

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

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.

MUSIC

<p>Paper 8663/06 Investigation and Report</p>

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 e.g. 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 between 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.