

MUSIC

Paper 8663/01

Listening

Key messages

- Use specific musical examples that are clearly recognisable
- Read the question carefully and make sure the response is entirely relevant and focused
- Choose appropriate repertoire for comparison, focusing on music and not lyrics

General comments

The general standard has shown a continued improvement. The best responses were certainly of a very high standard, and there was some very mature thinking and extensive musical experience in evidence in the best work. Many candidates had clearly diligently and keenly studied the Prescribed and Core works, knew them in fine detail, and were able to construct intelligent and focused responses. Some candidates could have provided greater detail in the discussion questions in particular. These candidates' musical experience also required expanding to better inform their responses.

Most papers delved straight into answering the question, where some others unnecessarily included much irrelevant information in lengthy introductions or conclusions, which did not add anything significant to the response. It is also unnecessary to write the question out at the beginning of the response, and any planning should be crossed out.

Handwriting was generally legible and the standard of English was mostly good.

The tendency for unasked-for 'blow-by-blow' commentaries was somewhat reduced this session, with candidates managing to highlight significant features instead. Section A, with its requirement for a more detailed familiarity with the set works, was sometimes less well-answered than **Section B** and **C** questions, and there was often a lack of consistency across the three sections. In some cases, the brevity of responses prevented candidates from being able to demonstrate sufficient familiarity; there were also some longer responses which avoided relevant points.

Section A

This section requires close familiarity with the prescribed works; the best responses used vivid commentaries and well-chosen examples to answer the question relevantly. Candidates should be reminded that referring to timings on recordings is not helpful, as the examiner will not necessarily have access to the same recording; relating examples to where they sit in the overall structure or sequence of events, as well as in relation to each other, will make references perfectly clear.

- 1 This was a popular question, and most candidates knew the music well, aside from some confusion over the numbering of variations. The best responses were able to maintain a focus on *texture*, with some slightly weaker ones commenting knowledgeably on the music more generally.
- 2 Candidates knew the music well, and there was generally good awareness of tradition and Classical style. Comments on innovation were sometimes a little vague, although commentaries were often detailed and clearly well-prepared.
- 3 Almost as popular a choice as **Question 1**, some candidates struggled with the comparison element of this question. Some weaker responses did not address the central issue of *structure*, instead offering up everything that could be recalled about the pieces. Some stronger responses mentioned tonalities as a structural element, which can be important in music of this period.

Section B

Although close familiarity with Core Works is to be commended, the strongest candidates showed familiarity with a wider range of repertoire where it was required by the question. In order to show a well-developed understanding, candidates need to relate musical features and techniques to their effects.

- 4 This was a reasonably popular question, and many candidates wrote at length about the different movements. There was some imbalance between discussion of the programme and the music, which reinforces the point made above that candidates must make convincing links between musical features and effects. The strongest responses were able to focus on the use of the orchestra, which was central to the question.
- 5 Some responses showed a lack of understanding of the musical features of *Clair de lune*, making vague statements that did not bear up to scrutiny of the music itself. The choice of piece for comparison was least effective where the focus was on lyrics, which are only of secondary importance, and in pop songs often tend to have no relation to the music. Stronger responses picked out the most significant features of the Debussy and presented an appropriate, programmatic piece for comparison.
- 6 This was a popular question, although many candidates found it difficult to remain focused on the river itself, relying instead upon writing down everything they knew about the piece. Nonetheless, there were some very successful responses, which convincingly linked musical features to the depiction of the river.

Section C

The best candidates organised their thoughts logically and presented them in an orderly essay, point by point, each illustrated by reference to relevant musical matters, drawn from study of a wide range of repertoire and personal experience. Weaker responses were extensive, but somewhat confused, with the question not being properly addressed or understood.

- 7 This was not answered by many candidates, and those that chose to respond needed to show a more comprehensive understanding of chronology and the different ways in which music was shared. Surprisingly, modern examples were lacking; it is worthwhile for candidates to be aware of musical issues in their own countries and times.
- 8 Many candidates experienced difficulty in presenting a balanced argument; quite a few came down fairly heavily in favour of programmatic music, but often did not manage to focus successfully on 'which is easier?', which ought to have been the central theme of the response. Material on absolute music was generally less convincing, with candidates struggling to think of why absolute music might also be successful. Weaker responses referred to the lyrics of pop songs, which were not helpful to the argument in much the same way as in **Question 5**.
- 9 An understanding of the purpose of notation was needed here, and few candidates were able to demonstrate this convincingly. Some took notation to mean expressive directions on the score, rather than the notes themselves, and there was little evidence of considering both sides of the argument. The question contained prompts for a range of examples; candidates would have done well to heed this.
- 10 The trumpet was a popular choice to describe, and most candidates showed a good historical understanding of its different roles, with preparation for Section A having some positive impact here. There was generally good knowledge of the instruments that make up the brass family, although many candidates missed at least one part of the question.

MUSIC

Paper 8663/06 Investigation and Report

This report addresses a range of considerations that are valid for both 9703/05 and 8663/06. Comments that address the link required for 9703/05 are not relevant for 8663/06.

Key messages

- A comprehensive track list must be included, detailing the contents of the CD of selected/edited extracts supporting the submission.
- The cover sheet must always be included as this states and explains the link between the investigation and either performing or composing (9703).
- Centres may choose to provide instruction that enables their candidates to understand the importance of researching relevant and reliable materials; guidance in consistent reference methods can also be very useful.

General comments

The range of topics investigated by candidates was broad and incorporated all manner of styles, genres and traditions.

A small but significant proportion of the submissions had elements of the work that were missing; using the syllabus outline as a ‘checklist’ can helpfully enable centres to navigate their way through the components required.

Many candidates were keen to explore programmatic and descriptive aspects of a body of music but overlap with prescribed works in other components of the course should be avoided.

Some chosen topics had a substantial contextual element. It is important to explain and validate the research by reflecting on the impact this has had on personal musical understanding as a whole. Where specific pieces of music are mentioned, for example in songs from musicals, the plot line or place of a song within the context of the dramatic work is relevant, but candidates should make sure that they also talk about the music itself.

Some topic parameters were rather broad – ‘How the piano revolutionised music’; in such cases, the most successful work came from candidates who carefully chose a small group of significant pieces to demonstrate their findings.

Teachers can provide guidance to help candidates to focus their thinking from an initial starting point such as ‘The Development of Romanticism in the Romantic period’ to a more manageable task such as investigating Romantic traits through the study of two or three composers, or the repertoire of romantic music in a single instrument. This would need further refining in the consideration of piano repertoire, for example.

Research

Successful reports achieved a good balance between summarising the outcomes of research and reporting more fully on material finally deemed to be of most importance.

Some good analytical projects were presented. An investigation of the crosscurrents in impressionism and early jazz, for example, provided opportunity for musical analysis and cultural comparisons. Some candidates, however, got rather diverted from their primary purpose, by the inclusion of a ‘History of the Piano/Saxophone ...’ section which was less relevant to the main focus of the investigation.

Candidates who understood that their unique research topic required a bespoke research plan fared better than those candidates in centres who worked to a common framework.

Many candidates demonstrated the ability to research and select authoritative sources online. The practice of using undergraduate dissertations is questionable – they may not be academically reliable enough and teachers can do a great deal to guide candidates in developing their skills of discernment.

Some candidates were very thorough in documenting their use of websites, having been guided in good practice that refers to the access date.

Syllabus guidance underlines that use of web-based resources alone are unlikely to provide the breadth of materials for research required in this syllabus.

Presentation of Findings

It is not necessary to send bulky lever arch files of documentation as evidence of research – this should be clearly discernible in the distillation of information in the report and supporting biography/discography.

It is very important that all parts of the submission are checked before dispatch. Occasionally, CDs were blank and, without a track list referencing the aural aspects of the investigation, credit could not be given in the absence of evidence.

Candidates should give details of *performers* for pieces of music on the CD – this is crucial information in addition to the name of the piece and the composer.

Referencing takes a good degree of organisation throughout the course. The references should be very clear in the text, with footnotes, or with a detailed bibliography/discography/references at the end. Omissions or confusion occurred where candidates mixed the two approaches.

A track list should be presented separately (not written on the CD itself as the only source of information) and editing of longer pieces should be conveyed through the carefully selection of pertinent passages.

Concluding remarks

Exemplary levels of curiosity and motivation in the researching and presentation of findings were observed in much of the work this session. Whilst many areas of investigation were very interesting, it is not the chosen topic that makes for validity, but the extent to which the report is credible in the light it throws on both the candidate's research process and findings relating to the subject matter at hand.

Highly successful candidates were able to channel the results of extensive research, conducted across the course, into a clearly focused, informative and convincing report.