

# MUSIC

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**Paper 0410/02**  
**Performing**

## **General Comments**

The overall quality of performances submitted in this session was variable. There were some really excellent performances, demonstrating skills well beyond those required at this level, but others were unsuitable for a number of reasons.

## **Solos**

Many candidates chose pieces which were within their grasp and which they could perform confidently. However, there were some performances (particularly vocal ones) in which candidates demonstrated only very modest skills (e.g. very simple, short pieces of music, performed with poor intonation or other technical limitations). This is fine if it reflects the candidate's ability, but the marking should be realistic and lower marks given in most/all categories.

There appeared to be some difficulty with candidates presenting performances of a suitable length. Many candidates did not meet the minimum requirement of a performance time (for both solo and ensemble) of four minutes. In this situation, if possible, the candidate should offer a second solo performance. Less frequently candidates performed for significantly longer than the maximum ten minutes. In this situation it is not necessary for candidates to perform a further solo, particularly if it is not of such a good standard as the first.

Centres are reminded that if a candidate presents a performance involving two instruments simultaneously (e.g. voice and guitar) then only one can be assessed as the solo performance. The Centre should indicate on the Performing Working Marksheet which instrument has been assessed and awarded the marks.

## **Ensembles**

Some Centres presented some truly excellent ensemble performances. These allowed the candidates to perform music well suited to their abilities and to engage with other performers. Unfortunately some candidates presented pieces which were in fact solos, meaning that they could not receive marks in the category 'ensemble co-ordination'. In an ensemble performance the candidate's part should not be consistently doubled and the candidate should not merely be accompanied by the other performers.

In an ensemble performance Centres are asked to identify clearly which part a candidate is performing, particularly when there is more than one of the same instrument in an ensemble (e.g. a clarinet trio).

In an ensemble performance the performers do not all need to be candidates for the examination. If a candidate plays/sings in an ensemble with other people then this is perfectly acceptable, provided the other criteria (of not doubling etc.) are met. This will then hopefully allow candidates to present an ensemble performance which shows their skills to best effect.

## **Assessment**

Most Centres marked the performances realistically. However, a few Centres were very lenient and marks had to be significantly reduced. In order to be gaining higher marks in each of the five categories candidates should be performing relatively difficult music accurately, musically and with good technical skills.

## Administration

It would be helpful if Centres could ensure that:

- All necessary material is included in the submission (CD, MS1, sheet music, performing working marksheet) and that the performing material is separate from the composing material.
- A mark out of 50 on the Performing Working Marksheet is transferred without alteration to the MS1. Half marks should not be used and the final mark does not need to be doubled. Addition of marks should also be checked carefully.
- Recordings are submitted on CD, capable of being played on a standard audio CD player.
- The work of all candidates is submitted, not just a sample.
- Consistent names for candidates are used.

It is also very helpful when Centres provide a track listing for the CD(s) submitted, so that the work of individual candidates can be found quickly.

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**Paper 0410/03**  
**Composing**

## **Key Messages**

- To gain marks in the highest band candidates should submit two contrasting compositions (either differing in style or written for different forces).
- The musical ideas should be the candidate's own (if a piece includes material borrowed from a pre-existing source, this should be kept to an absolute minimum).
- The pieces should be carefully structured and should demonstrate a developing command of appropriate compositional techniques.
- Both pieces should be fully and accurately notated (and carefully edited if produced through a computer notation program).
- A recording of both pieces should be provided (on CD if possible); whenever possible the recording should be of a live performance.

## **General comments**

There was a marked improvement in the overall quality of the compositions submitted this year. The work still covered a wide range of attainment but it was clear that many candidates had tried very hard to produce compositions that were innovative and creative, with good aural perception and well-developed ideas.

The quality of administration by Centres was also much better than last year. There were a few problems caused by missing documentation, incorrect addition or transcription of marks and wrongly formatted CDs, but these were significantly fewer than last year.

## **Assessment**

Internal marking by Centres was often lenient, although the majority of marks were in the correct band. It was often the case that marks at the upper end of the range were more generous than those lower down. In a few Centres the marking was very generous indeed throughout the whole range. There were a few cases where the marks bore little relation to the descriptors given in the Assessment Criteria and where the rank order of merit was demonstrably incorrect, so that the Moderators needed to re-mark the entire submission.

## **Compositions**

The pieces submitted this year ranged from simple pieces for piano or for a single melody instrument to lengthy and ambitious works for full orchestra. The ambitious pieces were not necessarily more successful, since only candidates with an unusually developed understanding of the compositional process were able to demonstrate that they possessed the technique required. The best pieces invariably came from candidates who matched the length and scope of their pieces to their technical ability.

It is often difficult to judge exactly how long a piece should be; learning how to gauge this is one of the most important skills for a young composer to develop. It is worth remembering (especially at this level) that the more a candidate writes, the more scope there is for taking a wrong turn. In this year's submissions, that applied particularly to pieces that fell into several sections: such pieces were often uneven and would have benefited from the omission of the weakest section(s).

A number of pieces were based on folk tunes, or other pre-existing material. Under the heading of *Ideas*, candidates must be marked on their own individual contribution to the ideas contained in the piece, discounting any borrowed material. For this reason, pieces that consist of variations on a borrowed melody are unlikely to score a very high mark for Ideas (though they may still be strong in other respects).

The widespread use of technology has many benefits, one significant example being that it allows candidates to hear a simulation of their work through computer playback. One of the drawbacks of the use of technology is that it can give a false impression of the balance between instruments, especially in cases where exotic and unusual combinations of instruments are used. There were several pieces this year where candidates were tempted to use a selection of instruments which would have been impossible to balance satisfactorily in live performance.

### **Notation and Presentation**

Most scores this year were computer generated. There were few handwritten scores, and some of these were barely adequate. Even if candidates intend to produce their final score on the computer, it is very useful for them to learn how to write a score by hand: only then can they begin to tell whether a computer score is actually correct, however impressive it may look at first glance. Internal marking of computer notations should take account of such matters as correct layout, accurate spelling of notes (e.g. the leading-note in G major should be written as F sharp, not G flat), correct and consistent placing of dynamics or avoidance of collisions between notes, dynamics and slurs. A mark of 10 should be awarded only if a score avoids these common pitfalls, and internal markers are asked to satisfy themselves that this is the case before awarding such a high mark.

Candidates who compose songs should always notate the voice part, at the very least. If they cannot also notate the accompaniment in full (which is a more complex matter), they could write chord symbols so that there is at least a guide to the intended nature of the accompaniment. It must be stressed, however, that a song presented with just the words and a few chord symbols does not constitute an adequate form of notation.

Sets of instrumental parts should not be submitted. Some candidates had sent in the parts in addition to the score, which is unnecessary, while a few candidates submitted only parts, without a score, which is contrary to the Syllabus requirements.

A few candidates submitted graphic scores. In the very small number of cases when this is the most appropriate method of notation it is, of course, permitted. Graphic scores, however, need to contain a key to the meaning of the symbols used, as well as a clear indication of timings, so that the effectiveness of the score can be measured against the recording.

### **Recorded Performances**

It was good to hear several recordings of live performances, especially those which had been given in front of an audience (which were often followed by a burst of enthusiastic applause). If live performance is not possible, Centres can submit computer-generated performances instead, as many do. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that the synthesised sounds replicate as closely as possible the sonority of real instruments. In the case of a song, it is better if the melody line is reproduced with a vocal sound ('Choir Ahs', for example) than with an instrumental one.

Candidates need to understand the relationship between what they write and what is heard when their pieces are performed. For this reason, they should experience live performances of their pieces whenever possible. Some very successful pieces came from candidates who composed for groups of instruments that they and their classmates could play together.

### **CDs**

Centres are asked to ensure that all CDs submitted will play on a domestic, single-standard CD player. CDs which can only be played through particular computer software (e.g. Windows Media Player or iTunes) must not be submitted. Centres are asked to pay particular attention to this requirement, and to convert the recording format if necessary when recordings are assembled on the CD. DVD recordings should not be submitted.

Recordings should be assembled in candidate number order, with Piece 1 followed by Piece 2 for each candidate. CDs should also have a track listing, provided on a separate piece of paper.

### **Packaging of Work**

There were several cases this year where the CDs had not been adequately protected and where they arrived broken and impossible to play. Although excessively bulky packaging should be avoided if at all possible, it is important that CDs should be wrapped carefully so that they survive the journey through the post.