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# A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/P Component 2: Performing  
Report on the Examination

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7272  
June 2022

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## General comments

In this unique examination series, students were required to perform for a minimum duration of 3'30 instead of the usual 10 minutes. Recordings of the performance coursework could also take place at any point in the academic year instead of the usual assessment window between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 15<sup>th</sup> May. Apart from these two changes, the requirements of the component and its assessment remained the same.

The majority of students exceeded the minimum time requirement and performed between 4 and 6 minutes of repertoire. There was a minority of students who still exceeded the usual 10 minutes and also a small amount who did not meet the minimum time for this series, and in both these scenarios examiners found that this tended to be self penalising.

Examiners enjoyed listening to a wide range of repertoire including graded examination pieces, music by composers and artists from the Areas of Study in the specification and a whole range of other pieces across classical, jazz, pop, musical theatre and film music. A considerable majority of students performed on the piano or sang, however, examiners heard a wide variety of instruments from all instrumental families and groups, as well as music production, all with a full range of attainment.

## Assessment Criteria for Instrumental/Vocal

The assessment criteria for this component is unchanged from the published version in the specification.

### Ambition of Project

Students who achieved the full 5 marks for this criterion performed music that was more technically demanding than music set at grade 7 for practical music examinations. Where several pieces of differing standards were presented, examiners would take the average standard in order to assess the mark in this area. There were many examples of students who judiciously selected music which achieved less marks for AoP, however, enabled them to maximise their marks in the other criteria.

Also considered was the 'expressive variety' presented and this year examiners had a slightly more lenient approach due to the reduced time requirements. Some students presented a single piece, and when this occurred examiners credited 'expressive variety' within the piece, such as changes in tempo, style, mood etc., where possible.

### Technical Control

In general, examiners found that the level of technical control was more secure than in previous years potentially as a result of having less music to master. Fluent and secure performances with limited errors of pitch and rhythm were awarded with marks in the highest mark band. Performances in which intonation was not fully secure, or featured consistent rhythmic inaccuracy could not achieve a mark in the top band. The most successful students in this area also demonstrated a mature tone quality across the full instrument or vocal range.

Students whose fluency was interrupted and had not mastered the technical requirements of their chosen repertoire and/or their instrument were restricted to marks in the lower three bands.

### Expressive Control

The most successful students had a strong ownership of the expressive features of their performance including tempo, tempo changes, dynamic contrast, shaping of phrases and articulation. Where the repertoire selected was limited in the scored or notated expressive features, the most successful students delivered their own musical interpretation. Less successful students delivered a bland performance without contrast, nuance and control, and this was often due to selecting repertoire that didn't allow for much expression.

It was also frequently noted by examiners that dynamic contrast was reduced on recordings due to limiters or equalizers on the recording device. Please see further comments below regarding recordings.

### Performance Quality

This was often the criterion where students were most successful and examiners enjoyed many engaging and assured performances in which the student had taken real ownership of the styles presented. Again, there were also occasions where the repertoire selected limited the student's ability to fully engage in the style 'with real flair' and therefore the top mark band was unattainable. When presenting two or more pieces of contrasting styles, examiners would expect to see this reflected in the performance. For example with singers, a change of vocal tone and delivery for different styles, characters, moods etc. was positively credited in this criterion.

Worth noting is the importance of a good accompanist to the success of a student's performance. Examiners did hear performances where the accompanist wasn't supportive of the soloist and features such as inflexibility, dominating balance and incorrect notes directly affected the quality of the student's performance. Students should be encouraged to rehearse with their accompanist well in advance of recording their submission as this is an integral part of preparing for their performance. Similarly, for students that perform with a backing track, sourcing a good quality backing track is to be encouraged and time taken to rehearse effectively with the track prior to recording.

Overall, the most successful students performed repertoire that was well within their technical capabilities, allowing them to fully master the techniques demanded, musically interpret the expressive features and deliver a performance with assurance, command and in many cases, stylistic flair.

## **Assessment Criteria for Production**

The assessment criteria for this component is unchanged from the published version in the specification.

### Ambition of Project

Students who achieved the upper marks in this area presented submissions with high musical and technical demands. This included large amounts of tracks (any combination of midi and audio)

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which required careful editing, balancing and mixing, demonstrating great technical skill but also high levels of musicality. Examiners heard some ambitious projects which had clearly been inspired by current professional producers.

#### Technical Control

Accuracy of rhythm and pitch in comparison to the original score or guide recording was often very secure, as was the capture of audio overall. Often the intonation of vocal parts wasn't as secure and, as a minor slip, would result in a mark in the 10-12 band. The most successful students paid great attention to articulation and phrasing, in particular of midi tracks. This attention to detail was often a key factor in the awarding of marks in this area.

#### Expressive Control

Examiners heard and read about some incredibly creative approaches to achieving the desired timbres for recordings, which often demonstrated a student's determination to achieve the exact sound. Where sounds and timbres had been successfully selected but lacked the same level of attention and editing, marks were restricted to the 10-12 band. Similarly to instrumental performances, examiners were listening for contrast in dynamics and musical shaping of each part. Compression and EQ were occasionally awkwardly applied, resulting in an overall sound that was too contained and lacking in depth. Where they were used successfully, students really understood how to manipulate both to accomplish their required sound.

#### Performance Quality

There were some excellent examples where students had completely captured and emulated the sound of the original artist or producer. The annotation or commentary provided by the student really aided the examiner in understanding what the student was aiming to achieve with their production and could therefore be credited accordingly. The most successful students created a final mix in which all parts 'sat' effectively and were well balanced and blended according to the desired sound. Where tracks stuck out unmusically, were seemingly not integrated or blended with the other parts, marks were restricted to the lower marks bands. Very often it was the vocal tracks which sounded 'alien' to the rest of the track.

Overall, examiners heard productions which demonstrated a huge amount of work, time and attention to detail and were awarded accordingly. For the students submitting productions there were clearly high levels of engagement and expertise. Additionally, for students who are not as confident or experienced in instrumental or vocal performance, this may be a considered performance option.

### **Administration**

Examiners would like to thank centres who were punctual to the 15<sup>th</sup> May deadline and presented their students' work in an organised manner. This greatly assisted examination. However, there were many administrative issues to combat this year and it is worth highlighting here what should be included for submission and what is to be avoided.

To be sent to the examiner:

- For each Student, a Candidate Record Form (CRF) – a printed, paper copy. Ideally A3 folded.

- Pages 1 and 2 should be completed by the centre and the student.
  - The front page should be signed by the student and the teacher.
  - On page 2 details of the music and recordings should be completed including the grades of the music if the piece has previously been on an examination syllabus. It is also important to state the instrument the student is performing, whether they are singing or submitting music production.
- The recordings on either a USB pen drive or one composite CD.
    - Recordings should be in candidate number order and should correlate with the details provided on the CRF
    - Guide recordings should be placed immediately before the student’s performance.
    - Recordings should be submitted as WAV or MP3 (minimum 128kbps) files
  - Photocopies of the sheet music, lead sheets, annotations.
  - For Music Production – sheet music/guide recordings **and** the student’s detailed annotation/commentary
  - The printed register

To be avoided:

- Sending all paperwork electronically on the USB pen drive
- USB pen drives do not need to be password protected for this component
- Bulky folders and plastic wallets – place the music inside the folded CRF and then place all CRFs inside a simple document wallet
- Don’t send one CD per student
- Centre Declaration Sheet – this is not a moderated unit therefore this is unnecessary
- Announcements on recordings
- Sending video submissions – these are not permitted for this component
- Sending the Composing coursework!

Examiners frequently discovered missing music, recordings that finished early and ‘recordings’ that wouldn’t play at all because they were not the correct type of file. It is important that centres provide the best and complete evidence for assessment. For example, if a student has submitted a performance for which the score is purely a guide but they have modelled their performance on a particular recording by another artist, it is important to provide that also.

Please check that:

- All pages of all sheet music are included and are readable
- The correct, complete recordings have been submitted
- If submitting one, that the CD has been finalised and is complete
- The coursework is for the correct component and going to the correct examiner

### Closing comments

Examiners greatly enjoyed the range of performances submitted and commended students for continuing to develop their performance skills throughout some difficult years. It was encouraging to hear the sustained quality and engagement with performing.

It is worth a reminder that for Summer 2023 the time requirements return to a minimum of 10 minutes and that recordings must be completed between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 15<sup>th</sup> May in the year of certification.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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