, sub-genres and performers, notably on 'Electronic Dance Music' and 'Charles Mingus'. These and others were the fruit of deep, longstanding familiarity with their subjects and excellently illustrated by very short extracts that aptly supported specific points in their texts.

Listening

As a way of ensuring that candidates did listen to sufficient music, some Centres had encouraged them to compile and include 'Listening Logs'. These were helpful evidence of the range of music studied. Usually they were 'stream-of-consciousness' accounts of whatever features had immediately taken the candidate's attention on first hearing. These needed to be built on by further, closer listening to develop real familiarity and sufficient understanding to be able to distinguish significant features from surface ones.

Intending to improve candidates' powers of aural perception, to encourage them to hear more than just which instrument is now playing, more than one Centre seems to have provided a structured course that offered precise reference points, some of them modelled on Aaron Copland's book on listening. These were helpful exercises in developing focus and concentration, most obviously as preparation for aural dictation, but they sometimes proved to be something of a straitjacket when they were applied too rigorously to more complex music. While candidates could comment in detail on the pitch contour of a melody, their extensive, apparently systematic but randomly-detailed commentaries often failed to arrive at the 'bigger picture' of the style or genre they were discussing, to the point where they could 'place' what they heard in a relevant context.

With the best of intentions, candidates sometimes took on too much listening: this was particularly true of the many who chose whole albums as their topic. In several cases, the self-imposed challenge of writing something about every song in the album led inevitably to superficiality – to 'whistle-stop tours'. It would sometimes have been more fruitful to have focused more closely on three or four, and on evaluating these in greater depth *in the context of the whole*. The best Reports of this kind were those of candidates who successfully demonstrated that they had understood what made the music 'tick'.

Some candidates, having included a recording of a whole album on their CD, then referred in their text to timings. Yes, it may often be helpful for the Examiner to be supplied with the whole of the music that has been heard, but they cannot be expected to spend their time fast-forwarding through it. Choosing an apt example, finding exactly the right spot and transferring it to a CD and then *cross-referencing* by track number to their text need not be an irksome chore for candidates but rather a helpful part of their learning process. In the best Reports, well chosen extracts that 'hit the right spot' demonstrated real understanding.

Plagiarism

A handful of instances of wholesale plagiarism in Reports were recognised and dealt with appropriately. More widespread, and equally unacceptable, were the many occasions on which candidates seemed to believe that they were avoiding plagiarism by turning round phrases from a source, substituting synonyms (often making garbled nonsense of the text, thereby betraying their own lack of understanding), or adding different conjunctions, for example 'as well as' or 'also' in place of 'and.'

The internet now offers many very reliable guides to standard repertoire (such as Alan Pollack's comprehensive commentaries on the music of The Beatles) and these are a valuable resource for candidates but they **must** acknowledge in quotation marks every judgement that they are 'borrowing' from them. If that is done properly throughout the Report, then relevant reading and the level of understanding shown in the selection and use made of it can be credited. If it is not specifically acknowledged but passed off as the candidate's own thoughts, then it must be discounted. Perhaps some candidates assumed that listing the source in the Bibliography would then allow them to draw heavily on it without further acknowledgement? The Authentication Form makes it clear that this is not so. By signing it, both candidate and their teacher acknowledge that they have understood this.