
A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/W - Appraising Music
Report on the Examination

7272
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General comments

This is the first year of the new specification, so this report offers a very important opportunity to give helpful feedback to students and teachers about how to approach the new exam paper. The new specification allows a far greater degree of choice over areas of study than the legacy specification. This is fundamentally a great strength, but it does mean that the exam paper has the potential to seem quite long and complex because of the number of different combinations of options. It is really pleasing therefore that the vast majority of students were able to find their way around the paper correctly and had clearly been well prepared in managing their time. There were occasional examples of students missing questions out or attempting all three questions in Section B instead of two.

The fact that each student has control over their own audio playback is another important new feature of flexibility in the exam. There was evidence that many students had taken advantage of this by tackling the questions in the order in which they felt most comfortable, rather than strictly in the printed order. In a few cases, it was clear that students had ended up rushing through some questions, and as a result their handwriting became difficult to read. Schools and colleges are reminded that students with handwriting difficulties may be allowed to use a word processor if they qualify for access arrangements; this is a very effective solution for an increasing number of students.

Above all, it is important that students get the opportunity to practise working through exam-style questions using their own audio sources as a preparation for the actual exam. This is particularly true of the 10-mark questions on excerpts from unfamiliar music found in Section A.

Section A: Listening

The compulsory questions from Area of study 1 include excerpts from all three strands; their position will change each year. This year, the 4-mark short answer question was on piano music by Grieg, the 6-mark dictation on a baroque solo concerto, and the 10-mark question on an excerpt from a Mozart opera.

Question 1

The majority of students correctly identified two rhythmic features and almost everybody spotted the perfect cadence. However, many responses failed to select appoggiaturas as the harmonic feature, with several opting for augmented triads, perhaps because they had heard a diminished triad and confused these types of harmony.

Question 2

The dictation question elicited a full spread of marks, with over ten percent obtaining full marks. Most students managed to notate the first two notes successfully as they descend in a scale from the previous one. Finding the A seemed harder for many because of the leap; some helpful strategies might be to try and trace the overall scale downwards from this A through the G and F to the E flat at the start of the next bar, or to think about the harmony made against the F# in the bass at the start of bar 4. Unfortunately, rather a lot of responses did not recognise the fairly standard baroque bass cadence formula in bar 6, suggesting that familiarity with the bass clef is still an issue for some.

Question 3

Question 3 offered a vivid scene from near the end of Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' for aural analysis. Nearly all students made a pleasing attempt at this, most dwelling on description of the arresting opening chords and first entry of the statue. The strongest responses managed to balance accurate description of the music in technical terms with its emotional impact. There tended to be a lot of writing about dynamics, instrumentation and register, and not enough on melody, harmony and rhythm.

The rest of Section A consists of questions on the optional Areas of Study. In descending order of popularity, these were:

- AoS4 Music for Theatre
- AoS5 Jazz
- AoS3 Music for Media
- AoS2 Pop (AoS 2, 3 and 5 all being relatively close in popularity)
- AoS7 Art Music since 1910
- AoS6 Contemporary Traditional Music

In general, there was a similar profile of responses to the questions in these Areas of Study, with the 10-mark questions mostly generating an average mark of between 4 and 5. The exception to this was the Gwilym Simcock excerpt for the Jazz area, which elicited some very vague answers.

As with Question 3, responses to the 10 mark questions need to make use of specific musical details taken from the excerpt and referenced either through the line number (in the case of items where a text is given) or by time point.

Area of Study 2: Pop Music

In AoS2, students appeared to find the aural questions difficult. The questions students' appeared to find most challenging seemed to be those on the modulations and harmony in Beyoncé's 'Love on Top'. However, there were some knowledgeable answers on the Daft Punk track for Question 6, listing several relevant features of electronic dance music.

Area of Study 3: Music for Media

In AoS3, students appeared to find the identification of the marimba in the Thomas Newman excerpt from 'American Beauty' challenging; many thought this was a xylophone, which has a much higher, brighter, shriller and less resonant sound. However, this was balanced out by very confident general recognition of the harpsichord in Uematsu's 'Game Over' music from 'Final Fantasy IX'. The eventful Bernard Herrmann excerpt from the classic science-fiction film 'Fahrenheit 451' generated some colourful writing.

Area of Study 4: Music for Theatre

In AoS4, the most confidently answered question was the spotting of the chromatic chord on the word 'lied' in the excerpt from 'Miss Saigon'; interestingly, however, elsewhere in this area, questions about pitch, intervals and harmony elicited less confident responses. Question 12 on 'You'll Never Walk Alone' was one of the better answered 10-mark questions in Section A; its clear emotional trajectory and direct lyrics perhaps providing a strong guide to structuring an answer.

Area of Study 5: Jazz

In AoS5, students found recognising the pedal at the start of Charlie Parker's 'Yardbird Suite' in question 13 very straightforward, but appeared to find recognising the octave range of the vocal solo in Louis Armstrong's 'I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket' more difficult. As mentioned above, Question 15 was the least convincingly answered of the 10-mark questions.

Area of Study 6: Contemporary traditional music

Students appeared to find the aural questions in AoS6 challenging; few responses managed to identify the scale used in Diabaté's 'Salama' or the highest note in this excerpt. On the other hand, the vibrant and exciting Anoushkar Shankar track used in question 18 was one of the better answered 10-mark questions.

Area of Study 7: Art music since 1910

Most students tackling AoS7 managed to identify the soprano's pitch set in the MacMillan excerpt, but struggled with both the harmonic effect of the chorus in the same piece and the scale type used at the end of the Shostakovich excerpt. Question 21 on Reich's 'New York Counterpoint' led to some detailed answers that were quite creative in their exploration of the relationship between sound and meaning, but there were quite a lot of examples of misidentification of the instruments, especially the bass clarinets.

Section B: Analysis

This section requires secure musical literacy to deal with the scores of the set works and it is important that students practise the techniques of analysis in order to gain the skills to analyse scores independently. There were a number of errors in dealing with technical terms and some uncertainty in discussing harmony, tonality and texture in scores with several lines of music.

Some of the most common sources of confusion are listed below:

- Compound time – the notation of the 9/8 metre of the Bach led to some responses making inappropriate references to syncopation, triplets and dotted rhythms (which were just dotted crotchets measuring out the beat);
- Technical terms relating to texture – 'antiphonal' was often used in the wrong way when 'contrapuntal' would have been more appropriate;
- 'Tonic' was sometimes used instead of 'root';
- 'Hemiola' was sometimes used instead of 'cross-rhythm' (hemiola is a very particular kind of cross-rhythm);
- 'Bariolage' was sometimes used instead of simply 'string-crossing';
- 'Sequencing' (which is a term used in music technology) was used incorrectly to describe melodic sequences;
- 'Range', 'register' and 'tessitura' were often confused;
- 'Major 7th' was often used when 'dominant 7th' was the correct analysis of a chord (for example the final chord in the Bach excerpt for question 22.1).

Question 22

Of the three questions, Question 22 (on an excerpt from the third movement of Bach's A minor Violin Concerto) was by far the most popular. The majority of responses correctly identified the dominant 7th chord at the end of the excerpt (though there were many which labelled this as a major 7th chord, which would have implied a D#, or as a minor chord, failing to spot the G# tied across the bar lines, or as something entirely unlikely). The second part of the question asked for an analysis of the harmony of bars 82-88; while many noticed the circle of 5ths, this recognition was not universal and the level of detail in discussing the various sorts of 7th chord in the passage was very variable. Many students were distracted into writing about the texture of the passage (how the orchestral parts relate to each other) rather than the harmony. The third part of the question focused on melody, rhythm and texture in the excerpt as a whole. While most responses managed to gain some credit here, too few made reference to the fact that the movement is a gigue and begins as a fugue; remembering these facts would have led to recall of some obvious features.

Question 23

Question 23 (on the opening of the first duet in 'Figaro') was the least popular of the three questions. More than half of responses did not manage to tackle the transposition task correctly; horns in G have to be transposed down a perfect 4th. Part 2 of the question, on the orchestral texture in bars 1-8, was handled rather better. The question required students to focus on the roles of individual instrumental lines; woodwind and horns were often left out. Part 3 asked for an analysis of how the music of the opening was used in the unfolding of the scene between Figaro and Susanna. Many answers dealt effectively with the basic characterisation but did not really explore how the music and situation develops during the scene.

Question 24

Question 24 (on the middle section of Brahms' Intermezzo Op. 118 no.2) was slightly more popular than the Mozart question. The first part of this question asked for the meaning of the *una corda* and *tre corde* instructions. Most students realised that this was something to do with pedals, but only about one third were completely accurate; there were some mistaken assumptions that it had to do with the number of notes played in a chord. In part 2, there were some very vague answers which simply mentioned shapes going up and down. Brahms' melodic writing always repays close study because of its intricate internal motivic relationships; in this case, the three opening notes form a shape which is reproduced in diminution at the end of bars 50 and 51, before being developed in subsequent bars through extension or augmentation of the opening interval. Several responses confused the legato slurs with 'phrase marks' and many were distracted into discussing what happens in the left hand. To be answered well, part 3 needed a realisation that the excerpt was structured in a simple ternary form. Once this was recognised, discussion of the contrasts and similarities between the sections form the basis of the answer. Many straightforward observations were made regarding the contrasts of texture between sections, but many subtleties were lost; for example, that there is an inner voice in 49-56, beginning in the left hand but migrating to the right hand at 54, which shadows the melody in a kind of imitation. At 65, these two voices return but in opposite registers. Most responses recognised that the melody at 57 is related to the beginning of the previous section (48-51¹) in its descending scale shape, but very few responses recognise that there is another canon here, with the bass part playing the same motif descending from F# to C# two beats later. In general, there were many examples of confusion about the tonality of this excerpt with some responses failing to correctly identify the opening key of F# minor and many

simply referring to increased chromaticism at 57, without seeing that this is simply the result of changing to the parallel major.

In general, the short 5-mark questions need a precise and focused approach, which was not always demonstrated in responses.

Section C: Essay

There was evidence of a great deal of thorough preparation for this part of the exam. Many students were able to write in detail and at length about music they had studied. The clearest element of differentiation between the success of different responses in this section was the degree to which the students had managed to fit this prepared information into a relevant discussion of the essay subject.

Question 25

Question 25 asked about the roles of repetition and surprise in the structure of pop songs. The general standard of answers here was less successful than those in most other areas of study. Several answers tended to focus on elements of texture or sonority when discussing surprise, forgetting to show how these might play a role in the structure of a song. All six artists or groups featured to some extent, with the most frequently discussed being Stevie Wonder, Muse and Beyoncé.

Question 26

Question 26 referred to character portraits of heroes and/or villains in film music. While there was a lot of detailed writing, not all of it was well focused on this topic, instead describing scenes of action or feeling in general. Bernard Herrmann and Hans Zimmer were the favourite subjects, with 'Psycho' and 'Gladiator' as respective examples, but Michael Giacchino's score for 'The Incredibles' understandably received substantial attention.

Question 27

Question 27 asked for examples of critical moments of poignancy or comedy in musical theatre. This was the most popular question by a considerable margin and was generally quite well answered. There were many examples of students discussing multiple songs by two composers. Richard Rodgers, Stephen Sondheim and Claude-Michel Schönberg were most frequently discussed, but Jason Robert Brown's 'The Last Five Years' also featured. Kurt Weill did not appear very often. The definition of 'poignancy' was stretched a little wide in some responses, which attempted to describe 'Oh What a Beautiful Morning' and 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd' in these terms; however, in some hands, this worked well. Effective subject matter for this topic was frequently provided by 'Lonely Room' from 'Oklahoma!', 'I'd Give my Life for You' and 'I Still Believe' from 'Miss Saigon', 'One Day More', 'I Dreamed a Dream', 'Empty Chairs and Empty Tables' and 'On My Own' from 'Les Misérables' and 'Still Hurting' from 'The Last Five Years'.

Question 28

Question 28 asked how important harmonic innovation has been in jazz and there were a variety of answers, some subtly nuanced and taking several other elements into consideration. There were some rather awkward discussions of music which does not particularly rely on harmonic innovation and some misunderstanding of innovation as always meaning complexity. The strongest answers

showed a really impressive command of the chord changes of several jazz classics. Armstrong, Ellington, Parker and Davis all featured widely, but Metheny and Simcock almost not at all.

Question 29

Question 29 was only attempted by a very small minority; effective answers were given referencing Piazzolla, Anoushka Shankar and Bellowhead.

Question 30

Question 30 was the strongest answered essay overall, although very few students opted for it. As with question 28, there was an invitation to develop an opinion (about whether great music is always rhythmically complex) and the strongest answers did so with intelligent consideration of both sides of the issue. Messiaen featured frequently and was a suitable subject for this topic when considering complexity; Shostakovich often provided an effective foil, being generally simpler and more conservative in approach.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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