
AS MUSIC

7271/W – Appraising Music
Report on the Examination

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As this was the first year of the new specification and examination, this document represents a vital opportunity to share feedback with teachers and students.

First, congratulations should be offered to all those who prepared for this examination and there was evidence of some very effective preparation in all areas. The points that follow include some advice on how to prepare even more effectively, both for subsequent years of AS level and for the first year of the new A level in 2018.

General points

It was encouraging to see a wide and relatively even spread across optional Areas of Study 2 to 5, but a great pity that it appeared that no schools or colleges had elected to study Area of Study 6 (Contemporary Traditional Music). It is hoped that some schools or colleges are considering this stimulating field for the full A level in 2018 as it contains such a fascinating range of beautiful music.

It is not surprising that the slightly more popular Areas of Study were Music for Theatre and Jazz, as these offered a strong element of continuity with the legacy specification.

The increased degree of optionality in the paper compared with the legacy specification is a great strength of the new AS level. However, there were some students who found it difficult to adjust to the new format and, in the examination room, attempted to answer all questions in Sections A and B. This is certainly not to be recommended as a strategy, as it reduces the amount of time available to answer the essay question in Section C.

A few students had chosen to answer on different Areas of Study for Sections A and C. Whilst permitted within the rubric of the examination, this suggests possible uncertainty or confusion on the part of a handful of students as it seems unlikely that they will have had time to prepare more than one Area of Study in sufficient depth.

Having said all this, it was clear that the vast majority of students were able to make very good use of their individual control of the audio tracks, and thus of the overall timing of the exam, producing work of appropriate length and detail in all sections.

Section A: Listening

Area of Study 1: Western Classical Tradition

Questions 01 and 02

Responses to these questions suggest that most students found them to be accessible. The time signature and solo instrument in the Vivaldi Bassoon Concerto and the cadence and voice type heard in the Mozart aria were all identified correctly by a majority of students. However, there were a number of responses which incorrectly suggested that the respective soloists were oboes or Counter-Tenors. The most difficult question proved to be identifying the modulation to the subdominant in the Vivaldi; a strategic use of the fast-forward and rewind buttons might have helped students to compare the tonality of the opening and closing ritornelli directly.

Question 03

This question was generally well done. The relatively obvious motivic construction of the melody was intelligently used by many students to help them deduce the missing notes. Unsurprisingly, the two most frequently achieved marks for this question were 6 marks out of 6 and 3 marks out of 6.

Question 04

This question is the first on the paper requiring an extended answer in response to a piece of unfamiliar music. This is a new feature of the examination compared with the legacy specification.

At AS level, this question will always take the same format; ie students must choose between the excerpts of baroque music on track 1 and from a Mozart opera on track 2. It is not appropriate for students to simply memorise a 'tick-list' of points about baroque or classical music and reproduce this in the exam, regardless of what can actually be heard in the excerpts. For example, expectations about 'modulation to the dominant or relative minor' for the Vivaldi were not fulfilled, while answers that focused on 'simple diatonic harmony' or 'regular 2-bar phrase structure' in the Mozart ignored more sophisticated and subtle truths. To give an illustration of this, in 04 (Mozart) only limited credit could be given to a student who wrote 'regular phrasing with imperfect and perfect cadences' but a higher mark would have been achieved by a student who wrote 'the first orchestral phrase of five bars concluded with an imperfect cadence, followed by a four-bar phrase finishing with a perfect cadence'.

In order to prove to examiners that they have genuinely heard what they are describing, it is advised that students get in to the habit of making reference to specific locations within the excerpt. This could be done by referring to line numbers in an excerpt with text, by relation to a structural point (eg 'at the end of the first ritornello') or, given that each student will have their own audio playback device, by giving the exact time point in minutes and seconds.

The advice given here applies also to the 10 mark extended responses required for questions 8, 12, 16, 20 and 24.

Area of Study 2: Pop**Question 05 (Beyoncé)**

This question was generally well done, with the question about the opening interval in the guitar being the least uniformly correct.

Question 06 (Joni Mitchell)

This question was slightly less well done; the technical questions about chord types and scale degrees proved the hardest parts.

Question 07 (Stevie Wonder)

This question was the least well answered of the listening questions, with most students unable to identify the 12/8 compound quadruple metre or the step up from E flat to F in the bass.

Question 08 (Muse)

While there were some perceptive comments about the overall processes heard in the track, too few students really got to grips with description and analysis of particular details. Many were distracted into writing about the lyrics without appropriate reference to their musical setting. This was the least well answered 10 mark question on the paper as a whole.

Area of Study 3: Music for Media

Question 9 (Newman)

Students appeared to find this question generally straightforward, with the exception of the multiple-choice question on the scale used.

Question 10 (Hermann)

Responses to the first question – identifying the intervallic range of the whistled melody – were a little weak given that this melodic fragment was repeated so many times in the excerpt and consists only of the first 3 notes of a major scale. The final question, asking for specific details of the accompaniment, was also poorly answered, with some responses doing little more than naming instrumental groups rather than saying what role they played in the accompaniment.

Question 11 (Zimmer)

This question produced many solid performances.

Question 12 (Giacchino)

This question prompted many detailed responses, but many students got carried away in writing imaginary scenarios rather than focusing on the technical details of the music.

Area of Study 4: Music for Theatre

Question 13 (Weill)

This was the best answered question in the whole of the optional Areas of Study. In the first question, 'octaves' was the correct answer; 'unison' was not acceptable.

Question 14 (Schönberg)

This question was also well done, but a surprising number of responses failed to identify the augmented 4th.

Question 15 (Rodgers)

The questions about scale degrees and keys were generally not well answered and there were some mis-identifications of the xylophone as a glockenspiel or marimba.

Question 16 (Sondheim)

This was the best answered of the extended writing questions in Section A, but there was still room for improvement in terms of observation of musical detail.

Area of Study 5: Jazz**Question 17 (Ellington)**

This question was well answered by students. The question about the opening interval was answered least securely.

Question 18 (Simcock)

This question generated some very good responses to the excerpt, but there were some strange choices in the last question, with several students selecting the rather unlikely choice of parallel 2nd and 7ths.

Question 19 (Parker)

This question was answered much less securely overall, with the response ‘appoggiatura’ proving rather elusive.

Question 20 (Davis)

There were many weak responses to this question. Whilst most were good at identifying instruments, some made reference to Miles Davis playing the saxophone, which suggested a superficial level of basic listening.

Area of Study 6: Contemporary traditional music

No students attempted this Area of Study.

Section A Summary

Students responded well to the opportunity to focus on their chosen Areas of Study. The areas in which students would be advised to try to improve are those aural ‘nuts and bolts’ of recognition of intervals, scale degrees, keys and modulations. These are of fundamental importance, regardless of which genre is being studied.

Section B: Analysis

Slightly more than three-quarters of students opted to answer on the baroque concerto rather than Mozart opera. However, those opting for the Mozart generally performed better in this section overall.

Question 25 (Vivaldi)

Within the short-answer questions, the two least well tackled were identification of a rising sequence and explanation of the bass figuring in bar 26. Whilst most students were able to say that it was figured bass, few gained the additional mark by explaining that 4-3 specifically indicated a suspension or that it was an instruction to play the notes D and C#. Question 25.6, requiring a discussion of harmony, tonality and texture, was one of the least effectively managed parts of the exam. Common errors included failing to tackle all three areas, mis-identification of modulations and writing in too general terms about baroque style rather than the specific excerpt.

Question 26 (Mozart)

Students' responses were generally more accurate and effective in this question, but fewer than half correctly identified the interrupted cadence in bars 11-12. In question 26.6 several responses went into discussion of plot and character without linking these to specific musical points from the excerpt. Although many students made valid points about tempo and dynamics, few were able to discuss the restless chromatic harmony and the delaying of the perfect cadence in the later stages of the excerpt.

In general, responses to Section B suggest that students might have benefitted from more intensive work in mastering score-reading and that preparation of the set works should be more of a priority for some. Both of these points will be particularly important for students proceeding to A level next year.

Section C: Essay

It was a pleasure to read many well-prepared, well-illustrated responses in this section, including several which covered repertoire not seen before in the legacy specification. This was a really encouraging indication of purposeful and enthusiastic engagement with the new Areas of Study.

An important piece of advice to give in relation to this section is that responses must attempt to address the given question rather than reproduce a pre-prepared essay on a slightly different topic. This was particularly noticeable this year in relation to Pop music and Music for Media.

A further general observation to make is that, regardless of the genre under discussion, students should ensure that they write in specific technical detail about the music. Actual melodic shapes, rhythmic motifs, chord progressions and textures must be analysed in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. The use of short musical examples on manuscript paper is to be encouraged, where appropriate.

Question 27 (Pop music)

Stevie Wonder was the overwhelming favourite artist here, though there were also many effective answers on Beyoncé and Muse. It was very clear that many students wanted to write an essay **comparing** two songs rather than writing about the reasons they became hits.

Question 28 (Music for media)

This question was framed in such a way as to suggest students write about the music in its own terms. However, several responses were unable to escape the temptation to give lengthy and irrelevant summaries of film plots or to give minute details about the relation of music to screen action, which was the exact opposite of the intention of the question. Bernard Hermann's scores for 'Psycho' and 'Vertigo' were the most popular subjects; Hans Zimmer (various 'Pirates of the Caribbean' films) and Michael Giacchino ('Finding Nemo') also featured.

Question 29 (Music for theatre)

Overall, this was the most well answered of the essay questions in Section C, although students tended to write about 'atmosphere' rather than specific times and places. The most successful essays in this genre were characterised by strong links between discussion of musical techniques and the emotional effects produced. Several old favourites such as 'Oklahoma!' and 'Les

Miserables' made frequent appearances, but it was also refreshing to see some more recent repertoire such as Jason Robert Brown's 'The Last Five Years'.

Question 30 (Jazz)

This question was also reasonably well done, with another perennial subject, Louis Armstrong's 'West End Blues', providing suitable material. Some of the best answers were on Duke Ellington's 'Ko Ko', which seems tailor-made for this particular question about 'flair and colour' in the use of instruments.

Question 31 (Contemporary traditional music)

No students attempted this Area of Study.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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