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# **GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**EDUQAS MUSIC  
A LEVEL**

**SUMMER 2023**

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:  
<https://www.wjecservices.co.uk/MarkToUMS/default.aspx?l=en>

### **Online Results Analysis**

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### **Annual Statistical Report**

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

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## **EDUQAS MUSIC**

### **GCE A LEVEL**

**Summer 2023**

#### **COMPONENT 1 – PERFORMANCE**

##### **General Comments**

A warm welcome was given to all examiners and the majority of candidates performed to their highest personal standards and seemed to enjoy the experience of performing live. There were, understandably, still some cases of nervousness and anxiety amongst candidates. The return to the full requirements has been an issue for some centres. Perhaps I should begin with a reminder of these requirements:

for Eduqas A level Component 1 option A, by far the most popular option, candidates are required to perform 3 pieces, one of which must be a solo, for a minimum of 10 minutes and a maximum of 12 minutes. For option B, candidates are required to perform 2 pieces for a minimum of 6 minutes and a maximum of 8 minutes.

##### **Comments on individual questions/sections**

##### **Timing:**

There were some issues with candidates not performing for the minimum time this year. In an effort to clarify this for future examinations, the Board has decided that the visiting examiners will time from the start of the candidate's first note to the end of the candidate's final note of each individual piece performed. Rests, which are written into the work by the composer in order to give the performer a rest, will be included in the time. However, if there are long periods when the candidate is not performing (eg) a 2nd verse in a duet which is sung by another singer, or a 32 bar break for solo piano in a jazz piece, these will not be included in the time. Centres should carefully check the timings of each piece (allowing for a slightly quicker performance on the day due to nerves) but should not enter these timings on the mark sheet. The visiting examiner will be responsible for timing the individual pieces as they are performed, live.

In most cases, the administration and timetabling of the examinations was excellent with many centres providing running orders. In the case of longer sessions at colleges and where there are consortium arrangements between centres, please continue to build into your timetables comfort breaks for the examiners. Allowing 15 minutes for each candidate seems ideal in most cases. Please be aware of school bells and tannoy announcements which may impact on your candidate's performance. If at all possible, please timetable AS and A level examinations separately. Please note that examiners may arrive up to 30 minutes before the examinations are due to commence in order to set up and ensure a prompt start. Thank you for reserving a parking space for the visiting examiner, especially if you are aware that parking is an issue at your centre.

Most centres had downloaded the correct forms as required but, in some instances, these had been completed by the candidates themselves. Please double-check these for accuracy. Candidates' full names, rather than shortened forms or nicknames, should be entered on the forms. In addition, forms need to be completed neatly and legibly. In some instances, examination numbers were missing from the forms when they were given to examiners. Please include the names of composers, in addition to the titles of the pieces to be performed.

Please ensure that the link with an Area of Study has also been completed. At A level, the links are Western Classical Tradition, Baroque, Classical or Romantic Music, Rock and Pop, Musical Theatre, Jazz, and 20th or 21st Century Art Music. On occasions, the links made are rather tenuous.

Examination rooms were, on the whole, fit for purpose. Please ensure that the instruments used, particularly the pianos, are in good working order (including the pedals) and have been recently tuned. Some centres choose to use electronic keyboards.

In cases where the standard of the repertoire is known, it would be helpful if this information was given on the form.

Most candidates provided copies of their music for the examiners. Photocopies of the originals on A4 paper need to be made as the examiners will take these away at the end of the session. Please ensure these are complete and in order, and are correctly labelled with the candidate's name and number. Please ensure that the music provided accurately reflects the performance being given, especially when downloading tab from the internet. In order to achieve the top marks for accuracy, singers must ensure that the vocal line has been added to lead sheets which also gives lyrics and chords. Please clearly mark any repeats, cuts or any other modifications on the copies. In addition, ensure that the edge of the music has not been cut off on the photocopy.

There were many excellent performers but some candidates need to give more careful consideration to their choice of programme as some are over-ambitious. Conversely, the occasional candidate performed a lower standard piece (amongst more difficult repertoire) which resulted in a lower overall mark. When using a backing track, please ensure that the track is a true backing track, with the candidate's part omitted, not a complete recording which includes the part the candidate is performing. In some instances, extracts from works were performed. It should be noted that the playing of extracts will, in most cases, lead to a lowering of the level of difficulty for the work performed.

There is no requirement to perform an ensemble at AS or A level but some candidates choose to include an ensemble piece in their programmes. On occasions, more care is needed in choosing ensemble repertoire in order to ensure that the individual parts are significant and of the required standard. These parts must not be doubled by any other performer. Candidates also need to be aware of the technical challenge afforded by their own compositions. Teachers and candidates should familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria.

Standards of accompaniment were very good on the whole. Some centres now bring in professional accompanists.

Performers need to ensure that they pay attention to the performance directions on the music. Some drummers and guitarists are not aware of the need for contrast, especially of dynamics. There should be no audible click tracks. However, if a backing track is used by the candidate, through headphones, it must also be audible to the examiner (without the click). Some singers lack projection and communication due to over-reliance on their music. If the music or lyrics are needed, it would be preferable for them to be placed on a stand, slightly to the side of the performer. Best practice includes rehearsing the performances "in situ", giving careful consideration to the position of the candidate in relation to the accompanist and the examiner; try to create the sense of occasion by involving other students and use this as an opportunity to check all the equipment which will be used. Give careful consideration to the position of an audience if present on the day, behind, and not encroaching on, the examiner, especially considering the recording equipment the examiner is using. As per examination guidelines, there should be no mobile phones present in the examination room (other than that being used by the examiner as a timer, which is preset to Airplane Mode.)

In most instances, electronic equipment had been set up and sound-checked in advance allowing the examination to proceed without hold-ups. Take care with the positioning of microphones and consider carefully whether microphones need to be used for an acoustic performance, especially in a small room or classroom.

### **Summary of key points**

On the whole, the feedback from the examining team was very positive and I am very grateful to all those involved, including the team based in the office in Cardiff.

**MUSIC**  
**GCE A LEVEL**  
**Summer 2023**  
**COMPONENT 2 - COMPOSING**

**General Comments**

**Administration**

There was a continued improvement in administration this year, and in most centres, procedures were correctly adhered to.

**Uploading work/ Labelling**

There were occasional issues with incorrect (or missing) scores, lead sheets, audio and candidate logs. Please take heed of the board's recommendations for 'how to label the candidate's work' as detailed in previous Principal Examiner reports. Composition 1 is written in response to one of the briefs as presented by the Board and must be in the Western Classical Tradition, while composition 2 is the 'free' composition. Candidates must check that their work is presented and submitted in this order. One further problem encountered by examiners was Option A candidate's being entered as Option B and vice versa.

**Candidate Logs**

Most of these were completed correctly and included relevant and adequate information. Some centres mistakenly used AS level logs; on occasion, the authentication signatures were missing and needed to be requested. Please be mindful that these are compulsory requirements. Any material that is not the candidate's own must be clarified and described in the appropriate place in the log.

The information required in the candidate log is important for the examiner to appreciate and understand the creative process of the composition, including the musical influences, software used, the reasons why certain musical choices have been made, the titles of the pieces, and details of the advice given by the teacher.

There were a few handwritten logs submitted though these were somewhat difficult to read. Most examiners felt that logs uploaded in PDF format were easiest to access, though some requested that centres check the orientation. A few candidates uploaded logs which were sparse and severely lacking details, which was disappointing. Some presented the leadsheet information and screenshots within the log, which is not what is required. These must be presented separately.

One extremely important part of the log is the section which refers to any live performances of the work. Candidates often state that they had taught the line to the designated performer, but they do not always explain how. For example, when a candidate describes that they have sung the vocal line to the vocalist, the question arises as to why they did not sing the vocal part themselves if they were obviously able to do so. If they choose to have a more proficient vocalist, then the guide track or keyboard guide must be clearly audible. Please note: the examiner can only assess what is clearly the work of the candidate. In some cases, in a live group performance of a composition, it is not always clear what part the candidate actually plays. The content is what is assessed, not the performance.

Too many candidates still gave extremely detailed musical analyses of their work, which is not required when the score has been presented.

## **Scores and Recordings**

There was excellent use of ICT to present scores, often thoughtfully marked up with appropriate performance directions to indicate expression in the music. Where scores were not presented, most compositions were supported by explanatory leadsheets or annotated screenshots. In such instances, the specification requirements are for a detailed written description of the piece, accompanied by an outline of the chords and melody. This was not always the case.

There was a higher proportion of submitted scores generated from within a sequencer, most often Logic (although Flat io seems to be increasingly popular). Unfortunately, many of these scores lacked musical detail with little or no dynamic or performance instruction. Often, orchestral instruments within this type of software do not follow conventional ordering which makes following a score more difficult, particularly when there is no staff labelling for instruments either.

Future candidates must ensure that pop/rock compositions include musical details and information to support the audio as lyrics on their own are insufficient, and all scores must be presented in the best orientation so parts can be seen, deleting bars which are not being used.

The quality of recordings was generally very good indeed, although a careful consideration of balancing all parts in terms of volume is advised – some work had not taken this into consideration and there were times when certain lines were missing or not clear. There were fewer live realisations of compositions this year, but when submitted they were mostly of impressive quality; in such cases, however, it is the compositions, not the performances that are the main focus - especially if there are inconsequential slips in pitch, rhythm or timing. Computer realizations are considered a better alternative in the face of difficulties when attempting to produce a live performance. There were some hybrid recordings of computer-generated music and live vocal recording, and this was mostly well done.

Candidates are advised to check that the correct files have been attached, and that they open and work correctly. Finally – a reminder that no announcements are necessary on the recordings.

## **Comments on individual questions/sections**

The requirement this year was to present two pieces as per the specification, with a total duration of 4-6 minutes for Option A, and 8–10 minutes for those candidates opting for the extended portfolio submission, Option B.

Option A requirements: two compositions, with the first being in the WCT style, and the second being a free choice.

Option B requirements: three compositions, with the first being in the WCT style, the second reflecting a different area of study, and the third being a free composition.

No folios were considered to have been under time this year, though the duration of some was over ten minutes. In overly long pieces, the melodic ideas often lose focus and lack sufficient interest in terms of development, with the result that the work weakened slightly as it progressed. There seemed to be a greater number of shorter length pieces that did not sufficiently develop thematic material, often ending abruptly with a lack of resolution.

## **The brief**

Errors here included several candidates creating their own WCT brief while some candidates selected one of the AS briefs.

### **Composition 1: WCT.**

As usual, there were four set briefs this year. Candidates chose their preferred option, and best practice was evident when the style had been carefully researched, resources were appropriate, and the requirements of the assessment criteria were kept at the forefront of thinking and the creative responses. Some centres adopted a teacher-led approach whereby all candidates were given the same brief. This was felt to be restrictive as the outcomes were similar and lacked individuality. While the benefits of this as a teaching approach are appreciated, it is not considered good practice for examination purposes. For example, the use of a bar by bar chord plan and outline for candidates is not considered appropriate as it leaves little room for individual creativity particularly in terms of harmony.

This specification encourages candidates to be given the freedom of choice supported with teacher guidance, as they will generally succeed more in something that is of personal interest to them. Future candidates should be advised that when there is a requirement for a device to be 'featured' within a composition, then it is expected to be made a convincing feature of the music – just placing it once, or briefly within a work is insufficient.

Generally, the most successful WCT pieces were instrumental pieces this year as it was felt that effective textural variation, development and appropriate stylistic control of the elements were lacking in some of the vocal pieces. Some combinations of resource choices were not always felt to be appropriate (e.g., a WCT piece for ukulele and piano). Another concern that arose is the choice of related listening that some candidates referenced for their WCT composition. The majority were focussed firmly on composers such as Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt. However, there were also references to Schoenberg and Shostakovich, Malcolm Arnold, and Eric Whitacre which directed the candidates into the twentieth century arena.

#### **1. Write a piece for SATB to be performed in a concert organized for the centenary celebrations of a local museum. Select suitable words or write your own.**

This seemed to be the least popular brief, and possibly the least successful. Responses here were mostly focused on liturgical texts or war poems, and most candidates gave details as to which museum the celebratory piece was intended for. The occasional folk setting was reported (not suitable for WCT). There were some good attempts at vocal writing, but many pieces lacked consistency of strong musical ideas throughout.

Some of the lyrics chosen did not always lend themselves particularly well to being set to music and the results were unconvincing. Text setting was often quite weak with many of the candidates writing almost entirely syllabically with insufficient attention to the metre of the text and its stresses. Too many of the responses gave the melody only to the sopranos with the remaining voices being statically homophonic. Many attempts were inconsistent, partly due to the word setting, but also due to a lack of understanding of writing for voices. Textures were often lacking in variety and harmony was rather static. It appeared that some candidates were not singers and may have been in a stronger position had they selected an instrumental brief. Though there were some valiant attempts to create interwoven, polyphonic parts as a contrasting section to more homophonic ideas, there was often a lack of clear development, with a tendency to write strophic songs, where each verse was very similar. Some candidates ignored the 'celebratory' aspect.

**2. Write a composition which illustrates Sonata Form, for piano solo or instrumental solo with accompaniment.**

This brief was extremely popular, resulting in some outstanding submissions which were truly excellent, including developmental work which was sophisticated and substantial. The instruments used were mainly piano, but other works were noted also e.g., a woodwind or string instrument with piano accompaniment, as well as string quartets and small instrumental ensembles. Many piano solos were over-reliant on the model of Mozart's Piano Sonata in C (sometimes rather too simplistically).

The best examples of this brief were well structured in terms of key relationships/conventions in sonata form, which was pleasing to note. The quality of writing was generally good, with the majority understanding the form, producing works with distinct first and second subjects, sensible modulations, varied development sections, and a definite return to the tonic. In these cases, cadences and modulations were well handled, with circle of 5ths used effectively in many development sections. The more successful candidates were creative and imaginative, exploring a wider palette of keys.

A few candidates misunderstood the concept of the form, providing disjointed efforts which did not always follow the sonata structure. The problems lay in constant L.H. Alberti bass figures, busy textures throughout with no melodic or harmonic relief, lack of cadential points, accidentals which had no reference whatsoever to the new key, and a general sense of rambling and monotony. Certain candidates had excellent 1<sup>st</sup> subject ideas, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> subjects were weaker musically. The simpler attempts were little more than ternary form pieces, using predictable patterns. As mentioned above, some pieces were incredibly formulaic, with little room for creativity and individuality.

Note: Though repeat marks are evidenced at the end of the Exposition sections, there is no requirement to include the repeat in the examination audio track.

**3. Compose a piece of programme music which illustrates the elements of wind, rain and sun.**

There were some excellent programmatic efforts here, with florid descriptions of the three elements. It obviously caught the imagination of competent musicians, as well as offering a simpler three-part structure for the weaker candidates. There were extreme responses, with some candidates excelling and others going off on tangents that did not connect. Many aligned the elements to a cinematic narrative which worked for some, though occasionally the requirement for a development of the initial material was lost when candidates opted to present three distinct 'weather' sections. A small minority of candidates had approached this brief in a minimalist or film music style which was inappropriate for a WCT brief. Some responses were fairly basic in their attempts with ascending and descending chromatic scales for wind and staccato notes for rain drops, with insufficient attempt to present convincing modulation or harmonic exploration or thematic development. There was a variety of ways in which candidates structured their work, from Rondo to Sonata Form. As already suggested, the less successful tended to be the ones that were episodic or through composed. The effort that candidates had made to suggest 'rain' in their pieces was appreciated, but this was sometimes at odds with the rest of the piece - there were quite a lot of sudden glockenspiel solos, and other percussion instruments. This often affected the overall coherence. One candidate layered wind and rain noises over the entire composition, which detracted rather than enhanced. Some writing for instruments was not idiomatic.

Within this option, examiners noted the most non-WCT features as some approached it as film music, rather than programmatic. Many mentioned composers such as Mendelssohn, Berlioz and Tchaikovsky, and the Romantic programmatic influence was clear. Others stated 20/21 century influences, such as Satie and even Yiruma; a few mentioned Debussy but most managed to emulate a 'late Romantic' crossover rather than feeling 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of the style.

But not to detract from the best compositions, which were described as being phenomenal. Some of these transcended 'composing for an exam' and the candidates clearly had an individual compositional voice, of which examiners were in awe.

#### **4. Compose a musical prelude to set the scene for a new production of 'Romeo and Juliet'.**

Another popular brief, with many candidates selecting specific scenes to focus on, despite the brief requesting a prelude which might suggest a general introduction to the play. There was often much detail in the scores aligning the music to the narrative, accompanied by many detailed logbooks. Such pieces were often quite fragmentary, and therefore rather weak structurally.

There were many strong submissions here, with candidates developing leitmotifs to represent different themes and/or characters from the play. Most opted for the love themes, or the fight between the two families. A whole range of instrumental combinations were used, including full orchestra, string groups, piano and string quartets. The majority wrote programmatically with clearly vivid musical images in their compositions. Melodies and harmony were well executed at best, but the weaker efforts had difficulty with clear structure and appropriate control.

In many cases, there was a clear Romantic era influence, and in some pieces the use of harmony was very effective (e.g. exploring chromatic harmony and interesting chord progressions). Suspensions were often used to convey emotion. Some compositions were more Classical or Baroque in style, and there were also some interesting Bach inspired pieces.

#### **Composition 2: Free**

The free composition offers candidates the opportunity to write their own brief, according to their talents and interests. Still too many candidates did not state their brief in the log, while some others wrote 'Free piece'. As stated in previous reports, this is not satisfactory and not in the best interests of the candidates - examiners need more information, as the first column of the assessment criteria relates to creating ideas, and the success of the response to the brief; it is difficult to judge a composition if no brief is stated, or there is a lack of the intention and a clearly identified outcome. This cost some candidates marks. A specific style, theme and mood with brief commentary is required (please refer to the specification/Teaching Guidance for further explanation of this requirement). Some candidates therefore lost marks when the brief was not clearly stated. Similarly, quite a few candidates said in the brief they were doing one thing and then the composition resembled nothing of the sort.

Teachers are to be applauded for encouraging candidates to compose in their preferred styles here, and the range was incredible. In addition to Baroque and WCT pieces, examiners were treated to such a variety of styles/topics, including:

- Musical Theatre
- Pop, Folk, Funk, Rock, Heavy Metal, Rhythm and Blues, Electro-Pop, Gospel
- Jazz, Bossa nova, Latin American, Brazilian, Big band
- Greek/Asia Minor, Irish, Folk, Ukrainian
- Neoclassical, Serialism, Minimalism, Impressionism
- Video game music, Anime
- Royalty and the Coronation
- Contemporary choral pieces
- Film

There were some briefs – and many titles – that didn't make sense and bore little relation to the music (even if extremely amusing at times!). Instrumentation included the usual combinations; one interesting piece this year was a work for organ written by a candidate who was a chorister.

Some candidates showed a good understanding of their chosen instruments/voices and genre, achieved fluency and direction in the melodic substance, ensured effective development of both thematic and textural ideas, and wrote idiomatically and effectively. The same compositional errors occurred again this year: over-ambitious compositions resulted in substantial doubling and cumbersome textures, busy structures lacked structural focus and balance, material lacked sufficient development, harmonic usage sometimes lacked understanding and exploration.

Some of the Jazz / Big Band responses were extraordinarily skilful, as were the modern Metal pieces, with both styles, when successful, demonstrating an utter command of the stylistic conventions allied with effective creativity and sophisticated compositional techniques. These were offset by inadequate responses which were less successful and simply did not have the complexity to achieve well at this level. Some very weak minimalist pieces were observed, and a minority of candidates wrote Einaudi style piano pieces which did not allow them to demonstrate sufficient textural variety or development to access the upper bands of the assessment criteria.

Film music remains a big inspiration for many candidates with some writing examples for large orchestral forces or deploying technology and FX expertly to generate their desired soundworld. Many candidates wrote a detailed narrative to accompany the music, although some of the storylines had too many plot lines and the resultant music was fragmented and without the opportunity to develop and progress before the 'scene' demanded a significant change.

As in the WCT section, some candidates chose to directly base their piece on an existing piece as a blueprint, which resulted in compositions that did not feel original.

## **Content**

The standards achieved covered the full range. The work at the top end was extremely impressive, well-planned, imaginatively developed and superbly presented. Many pieces were mid-range, including effective content which was competently developed, controlled, and organised. A number of pieces fell into Band 2 category, where the work was not only inconsistent, but at times lacking the required musical understanding, technical control and sufficient development of the initial material as required for A level. Some sensitive issues were reported via the logs / song lyrics and also inappropriate bad language. Some folios were a little uneven, with one good piece and one that was less secure.

### **Creating musical ideas**

The appropriate selection of musical ideas was most effective when considered directly in response to the chosen brief and selected style. This choice is inextricably linked to the success of the outcome. The candidate must be set to impress with an understanding and command of the musical language to achieve at this level. This demands content which relates to the musical elements and ideas listed in Appendix B and Appendix C of the A Level specification in Music.

Examiners expressed their main concerns over first compositions that did not thoughtfully reflect the language, techniques and conventions of the Western Classical tradition. Inappropriate instrumentation or stylistic features cost marks - for example, pieces which tended to be Minimalist or perhaps Impressionist in style. Some candidates made little or no attempt to compose in the WCT style, and as a result, the work could not access top marks (there were even examples of jazz and rock pieces).

In this specification, Impressionism is linked with the 20th century area of study (even though there were famous pieces composed earlier in terms of the date) but it is the styling that is important. The relevant appendix at the end of the specification clearly lists the requirements of the WCT styling, and future candidates must remember to consult this (page 45 of the specification). There were some ambitious compositions which were very imaginative in terms of texture and timbre but unfortunately failed to successfully capture the stylistic characteristics of WCT melody / rhythm / harmony.

Many candidates needed to focus on creating musical ideas more effectively. The quality of the initial material is crucial; weaknesses here will transcend into later working.

Examples were noted by examiners of candidates who had been heavily influenced by one particular piece. While analysis of a composition by Bach, Mozart (or whoever), is valued, too much emphasis and reliance on one particular composition curbs individual creativity. Accepted practice and exemplars from a variety of composers is far more beneficial. Armed with the tools of stylistic features from an area of research, candidates can then go and create their own individual ideas.

### **Developing Musical Ideas**

Some compositions presented effective basic ideas, which remained undeveloped in their work – this affected potential credit in this column. Candidates must consult the wide range of compositional devices suggested in the specification to develop melodic, rhythmic and harmonic content in a structured and thoughtful manner.

Some pop and rock songs were fantastic – others were too repetitive. In such cases, candidates would be well advised to consider how ideas could be contrasted, as this would enhance marks in the ‘development of ideas’ criteria. For example, structures could be rearranged, with additional contrasting sections and parts/counter melodies/additional harmonies added. It was also felt that minimalist, serialist, and experimental pieces needed careful attention to structure, thus achieving meaningful textural contrast and further changes using a variety and range of musical elements.

### **Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements**

Technical control of the elements of music needed more focus in many compositions. Please note the following suggestions:

Harmony - use a greater variety of chords, chord progressions, inversions, modulation

Texture - a variety to show the depth of musical understanding (homophony, imitation, fugal ideas, counter melodies)

Instrumentation – display a knowledge of ranges, appropriate use of techniques, and imaginative employment of timbres

Structure - keep to the 'rules' if a particular form / structure has been named and consider the overall structure of a work; quite a few compositions finished abruptly and unexpectedly and this weakened the structure

Devices - include a variety, to aid development.

In more modern styles research will also aid success but candidates must consider how to fulfil the assessment criteria e.g., how will a minimalistic piece achieve imaginative development? Candidates should also consider whether experimental styles are suitable to achieve the outcome as required by the composing criteria. Some serial pieces written for instruments were unplayable. Some compositions lacked stylistic coherence.

### **Summary of key points**

- All files must be clearly labelled as according to WJEC Eduqas guidelines. Check all files before submission, including the audio (for clarity and balance).
- There is no need to provide a detailed musical analysis of the composition if a musical score is submitted. All pieces without a conventional score must submit additional explanatory notes which include the specific musical details.
- All sections of the log must be fully completed, with particular attention paid to the recording details in the case of a live recording. Remember that guide tracks use be submitted if a notated score is not available, and the candidate is not the performer.
- Ensure that the chosen brief for a free composition piece is achievable and clearly stated in the log, remembering that part of the assessment is directly related to 'the response to the chosen brief'.
- Be reminded that no marks are awarded for existing musical ideas or an interpretation of an idea by a performer that is not the candidate's own. Guide tracks must be included when there is no score for performers other than the composer. Credit can only be given for ideas (including expression and interpretation) that are the work of the candidate.
- Refine the initial musical content to ensure musicality, conviction, general theoretical / stylistic understanding, and coherence. Keep the requirements of the assessment criteria at the forefront of all thinking, planning an effective presentation of ideas and subsequent development of the material.
- Avoid using repeat marks for the sole purpose of extending ideas.
- Work to the suggested time requirement – but remember that there is no penalty for a piece which falls a little short of this. Overly long pieces often lack focus and direction and are the result of poor planning. If shorter pieces contain sufficiently advanced and developed musical content, then the results will not be affected.

## MUSIC

### GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

### COMPONENT 3 – APPRAISING

#### General Comments

Candidates and centres are to be congratulated on their preparation for this component as part of the return to the pre-pandemic, full A level examination. The demand of the paper was commensurate with that of previous years and the performance of candidates as a whole was broadly in line with previous years also. The number of candidates answering on AOSs B, C and D were generally similar. AOS E was much more frequently answered than AOS F, and within AOS A, the number of responses on Haydn Symphony 104 by far exceeded that on Mendelssohn Symphony 4. There were a few rubric infringements where candidates answered on more than one of AOSs B, C and D, or else answered on both the Haydn and Mendelssohn set works. In such cases, all answers were marked, and the best taken.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### AOS B: Rock and Pop

- Q.1 (a) This was very well answered, a strong grasp of the song's structure demonstrated with many candidates scoring full marks.
- (b) Questions that invite candidates to describe features of a vocal melody, are looking for aspects of pitch in the main, so answers that gave correct details on this area scored highly e.g., picking out precise points in the lines where repetition occurred, range, starting note. Answers that did not score as well often did so because they described features other than pitch or rhythm such as word setting. As mentioned previously, there is no credit for descriptions such as syllabic or melismatic if the question does not ask about word setting.
- (c) This was quite well answered on the whole, with the highest scoring answers picking out details of the two chords used, or specific effects used by the guitar. Less successful answers named instruments only without describing features of their use.
- (d) Quite a few correctly identified the year of composition and release.
- Q.2 (a) Some responses curtailed the range of answers by concentrating on the Introduction only, rather than including references to lines 1 and 2. There were some perceptive descriptions of precise features such as the repeated tonic note, dotted rhythms and identification of finishing notes for each line. There were some generic descriptions of walking bass, playing roots of chords, both not suitable in this instance. There were also some quite poor responses too to this question, which needed to describe things much more precisely. For example, if saying it is descending, is it by step? Or on a particular line or word? Just writing "descending" will not usually be enough to get a mark.

- (b) Sadly, candidates are still not differentiating between different saxophones. The answer needed to state “Tenor saxophone” to get the mark. Saxophone is never enough on its own.
- (c) This question was not particularly successfully answered, some evidence present of candidates being unsure of names of degrees of the scale.
- (d) Similarly, to Q1b, answers accurately describing pitch shape (such as “repeated pitches at the start”, “on the dominant note”) were successful in gaining credit, whereas answers homing in on aspects of tessitura or dynamics, were not relevant and did not receive credit. It should be remembered that it is not necessary to be specific about degrees of the scale to earn full marks though; an accurate, detailed description of the shape and direction of pitches within the lines, with precise line/lyric references, will be successful. Accurate detailed location is the key to this when answers do require precise references.
- (e) Again, this question was not very well answered overall, a lack of aural and theoretical knowledge present.
- (f) Most answers correctly identified syncopation.
- (g) The year chosen was often correct (any 1970s date was accepted).
- (h) Responses to this question covered the whole mark range. There were some excellent responses which highlighted details about both similarities and differences that extract 2 demonstrated in comparison with extract 1. High scoring answers picked out a range of areas to compare including melody, harmony, tonality, structure, instrumentation, texture and style, and gave precise details of where the differences were. Candidates should be reminded that credit is given for effective organisation and accurate technical vocabulary in this answer. Responses that were a collection of unrelated observations using very descriptive untechnical language, did not score as well. Some answers failed to access the higher mark bands due to describing the extracts only, particularly extract 1, rather than focusing the answer onto extract 2 as a comparison with extract 1 as asked. Candidates should not forget to point out the obvious too – such as the extracts being based on the same material.

#### AOS C Musical Theatre

- Q.3
- (a) Surprisingly, this was not that well answered overall, despite the metre being very obvious in lines 3 and 4.
  - (b) Questions that invite candidates to describe features of a vocal melody, are looking for aspects of pitch in the main, so answers that gave correct details on this area scored highly e.g., picking out precise points in the lines where repetition occurred, range, starting note, the interval of leaps, details of sequences. Answers that did not score as well often did so because they described features other than pitch or rhythm such as word setting. As mentioned previously, there is no credit for descriptions such as syllabic or melismatic if the question does not ask about word setting.
  - (c) The tonality was sometimes correctly identified as minor, though major was often mistakenly put.

- (d) Similarly, to Q3b, answers accurately describing pitch shape (such as “five notes ascending scalically”, or precise locations of repeated phrases or sequences) were successful in gaining credit, whereas answers homing in on aspects of tessitura or dynamics, were not relevant and did not receive credit. It should be remembered that it is not necessary to be specific about degrees of the scale to earn full marks though; an accurate, detailed description of the shape and direction of pitches within the lines, with precise line/lyric references, will be successful. Accurate detailed location is the key to this when answers do require precise references.
  - (e) This question was not very well answered, reliability in aural skills not always present.
  - (f) This question was mostly accurately answered.
  - (g) The composer was sometimes correctly named, though there was a wide variety of answers here.
- Q.4
- (a) Some answers correctly identified the 3<sup>rd</sup> interval, though many inverted it into a 6<sup>th</sup> which was not accepted.
  - (b) As with Qs 3b and 3d, in order to score three marks, candidates had to pinpoint precise, accurate descriptions of the melodic features of the melody in line 5. Many answers described the textural relationship between the two voices or veered away from the focus of the question by describing tessitura, word painting or dynamics. One mark was available here for stating that the line was “mainly conjunct”.
  - (c) Answers to the two questions on texture posed here were usually correct. Monophonic or “in octaves” were accepted as alternatives to unison in ii.
  - (d) Overall, most candidates scored at least one mark here for recognising the overall tonality as being major, and often a second mark was awarded for the correct line location of a modulation too.
  - (e) Most candidates correctly identified the perfect cadence.
  - (f) There were quite a lot of correct answers as to the decade of composition, though some inaccurate ones too.
  - (g) Responses to this question covered the whole mark range. There were some excellent responses which highlighted details about both similarities and differences that extract 2 demonstrated in comparison with extract 1. High scoring answers picked out a range of areas to compare including the nature of the melodies, use of harmony, tonality, structure, instrumentation and use of voices, texture and style, and gave precise details of where the points occurred. Candidates should be reminded that credit is given for effective organisation and accurate technical vocabulary in this answer. Responses that were a collection of unrelated observations using very descriptive untechnical language, did not score as well. Some answers failed to access the higher mark bands due to describing the extracts only, particularly extract 1, rather than focusing the answer onto extract 2 as a comparison with extract 1 as asked.

## AOS D Jazz

- Q.5
- (a) Most candidates correctly identified the instrument as a tambourine. Sadly, as the question said “name”, pictures were not credited.
  - (b) This was mostly correctly identified as the Blues scale.
  - (c) Overall, this question was largely well answered, though there was some evidence of generic descriptions such as “walking bass” being given, when they were not appropriate. Candidates are advised to note carefully when questions ask for two areas to be covered, as here. Answers that described melody or rhythm only, were not as successful. There was accurate detail noted in some answers, such as the anacrusis on V at the start. Some successfully noted the arpeggiated nature of the riff and the use of triplets.
  - (d) This question on texture was generally well answered, though candidates sometimes lost marks through not specifying exactly which section they were describing.
  - (e) This was a straightforward case of identifying arco and pizzicato. A few closely related alternatives were allowed which accurately described how the playing sounded, such as “plucking”.
  - (f) This was not terribly well answered, really, some confusion with dates of styles apparent.
- Q.6
- (a) The vast majority of the answers correctly identified the tenor saxophone here.
  - (b) Questions that invite candidates to describe features of a melody, are looking for aspects of pitch in the main, so answers that gave correct details on this area scored highly e.g., picking out precise points in the Head where repetition occurred, naming interval leaps, or starting and/or ending notes of phrases. Answers that did not score as well often did so because they described features other than pitch or rhythm such as playing techniques (e.g., “muted”).
  - (c) The texture was usually accurately identified as monophonic. Unison/octaves and homorhythmic were also accepted as alternative correct answers.
  - (d) This was also well answered, candidates successfully homing in on rhythmic aspects.
  - (e) Again, some candidates fell down here by not including descriptions of both the front line and the rhythm section, instead, just describing one of the sections. The maximum was 2 marks if this was the case. Most described accurate features of the music played by the rhythm section (including “dropping bombs”,) and accurately identifying the use of different cymbals at different times. Comments on the front line were generally less detailed, but many noted the improvised nature of the playing, with some detail about effects too.

- (f) Quite a few recognised the style as Be-bop, though there were quite a few other answers here, too.
- (g) Responses to this question covered the whole mark range. There were some excellent responses which highlighted details about both similarities and differences that extract 2 demonstrated in comparison with extract 1. High scoring answers picked out a range of areas to compare including the way the melody and harmony was different in extract 2 compared to extract 1, as well as similarities and differences in tonality, structure, instrumentation (including voice), texture and style, and gave precise details of where the points occurred. Candidates should be reminded that credit is given for effective organisation and accurate technical vocabulary in this answer. Responses that were a collection of unrelated observations using very descriptive untechnical language, did not score as well. Some answers failed to access the higher mark bands due to describing the extracts only, particularly extract 1, rather than focusing the answer onto extract 2 as a comparison with extract 1 as asked. Candidates should not forget to point out the obvious too – such as the extracts being based on the same material.

#### AOS F Into the Twentieth Century

- Q.7 (a) Whilst a lot of answers correctly cited the tonic pedal and G flat major chord in bar 3<sup>1-2</sup>,

There were some answers that were not related to harmony or else very generalised and often only partially accurate observations on chords.

- (b) Again, whilst some answers accurately pinpointed details about melodic shape, many answers here failed to focus on melody, instead describing other parameters such as instrumentation, or at best, giving very generalised comments about conjunct/disjunct shape. The most successful answers highlighted specific melodic details including the use of arpeggiatic figures and precise points of chromaticism. Candidates should not miss chances of mentioning the more obvious details such as the introduction of new melodic motifs in specific bars.
- (c) Some candidates seemed to get confused here, the information given not constituting a similarity and difference as asked. The instruction to tailor answers to the use of instruments was also ignored sometimes, rendering the answer irrelevant. Saying that, there were also some accurate observations though some misreading of clefs for the oboe and bassoon resulting in wrong intervals being given.
- (d) Sometimes the initial instruction not to mention the opening tonality was ignored resulting in non-creditable information being given as an answer. However, there were also some perceptive answers regarding subsequent changes of harmony and tonality. Sadly, answers lost credit by not providing bar/beat numbers as directed in the question.
- (e) This was quite well answered, many responses highlighting examples of “wrong note” harmony, though many failed to gain the mark by being too general with descriptions such as “dissonance”.
- (f) This was probably one of the best answered questions on the paper!

- (g) Sadly, some candidates did not appear to understand what was meant by phrase structure, but overall, there were many successful answers here. Answers that scored highly did so by giving not only precise detail about length of phrases, supported by accurate bar/beat references, but also some additional information explaining the rationale behind the phrase lengths – i.e., discussing them as directed by the question. Weaker answers mistakenly described the structure of the whole movement.
- Q.8 (a) (i) Answers scored well here by pinpointing precise, accurate facts about the oboe's melody such as its use of sequence, whole tone scale, repetition, span of a tritone in the last section. Less successful answers referred to ascending or descending without specifying at which points in the melody these were relevant.
- (ii) This was not well answered overall, most answers failing to note that the intervals used had changed. A few very perceptive answers did notice that the melody was now based on the octatonic scale rather than the whole tone one.
- (b) Most responses homed in on the high tessitura or the sustained notes. Candidates are urged to be careful not to state instruments are in harmony when they are all playing the same note.
- (c) This was not very well answered overall, some candidates seeming not to be discussing the correct bars. The most common correct answer referred to high, sustained strings, with little detail of any other instrument or material mentioned.
- (d) Again, answers were often quite general here, failing to home in on specific detail about the melodic material. When specifics were mentioned, it was usually the chromatic scales in the woodwind.
- (e) (i) There were many very generalised comments here such as “extended chords”, “non-functional harmony”, without pinpointing specific chords such as the predominant V7 chords. Some answers correctly highlighted the use of parallel harmony or pedals.
- (ii) Again, answers were too generalised on the whole, lacking specific detail about how instruments were used. Credit was given to answers that referred to divisi strings or muted brass.
- (f) Examiners are pleased to note an improvement overall in the way candidates answer this question. There were still examples of answers which were irrelevant because they either referred to music in the same style as that of the extract, or indeed, referenced a set work. There still seems to be a misconception that they need to compare their chosen work to the given extract. This is not the case and wastes valuable time. Instead, answers need to provide detail about another work along the lines stated in the question, in this case, rhythm and/or metre. Quite a lot of answers also included tempo. There were a few highly perceptive answers, but overall, there is still room for further rigour here, with more factual detail and less general or irrelevant narrative description. Candidates need to be careful they clearly state the composer and piece, and then refer to it with real, relevant detail.

## AOS F: Into the Twenty-first Century

- Q.9
- (a) Many of the responses correctly identified this section as the Introduction, but not all - surprising as this is a set work.
  - (b) Answers often lacked detail and focus on features of harmony, unfortunately, some very generalised comments included rather than specifics about the chords in these first eight bars.
  - (c) Whilst there were a few perceptive answers giving detail about the use of instruments, most responses relied on copying features of instruments from the score. The question was looking for more than this.
  - (d) Some of the more obvious features such as syncopation and ostinatos were pointed out and these did earn credit, though to access the full marks available responses needed to demonstrate an understanding and awareness of the use of rhythm, rather than just identifying features.
  - (e) Whilst there was some confusion apparent over what was meant by phrase structure, most answers identified the prevalence of 8-bar phrasing through the extract with better answers noting additions and irregularities to this and how they were caused.
  - (f) Quite a few responses missed the point here, discussing ostinato patterns rather than melodic motifs. As the former were usually used in accompanimental roles rather than as the main melodic material, answers were not really relevant. Most did highlight the main falling semitone motif, and there were some responses that gave detail of how it was added to and transformed and were appropriately rewarded with higher marks.
- Q10
- (a)
    - (i) Many candidates correctly identified the effect as “glissando”. Alternative answers such as “slide” and “portamento” were also accepted.
    - (ii) Too many answers here relied on sweeping statements such as “conjunct” (when there were some decidedly disjunct intervals present too) or “dissonant”. Examiners were looking for more precise detail such as the presence of semitones, gradually expanding intervals or the sequential nature of the second half compared to the first.
  - (b) As for the question above, answers tended to lack specific detail, relying on one-word descriptions such as “shorter” which did not really give detail about the music itself as asked in the question.
  - (c) There were a few perceptive answers which pointed to such things as the violins being in unison, but some responses misread the question, not answering on Section 2, discussing instruments other than the orchestral strings instead.
  - (d) There was plenty of scope in this question for candidates to answer on a variety of points to do with the musical material. On the whole, answers tended to be generalised, lacking specific details, and many of the responses were related to texture rather than the use of musical material, being less relevant.

- (d) (i) Most answers earned a mark here for a relevant comment on the use of texture, “antiphony” being the most prevalent.
  - (ii) Whilst answers lacked detail, most gained a mark here for an accurate description of the harmony as dissonant.
  - (f) Examiners are pleased to note an improvement overall in the way candidates answer this question. There still seems to be a misconception that they need to compare their chosen work to the given extract. This is not the case and wastes valuable time. Instead, answers need to provide detail about another work along the lines stated in the question, in this case, rhythm and/or metre. Quite a lot of answers also included tempo. There were a few highly perceptive answers, but overall, there is still room for further rigour here, with more factual detail and less general or irrelevant narrative description. Candidates need to be careful they clearly state the composer and piece, and then refer to it with real, relevant detail.
- Q.11 (a) There were many accurate answers, both location and corrected pitch and rhythm clearly marked on the score. Further care needs to be taken in some cases aiming for accuracy in the corrected version. Candidates are advised not use pen for this question and until they are certain of their response, ideally using pencil first, and inking in later when decisions are confirmed. In some cases, it became difficult and occasionally impossible to decipher what was the final answer amidst many crossings out in pen.
- (b) Many missed the anacrusis rhythmic start, their responses to this dictation question a quaver later than needed. Candidates are reminded that there is equal credit given for pitch and rhythm in this question, so both should be attempted. Aural dictation is challenging, but clues and help in terms of pitch and rhythm are always present if one considers the context of the passage in question, and candidates are urged to do this and make use of them.
- (c) Many correctly identified the cadential progression as “interrupted”.
- Q.12 (a) Many correct answers here, though sadly, despite its being a set work, some did not appear to know the form.
- (b) There were some very full and accurate answers here, candidates demonstrating a secure grasp of the different keys visited in the Trio, though quite a few failed to note the ambiguity of its opening, incorrectly identifying B flat major as the key right at the start. Successful answers were supported by bar and beat references too, allowing them to score highly. Less successful answers discussed chords rather than keys, and/or failed to substantiate points with bar/beat references.
- (c) This was often accurately answered, though it was clear that some candidates had misread the question, giving the key at bar 104 rather than bar 94 as asked.
- (d) Many earned full marks here, showing they had clearly studied the interesting harmonic twists of bars 94 to 104 closely. Sometimes marks were lost through carelessness, bar and beat references not quite right; it is necessary to give the concluding bar of a pedal as well as the starting bar. There was some muddling of augmented and augmented 6th chords.

- (e) In some cases, this question was well answered, candidates clearly drawing points of comparison between the use of sonority in the trio compared to the minuet, giving precise references in support. However, sadly, other responses failed to gain as many marks as they could have due to just describing the use of sonority in the trio without showing how it compared to the minuet. The lack of precise substantiation brought other answers down, and in a few cases, it was clear that candidates did not understand what the word sonority meant – disappointing when it is clearly highlighted and described in the specification.

In general, for longer questions, many answers did tend to lack detail and relevance; disappointing when this is a set work.

- Q.13 (a) There were some correct answers here, but it was clear that some candidates did not know the form despite its being a set work.
- (b) There were some successful answers that correctly identified keys, giving bar and beat references in support, but also some responses that fell wide of the mark by describing chords rather than keys, or failing to give precise bar references in substantiation. The question asked candidates to outline “changes” in tonality, so no mark was awarded for stating the opening key.
- (d) This question was not particularly well answered on the whole, a lack of secure harmonic awareness reflected in answers.
- (e) In some cases, this question was well answered, candidates clearly drawing points of comparison between the use of sonority in the trio compared to the minuet, giving precise references in support. However, sadly, other responses failed to gain as many marks as they could have due to just describing the use of sonority in the trio without showing how it compared to the minuet. The lack of precise substantiation brought other answers down, and in a few cases, it was clear that candidates did not understand what the word sonority meant – disappointing when it is clearly highlighted and described in the specification.

In general, for longer questions, many answers did tend to lack detail and relevance; disappointing when this is a set work.

Q.14 This was a clear, straightforward question, harmony and tonality highlighted as possible areas for discussion in the specification and guidance notes. There were some excellent responses reflecting diligent and accurate knowledge and understanding of how harmony and tonality have been used by composers over the full range of the time period, giving accurate and detailed examples in support. Candidates and teachers are to be congratulated on the effort and research that clearly lay behind these answers. These responses earned deservedly high marks. Answers did cover the whole range of the marking criteria bands though, with some sadly struggling to move out of bands 1 or 2. Reasons for this often lay in the fact that the content was not relevant, constituting narrative, general descriptions of symphonic music, but lacking any detail pertaining to harmony and tonality. Some got rather bogged down in describing the story behind the programmatic links of symphonic music. Others – quite a few in fact – failed to move out of bands 2 and 3 by restricting themselves to the first half of the time period only, consequently not demonstrating full contextual knowledge. Another reason why answers did not access the upper mark bands was because they spent too much time discussing the set works at the expense of the wider repertoire. Many essays referred to harmony and tonality, but only in very general terms, making sweeping, generalised statements about the use of more “extended chords” “chromatic harmony” or “wider modulations” without giving any specific detail from the music they refer to. A recurrent misconception seems to be that Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* constitutes an example of late Romantic symphonic music, essays concluding with it, whereas there is still half of the period of study to go. On the whole, tonality was more confidently referred to than harmony. It is appreciated that harmony and tonality may not be the easiest areas to grasp, and on the whole, there were very creditable, valiant efforts with some that were outstanding and a pleasure to read.

### **Summary of key points**

Candidates need to understand that questions about melody require answers that describe patterns of pitches and any related, interesting rhythmic features, and really nothing else. Comments about syllabic and melismatic word setting are definitely not relevant.

Saxophone on its own is never sufficient as an answer identifying an instrument. It needs further qualification such as soprano, alto, tenor or baritone.

Longer answers on set works did often lack detail and relevance which was disappointing. Candidates need to practice answering specifically on areas such as melody, tonality, sonority etc., and referring to details of the music using bar numbers.

Further practice is needed for questions 8 and 10. Many answers seemed to be stabbing in the dark, sadly. However, the final question displayed significant improvement, apart from mistakenly treating it as a comparison with the given extract.

In general, for the essay question, candidates need to make sure they cover the latter part of the time frame more in comparison with the early years. They should include details of the works mentioned and explain the relevance and general thrust of development as they go along. They should not spend too much time on the set works and be mindful of striking a balance between historical context and musical detail.



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