

MUSIC

Paper 0410/03
Performing

General comments

Coursework presented for this examination session varied in standard from excellent solos and ensemble performances, to candidates who presented pieces which were entirely unsuitable, either for the candidate themselves or to meet the criteria of the examination.

Solos

Many solo pieces were well chosen, allowing candidates to clearly demonstrate their ability. However, there were sometimes performances on instruments such as drum kit or keyboard which required only very modest skills. This is fine if this reflects the candidate's ability, but such performances should not be marked highly. There were also some solo vocal performances in which the candidates sang with very poor intonation and many wrong notes. Centres are reminded that, in this situation, their marking should be realistic and that lower marks should probably be given in both the accuracy of notes and rhythm and technical control categories.

Please note that if a candidate performs on two instruments simultaneously (e.g. guitar and voice), then only one instrument can be assessed as the solo performance: the Centre should indicate which instrument has been awarded the marks.

Candidates are required to submit a performance which lasts between four and ten minutes in total (for both the solo and ensemble performance). If a candidate meets the minimum time requirement with one solo piece and one ensemble piece, it is not necessary for them to perform a further solo, particularly if it is not of such a good standard as the first.

Ensembles

Some Centres presented excellent ensemble performances, in which the candidates performed music well suited to their abilities in either its original form or in arrangements. Unfortunately some candidates submitted pieces as ensemble performances which were in fact solos, resulting in marks having to be significantly reduced when moderating. An ensemble performance should normally consist of three or more live performers; the candidate's part should not be consistently doubled; and the candidate should demonstrate true ensemble skills with the other players. A general rule of thumb is if the candidate's part could be described as a solo, then it is unlikely to qualify as an ensemble. Some candidates played or sang pieces accompanied by two instruments (for instance piano and drums, or piano and bass), but they were still clearly performing as a soloist; in pieces like this, the accompanying instruments respond to the needs of the soloist, whereas in a true ensemble all the performers will be interacting with each other.

Exceptions to the need for at least three instruments include acting as an accompanist (e.g. on the piano, accompanying another instrumentalist or singer) and piano duets. Please also note that backing tracks should not be used in an ensemble performance.

Centres should be aware that where an ensemble consists of more than one instrument or voice of the same type, it is impossible for the Moderator to know which performer is the candidate if no further information (specifically sheet music) is provided by the Centre.

Assessment

Many Centres marked the coursework realistically and accurately. Unfortunately a few Centres were very lenient and the marks had to be reduced significantly during the moderating process. Candidates should perform for between four and ten minutes; if a performance is shorter than four minutes then high marks cannot be awarded.

As in previous years, some Centres included very useful comments supporting the marks awarded in the space provided on the working mark sheet. All Centres are asked to do this: it not only helps the Moderator, but also focuses the assessor on the skills that have been demonstrated, and should lead to more objective marking.

Presentation of coursework

Most Centres now submit performances on CD, which is very welcome. However, it is vital that Centres check the final version of the CD they submit: once again this year, some CDs were incomplete, and some CDs had not been finalised properly, meaning that they could only be played on a computer, not a proper stereo. It is advisable for Centres to at least spot-check CDs before they are submitted so that these problems can be avoided. Centres are asked not to submit performances on DVD: the sound quality is sometimes very poor, owing to the distance of the microphone from the performers, particularly when the performance is at a concert or similar event.

Centres are reminded to send copies of the sheet music, with the sole exception of music which has been improvised. It is extremely difficult to moderate ensemble performances in particular when there is no sheet music to clearly show the candidate's part.

Centres are reminded that performing and composing coursework must be sent in separate packages, and that a separate recording is needed for each. It is now a requirement that the work of all candidates is submitted, not just a sample from larger Centres.

MUSIC

Paper 0410/04
Composing

General comments

The overall quality of compositions submitted in this session was variable. Some were really excellent, demonstrating an unusual degree of maturity and confidence, but others were lacking in both creativity and imagination. The standard of administration by Centres was also variable; a number of submissions were presented with missing CDs, missing scores or incomplete paper-work.

Individual Assessment Criteria

(a) Ideas

There were some very good examples of strong and interesting ideas which were handled with considerable assurance. Some compositions, however, gave the impression of having been written to some kind of formula: these tended to lack the sense of commitment from the candidates that the best compositions almost always convey.

(b) Structure

The most successful compositions took a highly resourceful approach to structuring their ideas. Conversely, several candidates stayed within the safe confines of Ternary Form (characteristically defined by a simple DC marking at the end of the second section, rather than by a more interesting varied recapitulation). Such pieces often lacked the necessary amount of contrast to make a satisfactory structure.

(c) Use of Medium

It is always necessary for candidates to state at the beginning of the score which instruments should play which parts. The best compositions almost always make this clear, but it is surprising that several candidates omitted this most basic requirement.

(d) Compositional Technique

The best compositions demonstrated an impressive degree of competence in every aspect of technique. Problems in this area often concern the harmonisation of melodies. The use of second inversion chords in inappropriate places is a persistent difficulty, as is the proper formation of cadences. Several candidates might have benefited from tuition in basic harmony as part of their course.

(e) Score Presentation / Notation

There were some very impressive examples of full and accurate notation, in which all details of tempo, dynamics and phrasing were clearly shown. In some cases, however, there was evidence of over-reliance on computer programs to produce the notation by default. Candidates need to realise that notation programs do not automatically notate correctly, and that a computer-generated score needs to be carefully edited to avoid pitfalls such as incorrect grouping of rests or wrong enharmonic spelling of notes (e.g. G flat is not the leading-note in G major: it should, of course, be F sharp).

The proper planning of dynamics is an important aspect and should be considered as a central aspect to a composition. Some candidates did not appear to have fully understood the importance of dynamic and expression markings to the overall impact of their music, scattering dynamic markings across the music in what appeared to be a random way.

Internal Assessment by Centres

In general, marking was reasonably accurate in this session. There was some inconsistency within the mark range, often with the better candidates being marked more strictly than the weaker ones. If a candidate does not produce a notated score, the mark for Score Presentation/Notation must be 0: moderation in those cases will be carried out on the basis of the recording alone.

Administration

This is an important part of the submission of coursework. Centres should ensure that:

- Composition coursework is submitted with the correct label on it and separate from the Performing;
- Marks are correctly added together and then correctly transcribed from individual Working Mark Sheets to the computer Mark Sheet;
- All elements of the submission are included (recordings, scores, individual Working Mark Sheets, computer Mark Sheet MS1)

It is very helpful to the Moderators if Centres provide a track listing for all CDs or cassettes submitted, and include an announcement at the start of each track of the recording to identify the candidate and to give the title of the piece (including whether it counts as Piece 1 or Piece 2).

