

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

Listening

General comments

The great majority of candidates were knowledgeable and showed close familiarity with the Prescribed and Core Works. Most had also responded to the music and were able to discuss effects and at least some of the musical techniques and processes engaged in achieving these. A few showed a well-developed understanding of music more generally enabling them to relate discussion of the prescribed repertoire (in **Sections B** and **C**) to a wider historical and/or contemporary context. It was disappointing that such candidates were small in number and that evidence of a broader listening experience was rare in answers.

The lengthy answers of some well-prepared candidates who clearly knew the music well and who had learned a great deal of useful information about it fell short of reaching the higher bands of marks because too much attention had been given to demonstrating knowledge that was not relevant to the question e.g. defining the precise modal nature of the melody in Mussorgsky's *The Old Castle* did not illuminate an aspect of Ravel's orchestration of the piece.

All the questions were tackled and the range of final marks was very wide, a pleasing number of candidates achieving high ones.

A candidate's command of English is not assessed, providing that the meaning of what they have written is clear, but a surprising number of answers consistently mis-spelled composers' names e.g. 'Holtz' for Holst. The legibility of hand-writing was also frequently poor: while Examiners are at great pains to read every word that a candidate has written, if a crucial one is indecipherable there is a danger that an otherwise credit-worthy point may not be recognised.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Candidates had generally prepared well for this section. They had listened attentively and learned to write vivid descriptions in often remarkably close commentaries. **Questions 1** and **2** were favoured and attracted some very high marks. The smaller number of candidates who chose **Question 3** were often less confident in their discussion of the two movements.

Question 1

Most candidates were able to make a basic distinction between Variations I to III and Variations IV/V in terms of instrumental roles and the extent to which the theme was explicitly present or not. Some described Variations I to III in considerable detail but had difficulty being equally precise about Variations IV and V. Weaker candidates who were less comfortable discussing techniques and textures sometimes padded out their answers with irrelevant speculation about ways in which the music illustrates the original fishing lyrics. A few ran into difficulties right from the start because they had identified the Theme as 'Variation I' and persisted with this mis-numbering, thereby omitting any reference to Schubert's actual Variation V. Others had not understood the concept of chamber music and referred throughout to violins, violas, etc. Discussion of tempo often showed insecurity in distinguishing: (i) between a faster beat and simply more notes to the beat, as well as (ii) between a change in tempo stipulated by the composer and one that was the performers' interpretative choice. A few outstanding candidates showed a well-developed understanding of tonal processes.

Question 2

The best answers showed an understanding of what was typical of its time in Beethoven's handling and what was innovative and could also flesh out their discussion of 'principal features' with a great deal of detail about his use of rhythm and instrumentation. Weaker answers from candidates who were less secure in their knowledge of the music often tried to compensate with background information and commentary of an almost journalistic nature. Some of these had been at pains to learn to write out significant themes: while this is a useful skill, by itself it is not necessarily a demonstration of close familiarity with the course of the music and the processes at work in it – any quotation needs to be relevant to a point made in the text of the answer.

Question 3

Fewer candidates chose this question and answers were generally less successful than to **Questions 1 and 2**. Although most candidates were able to convey an impression of the Haydn movement, there was usually a lack of overall view within which relevant details could be situated convincingly. Commentaries were more often incomplete 'blow-by-blow' accounts than conscious attempts to address the 'compare and contrast' aspect of the question. Those who chose the Mozart movement for comparison rarely showed any awareness of its formal structure. Beethoven commentaries tended to show flashes of enthusiasm but were also rather vague.

Section B

Again the third question was less popular than the first two: was this because **Questions 4 and 5** offered an opportunity (for candidates who wanted to answer this way) to give straightforward narrative accounts of the programmes, pointing out relevant features as they occurred, while **Question 6** required thought about how the answer would be organised and the 'wide range of examples' required was simply not available to them? The difference between the 'Prescribed' Works of **Section A** and the 'Core' Works of **Section B** is that the former may be treated as self-sufficient (apart from contextual considerations in preparation for **Section C**), i.e. candidates will not be expected to make references to other works by these four composers, or to the history of the development of these genres, but that preparation for **Section B** of the syllabus should extend candidates' listening and understanding of music beyond just the 'Core' works. These should be treated as starting-points for a more free-ranging exploration of the Topic as a whole.

Question 4

There were many good answers from candidates who knew the music really well and were able to choose and describe relevant examples that supported their argument. Most took the view that Ravel brought 'colour' to the 'black-and-white' of the monochrome piano version and were able to go beyond demonstrating simple dynamic effects or citing the use of unusual solo instruments. Many also showed an aurally-perceptive understanding of timbre and texture. Several apparently very full answers, however, focused too much on effects that were intrinsic to Mussorgsky's original material e.g. the use of particular rhythms or a drone or the function and pacing of the *Promenades*.

Question 5

In general this question attracted candidates who were more secure relating their discussion of musical techniques to the almost concrete images suggested by the sonnets to Vivaldi's *Summer* and *Winter*. There were some very detailed commentaries which showed close familiarity with the music and a well-developed understanding of the expressive techniques used. Treatment of a comparator piece, however, was often disappointing, nearly always less detailed and sometimes almost perfunctory (*Mars* and *Gnomus* were favourites). Some particularly reflective candidates made explicit distinctions between different categories of 'pictorialism' (such as aural realism, musical metaphor, narrative and events, mood, environment and character) and were able to illustrate these in discussion of apt examples.

Many candidates who compared their Vivaldi choice with one or more of the pieces from *Pictures at an Exhibition* seemed unclear in their minds whether they were discussing the original musical material or Ravel's orchestration of it – Mussorgsky himself often failed to get any acknowledgement.

Question 6

'Musical realism' was subjected to a wide range of interpretations: most answers included some reference to 'aural realism' (the cuckoo in Vivaldi's *Summer*, for instance) and many gave convincing accounts of some of the most accessible of Mussorgsky's pictures. More thoughtful answers were able to distinguish between the representation of the most direct features of an extra-musical stimulus and the less tangible sense of appropriate mood or character. A few understood 'realism' in a 19th century Russian sense and tried to demonstrate where Mussorgsky's sympathies lay, others took it too widely and tried to relate very general observations about music to 'real life' today.

Many candidates drew their examples solely from the Prescribed and Core Works: this was not sufficient to meet the question's requirement for 'a wide range of examples'.

Section C

It was in some of the questions in this section that a candidate's lack of any broader listening experience and wider contextual understanding was particularly telling. **Question 7** was by far the most popular, **Question 10** the least.

Question 7

Disappointingly, here again most answers restricted references to examples only to ones drawn from the Prescribed and Core Works. This was usually insufficient because, even taken as a whole over their entire chronological span, they are not sufficiently representative. While the question did not demand (and Examiners did not expect) a comprehensive overview of 'the development of the orchestra', it could not be answered adequately by simply comparing the instruments used in these works: some candidates, for instance, believed that woodwind instruments were not used at all in Baroque orchestral music, that they were introduced by Mozart, others that timpani were not used in orchestras before the 19th century. Study of the orchestral techniques used in the Prescribed and Core Works needed to have been placed against a background context of what a typical orchestra of its period was, and why and how each differed. Many candidates stated that 'the piano replaced the harpsichord' but did not understand that this did not apply to the harpsichord's role in the Baroque orchestra.

Question 8

This question was poorly answered. Many candidates were able to cite two potentially relevant titles but had difficulty in pinpointing what was 'virtuosic' about them. Most understood the terms as indicative of skill/technical ability and offered Haydn's *Trumpet Concerto* as one of their examples but very few attempted to demonstrate its technical demands, beyond explaining that a cadenza was improvised to 'show off'. A handful of candidates were able to extend their discussion beyond the Prescribed and Core Works with useful mentions of e.g. Paganini, Liszt, Chopin, Rachmaninoff but, again, they failed to grapple with the business of explaining the ways in which any one specific piece of music was 'virtuosic'. There were many very sweeping, and often confused, distinctions made between Classical and Romantic styles, both at different times associated with 'music that had nothing to do with feelings'.

Question 9

A few of the more successful answers addressed both the issue of interpretation by the performer (usually with particular reference to the observance of expressive markings in a score) and the issue of later adaptations, but most candidates only explored one of these. A few very weak answers focused instead only on the listener's freedom to interpret music as they like. 'Discuss a range of examples' was itself interpreted very loosely and often only carried out in very broad, general terms e.g. 'commercials', 'TV background music'. Reference (let alone discussion) to specific, named pieces of music was rare.

Question 10

The few candidates who answered this question were usually sure of their ground. They gave clear definitions and most of them were able to describe apt examples sufficiently clearly for them to be recognisable. Here there was reference to a wider range of music than just the Prescribed and Core Works, often to pieces that candidates performed themselves, or to repertoire (often from popular genres) that was their own personal choice for listening to. Some also related common usage of different textures to specific styles, periods or traditions.

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Paper 8663/06

Investigation and Report

General comments

Most candidates had chosen sensible topics, taken their investigations seriously and made an effort to present well-ordered, cogently-expressed Reports. Many of these included a CD of extracts, the best of which were carefully-selected to illustrate specific points made in the text. The relevance of some others, however, was not always convincingly established: some extracts were simply the opening *incipits* of pieces mentioned, used almost decoratively in a similar way to including a picture of a composer when his name is first referred to; others were not 'extracts' but whole pieces with no detailed discussion of any specific passages. The use candidates make of their audio examples can contribute significantly to each of the marks in categories A, C and D in the Assessment Criteria (Aural perception, Analytic/investigative techniques and Substantiation of judgements).

The other two Assessment Criteria – B (Contextual understanding) and E (Communication of findings and acknowledgements) - were often problematic for even the most well-intentioned candidates: if material originally written by someone else is reproduced in the Report it must be made clear who this author was and exactly where the quotation comes from. Some candidates seemed to presume that listing their sources in a Bibliography served this function – it is not sufficient. The Examiners were pleased to note that nearly every report included a Bibliography and many also a Discography: but very few candidates bothered to use footnotes to indicate which of these sources was being quoted from. Candidates who reproduced long passages of text (from e.g. *Wikipedia*), without distinguishing between their own words and those of their source, did not access the highest mark bands because they had not succeeded in demonstrating their own understanding. However imperfectly they may fear their own way of expressing their thoughts might be, using their own words is the only way to offer evidence that they have assimilated what they have read. Downloads from Internet sites convey nothing about what a candidate has actually learned. Some candidates attempted to make long passages of this nature their own by leaving out a few words here and there, skipping a sentence, or substituting a synonym: this is intentional plagiarism and dishonest.

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Link: most candidates were careful to explain the link between this Component and their Performing (there were no links made with the Composing Component); in the few where it was left unsaid it was easily deduced. The link needed to be more than an extended programme note: several candidates provided background to their pieces and discussed both why they had chosen them and how they had made their performing choices but very few understood the need to set the pieces in their musical 'context' i.e. there was little evidence of listening to a wider range of relevant repertoire, either music in the same style, by the same composer, or of the same genre. Discussions of interpretation were mostly vague, sometimes just a matter of preferring another singer's mood. This weakness also arose from a lack of wider experience of the repertoire.

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While most candidates tried to show that they had listened to a wide range of music, few managed to demonstrate convincingly that they had actually engaged closely with it. The listening and writing skills developed in the course of studying for Component 1 provide a foundation for more selective aural perception and give practice in describing more precisely what is heard. In this Component these skills are applied to music of the candidate's own choosing. The best Reports managed successfully to convey the candidate's response to, and enthusiasm for, the chosen repertoire in the way that specific examples were described and discussed.