



A Level Music

7272/W

Report on the examination

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Introduction

The format of the examination remains identical to that in previous series. In Section A (Listening), candidates answer nine questions: three on music from the different parts of the compulsory Area of study, Western classical tradition 1650-1910, and three each from two other optional Areas of study. In Section B (Analysis), there are three questions based on score excerpts from the set works associated with the Western classical tradition; candidates must answer two of these. In Section C (Essay), there is one essay question on each of the optional Areas of study and candidates must answer one of these.

It is pleasing to be able to report that candidates did markedly better overall on the written paper this year in almost every section. There were a few instances of candidates attempting too few questions, or in a very small minority of cases, attempting all three questions in Section B.

Section A – Listening (56 marks)

In general, it was encouraging to see students do well in this section, with performances in all Areas of study showing better average marks than last year. This was especially seen in the 10-mark extended responses to unfamiliar extracts.

Area of study 1 (Western classical tradition 1650-1910)

Question 1 (Brahms: Intermezzo in C major, op.119 no.3)

Several typical features of Brahms's late style are found in this quirky miniature. Slightly fewer than half of candidates found the use of mediant harmony as an alternative to the dominant and slightly over half found some way of expressing the appearance of the melody in an inner part. Of the rhythmic features, the displacement of accent on the 3rd and 6th quavers was correctly identified by a small majority, while nearly half found use of either hemiola or augmentation was an acceptable description of the final thematic transformation.

Question 2 (Dictation - Vivaldi: Violin concerto, Op.3, no.9, 1st movement)

There was a much more secure response to the dictation question overall than in last year's paper. The sequential nature of the melodic writing will have helped candidates identify the missing notes in bar 4. A common mistake was to omit the natural sign for the bass G in bar 4; checking for accidentals that show modulation is an important part of the harmonic aspect of this exercise. More than three-quarters of candidates achieved at least half marks in this question.

Question 3 (Mozart: 'Der Hölle Rache' from *Die Zauberflöte*)

The vividly expressed emotions and supernatural power of the character of the Queen of the Night inspired some expressive responses, many focusing on elements of orchestral sonority such as the use of tremolo strings, or on the extreme register and virtuosity of the vocal part.

Better answers were able also to pinpoint features of harmony, melody and rhythm more exactly, for example, the chords used to effect the rapid modulation to the relative major at 0:16-0:17 or the use of triplets in the long vocal melisma near the end of the excerpt.

Optional areas of study

Music for Media (AoS3) was the most popular option, with slightly over half of candidates choosing it. This was closely followed by Music for Theatre (AoS4) and Pop Music (AoS2), with slightly under half. Approximately one third of candidates opted for Jazz (AoS5), slightly under one fifth opted for Art Music post-1910 (AoS7) and very small minority for Contemporary Traditional Music (AoS6). Questions on AoS 4, 5 and 6 were generally more successfully answered this year than those on AoS 2, 3 and 7, though these variations were quite small.

AoS2 (Pop music)

Question 4 (Beyoncé: 'Irreplaceable' from *Bday*)

Unfortunately, there was a small error in the wording of question 4.2, regarding identification of the hi-hat sound. The second sentence should have begun 'Just before **line 3** starts...' (not line 4). We are sorry that this was not noticed until the day of the examination, when it was brought to our attention by staff at an examination centre, to whom we are very grateful. It seems that this mistake made no difference to the outcome of the examination as this part of question 4 seemed to be the most straightforward and was correctly answered by a large majority. The use of a dominant pedal was noticed by about half of candidates. In the multiple choice questions, a large minority of candidates correctly opted for the octave vocal range and about two thirds correctly chose version A of the syncopated rhythm of line 8.

Question 5 (Daft Punk: 'Aerodynamic' from *Discovery*)

Identification of the snare drum backbeat (beats 2 and 4) proved comparatively easy, while the opening guitar interval of a minor 6th by contrast seemed much more difficult. About two thirds of candidates picked the correct sequence of triad types in the opening progression.

Question 6 (Muse: 'Knights of Cydonia' from *Black Holes and Revelations*)

Many answers focused quite effectively on features of the sonority and texture, including some perceptive comments on the use of studio effects. Specific analysis of rhythms, melody and especially harmony was harder to find. Overall, this was one of the less well done 10-mark questions in Section A, but performance was still better than in the last two years.

AoS3 (Music for media)

Question 7 (Bernard Herrmann: Opening title music from *North by Northwest*)

A majority of candidates correctly opted for 3/4 as a likely partner of 6/8 in this iconic use of fandango cross-rhythm. A smaller number found parallel 5ths. There appeared to be a little

confusion for some candidates over what a ‘tuned percussion’ instrument was, as tambourine was frequently cited; others mistook the ‘woody’ sound of the xylophone for the metallic glockenspiel.

Question 8 (Nobuo Uematsu: ‘Theme of Love’ from *Final Fantasy IV*)

This expressive melody features a rising major 7th in bar 2, answered by a rising minor 7th in bar 4; the correct answer to the multiple choice question could be obtained by noticing this and most candidates did so. Many correctly identified appoggiaturas as a feature of the accompaniment, but others often confused these with suspensions; the lack of a preparatory note means that it cannot be the latter. Other parts of the question were well answered; most candidates picked the 2nd beat for the horn entries and flute for the added melody instrument (though some thought they heard a piccolo).

Question 9 (Hans Zimmer: ‘The Kraken’ from *Pirates of the Caribbean; Dead Man’s Chest*)

This was one of the better answered 10-mark questions in Section A, with 25% of candidates obtaining marks in the top two bands. Many candidates were able to relate elements of orchestration, texture and rhythm to the cinematic imagery of something huge and threatening. The best answers were those which were also able to be precise in the description of melodic and harmonic features.

Aos4 (Music for theatre)

Question 10 (Kurt Weill: ‘Foolish Heart’ from *One Touch of Venus*)

This was one of the most successfully answered questions overall, with most candidates able to select the correct timbre (muted brass) and scale type (whole tone) in the multiple choice questions. The expression of the changes of metre and tempo from introduction to verse was varied, but many candidates gained credit here. It is important to be as explicit as possible in questions such as this which ask for changes; a mention of which section exhibits a particular characteristic is vital.

Question 11 (Richard Rodgers: ‘Slaughter on 10th Avenue’ from *On Your Toes*)

This was also a well answered question overall; the only part which a majority of candidates did not get correct was naming the ornament (mordent) used in the trumpet melody. Of the remaining questions, the one on rhythmic grouping was most confidently answered and the multiple choice melody recognition least so.

Question 12 (Stephen Sondheim: ‘Four Black Dragons’ from *Pacific Overtures*)

Sondheim’s arresting portrayal of apprehension and confusion inspired many excellent answers here, with many picking up on the unusual features of sonority, harmony and tonality. The best answers included further information on melody and rhythm. This was one of the most successfully answered 10-mark questions.

Aos 5 (Jazz)

Question 13 (Charlie Parker: *Donna Lee*)

The part of the question requiring identification of a particular chord tone near the start of the saxophone solo was least successfully answered as under half correctly chose the fifth. By contrast, a healthy majority selected 'comping' as the correct term for the piano part. In the multiple choice question on rhythm, most chose the intended 'irregular phrase lengths' and 'triplets' (frequently heard in Parker's bebop solos); a frequently occurring error was 'straight quavers' (which would be unusual in this context).

Question 14 (Pat Metheny: 'Wherever You Go' from *Speaking of Now*)

A majority of candidates answered correctly in all four parts of the question, with the most straightforward part being the identification of the cymbal in the drum kit and the least the selection of the correct triadic shape in the melody (C major).

Question 15 (Duke Ellington: 'Harlem Airshaft' from *The Carnegie Hall Concerts*)

Although this was a colourful and energetic piece, inviting comment on the way Ellington had varied the texture through interplay between different sections and soloists, not many candidates dealt with this in a convincingly detailed way. There were also some careless generalisations on other elements; for example, a number of candidates wrongly described the harmonic structure as a 12-bar blues. Overall, this was one of the less successfully answered 10-mark questions.

Aos6 (Contemporary traditional music)

Question 16 (Bellowhead: 'Jordan' from *Burlesque*)

The first two parts of this question were well answered (naming features of the opening bagpipe solo, such as ornamentation and the use of long sustained notes; identifying the type of metre). However, only about one fifth of candidates correctly picked the interval pair major 3rd-perfect 4th between the voice parts.

Question 17 (Mariza: Mariza 'As Meninas dos meus Olhos' from *Fado Tradicional*)

Success in this question was polarised; few candidates were able to deal well with the pitch based questions (tonality in the first modulation, highest scale degree in the vocal melody). However, most were confident in naming the tradition and identifying the instruments in the ensemble.

Question 18 (Toumani Diabaté: 'Kaouding Cissoko' from *The Mandé Variations*)

Although tackled by relatively very few candidates, their performance was consistently good overall, showing evidence of a strong working understanding of the Malian kora style and technique.

Aos7 (Art music post-1910)

Question 19 (James MacMillan: 'Henry VIII' from ...*As Others See Us*)

MacMillan's comical musical interpretation of King Henry VIII produced mixed results; a majority of candidates confidently named a suitable time signature, but relatively few could identify the contra-bassoon. Pitch-based questions about the use of bitonality and parallel 4ths were correctly answered by about half of candidates.

Question 20 (Dmitri Shostakovich: 'Scherzo' from *Piano Quintet*)

This question was well done overall. A good majority selected the correct melodic outline, about half named the correct ornament and there were generally good answers on the string textures.

Question 21 (Steve Reich: 'II: Slow' from *Double Sextet*)

This was one of the slightly less well done 10 mark questions overall, with a rather polarised set of responses; too few candidates were able to write in convincing detail about crucial features of the music – its instrumentation, rhythmic, melodic and harmonic characteristics. Having said this, those who did do well were admirably comprehensive in their approach.

Section B – Analysis (34 marks)

The relative popularity of the three strands has remained fairly constant recently; about 85% of candidates chose to answer on the Baroque solo concerto, about 55% on the operas of Mozart and about 60% on the piano music of Chopin, Brahms and Grieg. While this remains the part of the exam in which candidates tend to do least well, because of weaknesses in understanding of music theory, there was a noticeable improvement overall in the quality of responses compared with last year; this was especially true of the question on piano music. As has been seen in recent years, candidates' answers on the Baroque concerto have been stronger than on the other genres, with responses on Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* being least convincing. There is still plenty of room for improvement in the level of accuracy and detail overall, especially in the harmonic interpretation of the scores. Some candidates found it hard to keep their answers relevant by focusing only on the specified musical elements.

Question 22 (Vivaldi: Flute Concerto, 3rd movement, bb.78-end)

A majority of candidates were able to correctly identify a B minor melodic scale and recognise an octave between 1st violin and viola.

In the 5-mark question on the harmony and tonality of the opening part of the excerpt, most, but not all candidates were able to recognise the use of a tonic pedal and that the passage began in the dominant key. Some were also able to describe the turn towards the relative

minor via a diminished 7th chord. Accurate descriptions of the chords and modulation in the later part of the passage were harder to come by.

The 10-mark question on melody, rhythm and texture was the best answered in Section B. However, a common problem was making sure that the response was balanced between the three elements; there were some very detailed commentaries on one element that neglected the other two.

Question 23: (Mozart: *Marriage of Figaro*, 'Overture', bb. 59-95)

A strong majority of candidates were able to identify a perfect cadence in A major, though some did not get the key right.

The 5-mark question was on the handling of harmony and tonality in a passage from the middle of the excerpt. Overall, this was the least successfully answered question in Section B as there was frequent misreading of the score and a lack of detail.

The 10-mark question asked candidates to relate the bustling rhythms, rapidly fluctuating dynamics and frequent interplay between instruments to the comedy of the opera. While the general tone appeared well understood, there needed to be more specific analytical detail in the description of Mozart's technique.

Question 24: (Grieg: *Notturmo*, bb.34-end)

Grieg's unusual cadence, in which the dominant chord is substituted by an E minor chord in first inversion, proved taxing for many students; just under half got this part of the question completely correct.

The question on the handling of rhythm and metre in the later part of the excerpt was the best answered 5-mark question in Section B. Many candidates confidently described the pervasive use of cross-rhythm and syncopation. The most successful answers also included reference to the hemiola effect present in bars 53-54 in conjunction with the *poco ritardando*.

The final part of the question was a demanding analysis of harmony, dynamics, articulation and sonority. While there were some very good responses here, some tended either to go into so much detail on harmony that the other elements were given inadequate attention, or to give only perfunctory and unconvincing descriptions of harmony.

Section C – Essay (30 marks)

As in Section A, the relative popularity of the optional Areas of study followed a familiar pattern, with more than 30% of candidates opting for the most popular and fewer than 5% for the least:

Most popular: AoS4 (Music for Theatre)
 AoS2 (Pop Music) and AoS3 (Music for Media)
 AoS5 (Jazz)

AoS7 (Art Music Post-1910)

AoS6 (Contemporary Traditional Music)

Candidate performances in this part of the examination were better than in recent years, markedly so in AoS3, 4 and 6. The one exception was AoS5, which was slightly poorer. There was plenty of evidence of well-prepared musical analysis and thoughtful engagement with the questions posed.

It is always helpful when candidates include clearly labelled musical examples for their essays on a sheet of manuscript paper; this can sometimes save time on cumbersome verbal description. The exercise of memorising short excerpts of melody, rhythm or harmony can be a very useful tool in revising for this part of the examination.

Question 25 Aos2 (Pop music): Use of rhythm, metre and tempo to create strong contrasts of character.

Although this remains (in line with the last few years) the least successfully answered essay, there were some good attempts to deal with contrasts of character. The best responses were those which included specific descriptions of rhythmic patterns or riffs rather than just generic references to tempo and metre. Songs by all the named artists featured in candidate responses.

Question 26 Aos3 (Music for media): How music brings an added element of emotional involvement to a scene.

This was a very well answered question, with a high proportion of responses in the top bracket (25-30). Film scores which were frequently and effectively analysed included *Psycho* (Bernard Herrmann) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (Thomas Newman). The best answers included reference to a broad range of musical elements, not just sonority.

Question 27 Aos4 (Music for theatre): How handling of musical elements helps audiences understand a character.

This was the best answered essay question overall. There were many convincing discussions of character portrayal, backed up with detailed musical analysis. Disturbed characters such as Sweeney Todd and Judd Fry were particularly popular!

Question 28 Aos 5 (Jazz): Traditional and innovative approaches to structure.

Although slightly less impressive overall than last year, this set of answers was still good, often showing a thorough understanding of the material under discussion. The most significant barrier to success tended to be a failure to engage with the issue of what is traditional or innovative. All of the artists featured, though Duke Ellington and Miles Davis were most often discussed.

Question 29 Aos6 (Contemporary traditional music): How harmony and melody are used to create a clear emotional character.

Very few candidates opted for this question, but the overall standard was high.

Question 30 Aos7 (Art music post-1910): Compare and contrast distinctive styles, focusing on melody and harmony.

This was a well answered question overall, with much evidence of good knowledge of the chosen composers' styles. Shostakovich and Messiaen were most often selected, though the work of all four composers was used successfully.

Closing observations

Centres and candidates are to be commended for a strong set of results in this examination. There were many impressive essays to be read and some perceptive responses to the unfamiliar listening excerpts. Some improvement in the grasp of basic music theory and score reading would enhance the performance of candidates in Section B.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.