

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

Listening

Key Messages

- Read the question carefully
- Illustrate points by reference to specific musical examples
- Do not repeat material used in one answer in another.

General

The spread of marks reflected a very wide ability range. At the top end candidates showed a mature understanding gained by close listening and hard work. Most had derived a great deal from some, if not all, the music they had encountered during the course.

In answering their questions, significant number of candidates needed to have read and probed what they were asked to do more carefully: some wrote about the wrong piece of music or gave the question a slant that it had not implied in order to reproduce what they had prepared. Others, perhaps over-enthusiastically, got the thrust of the question slightly skewed e.g. the many (otherwise knowledgeable) answers to question 1 which consisted almost wholly of commentaries on two separate sets of variations, without defining the process of identifying common techniques. By contrast, few candidates actually met the requirements of question 3, choosing to discuss not so much 'aspects of the music that are typical of the genre' but aspects that were typical of the classical style in general.

Handwriting: while Examiners are generously disposed towards candidates whose first language is not English and will take time to understand exactly what a candidate intends, the same approach should not be assumed towards almost illegible handwriting. If it proves impossible to decipher a word, or if the grammar of a sentence actually says the opposite of what the candidate may have intended, the candidate cannot be credited for what might have been a valid point in their mind.

Section A

On the whole there was a secure level of familiarity with the music of the Prescribed Works and most candidates were able to write fluently about it.

- 1 This was by far the most popular question in the section. A few candidates gave a vague definition, named two works and left it at that, but most had understood that explanation and illustration would be required. Some were not aware of a distinction between 'varying' and 'developing' and used the terms interchangeably. Although many were able to introduce or close their discussion by listing a number of techniques used by the composers they had studied, few traced these in a systematic way. Most candidates offered their evidence in the shape of commentaries variation by variation. The question could have been answered more succinctly by listing (as some candidates did) variation techniques and then referring briefly, by way of illustration, to specific variations rather than all of them. Only the most able succeeded in making relevant comparisons. A few very impressive answers showed a well-developed and perceptive understanding of compositional processes.

- 2 Most candidates who answered this question showed an appreciation of the character of the pieces. Some focused almost entirely on mood, often in a rather circular way and not succeeding in pinning down what contributed to this. Some of the best answers began by identifying tempo (both slow), muted strings and lyricism. Many were able to refer to a 'conversation' or 'dialogue' (or even 'trading') between clarinet and violin in the Mozart and some contrasted this with the relationship between the orchestra as principal carrier of the main theme in the Beethoven and the solo violin's descanting or embellishing role. The best answers offered a succinct comparison of the two structures, including comparing the 'closed' ending of the Mozart with the 'open'-endedness (a reference to the transitional link) of the Beethoven movement. Here again, there were some outstandingly purposeful, clear and very full answers that succeeded in identifying all the principal significant similarities and differences between the two movements.
- 3 Relatively few candidates chose this question. Many knew that the third movement is a Menuet and Trio and that this derived from a baroque dance but the Menuet was several times likened anachronistically to a waltz - an 'oom-pah-pah' accompaniment was suggested. Most described the processes of repetition but, although 'structure' was often referred to, few were really clear in their minds or their answers about the form. The contrasts of instrumentation and texture between the Menuet and Trio were usually described quite clearly. Some candidates attached too much importance to dynamics. Although this was a very compact, straightforward movement to describe very few candidates actually wrote a 'detailed commentary' - answers were frequently patchy and disjointed.

Section B

In general candidates had coped extremely well with the large body of music that made up the Core Works. The 'theme' seemed to have appealed and most responded to the expressiveness of all three pieces with enthusiasm.

- 4 There was generally a good level of familiarity with, and appreciation of, the music. A handful of impressively-detailed answers described and discussed a wide range of examples of different techniques of word-painting. Most candidates at least mentioned it and tried to explain two or three examples, but these often lacked convincing detail and/or an adequate understanding of how each effect was achieved. Many candidates also tried to illustrate other factors that affected the 'mood' of the music such as mode, speed, accompanying instruments and dynamics. A few focused solely on instrumentation, having not understood that part of the question which specified 'the music for soloists'. Dynamics and rubato (also mentioned) are principally effects of performance, aspects of interpretation, rather than direct contributions to the composer's interpretation of the text and were not really relevant.
- 5 The small number of answers to this question were disappointing. Although most candidates had understood the principle of a song cycle, and were able to summarise the story of *Die schöne Müllerin* intelligibly, few chose valid comparator pieces and even fewer made any sustained effort to discuss them. Several ingenious comparisons were suggested with *Dido and Aeneas*. Other answers discussed musicals but rarely managed to cite any relevant features. The most convincing discussions were those that identified examples of the concept album or of pop 'opera' (such as *American Idol*) but few of these were examined in an illuminating way.
- 6 Most of the answers referred to at least one of the Core Works as one of the examples and some confined themselves (legitimately) to these, but there was actually a little more evidence than in previous sessions that examples from wider repertoire had been studied. The relevance of these other examples was very variable. Films offered good potential in discussions of the contribution that background music can make to heightening the emotional impact of visual scenes and dialogue (but candidates needed to be careful not to repeat points made here if they also answered question 9). Accounts of songs were mostly weak: in the first place because the parallels with a stage portrayal of death could not be convincingly made and, secondly, because the focus was more often on the lyrics than on the musical expression of them.

Roughly a third of the candidates chose this question: the spread of marks was wide, from 1 to 33. A few outstanding answers showed a mature appreciation of how music and drama can work together, coupled with a well-developed understanding of musical processes which were clearly described in vivid, accurate detail using appropriate musical terms.

Section C

On the whole, answers to questions in this section showed an improvement on previous sessions. Answers were more focused, more coherently-expressed and, in many cases, well-illustrated by references to music.

- 7 It was surprising that so few candidates chose this question, as it was one for which all candidates should have been well-prepared.

Most answers explained something about the 'patronage system' which influenced Haydn's working life and contrasted this with the freer but less secure climate in which Schubert lived. Some showed an understanding of how political, economic, social and cultural factors changed in the 50 years that separated these two composers but the opening phrase of the question - 'musical life in Vienna' - was rarely addressed head on.

- 8 The question raised issues which a great many candidates found interesting. They were all, of course, able to answer from their own experience of studying the Core Works in **Section B**. It was by far the most popular question in this section and, generally, was answered well. Most candidates addressed both aspects of the question, many drawing convincing distinctions between 'understanding' and 'appreciation'. Several identified the potential limitations of translations, some showing a mature understanding of ways in which the innate qualities of a particular language might directly influence the way it is set to music. The best answers were those that managed to introduce and discuss specific examples convincingly.

- 9 Although the question did not specify that examples must be given, the best answers were those that were able either to refer to specific films (as well as operas from the Core Works) or could explain in detail what techniques might be used to achieve specific effects. Some candidates clouded their answers by not making clear when they referred to 'music' in an opera that they had in mind the role of the orchestra. Most explained the principal difference, often described in terms such as 'background' (in films) and 'integral' (in opera and musicals), and understood the ability of music to express or heighten emotion/mood. Some perceptive answers explained the power of music to foreshadow what was about to happen, or to 'say' things that were not explicit in the dialogue (if any). *Otello* was cited in this respect, but there were also some particularly good accounts of similar roles for music in film, e.g. in Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

- 10 A satisfactory distinction between the two terms eluded the very few candidates who attempted this question. Examples were bravely cited in ways that implied some understanding but most of the time the relationship was simply asserted as 'beat and rhythm'. Only one candidate explained a relevant example successfully – a demonstration of the effect of augmentation and diminution.

MUSIC

<p>Paper 8663/06 Investigation and Report</p>

Key messages

- Reading needs to be assimilated and understood; the music to which the reading refers needs to be listened to at first-hand.
- Judgements about the music should be supported by precise reference to musical examples.

General comments

There were some very enterprising entries for this component, based on a fairly wide knowledge of repertoire other than that associated with Paper 1. A pleasing number of candidates had kept careful records of their listening and incorporated these observations into their accounts of various genres/styles. These 'Listening Journals' reflected a real sense of 'investigation' over time, the best of them progressing beyond 'stream-of-consciousness' responses to show evidence of further reflection, an attempt to make 'connections' and an effort made to master appropriate technical terms. In some cases, however, the initial responses, expressed in language that was entirely adequate at that early stage (e.g. describing timbre in terms of 'colour'), had not been succeeded by any enquiry into how the musical effect noted was achieved, i.e. what the technical process was, and the understanding (reflected in the language used), therefore, had not advanced.

Many Reports benefited from being accompanied by CDs of appropriate examples. One, in particular, was made up of a considerable number of carefully-selected extracts that successfully demonstrated all the significant aspects of the development of the genre discussed. The extracts were brief – not complete pieces – but designed to be exactly long enough to make their point, and efficiently cross-referenced to the relevant place in the text. Candidates who also gave precise timing references to the significant events in their CDs of extracts strengthened the force of their evidence considerably.

On the other hand, there were a number of assiduously-researched submissions which showed plenty of reading but little listening. Some Reports were, effectively, little more than a synthesis of this reading. There was little convincing evidence that the information had been assimilated. Candidates need to be warned against reproducing accounts of pieces of music, or of composers' characteristics, from printed or website sources without themselves then seeking out examples of the music, listening, understanding and earning the right to quote these observations supported by their own personal understanding. Some candidates had enclosed their own rough notes made as they read. These threw useful light on the extent to which sources had been understood and the knowledge then applied to the listening.

Presentation: practice with regard to acknowledgements was variable. Some candidates were well-acquainted with scholarly conventions and used them skilfully. A small number of candidates gave no bibliography or discography at all. It was helpful to the Examiners when pages were numbered.