



A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/W Component 1 Appraising Music
Report on the Examination

7272
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Introduction

It is very pleasing indeed to be able to write a report on this component of the A-level Music examination, after the hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In general, it was possible to see that despite the challenges faced by students and teachers since March 2020, they have been able to prepare well for this exam. The provision of advanced information about the content of Section B appears to have been helpful in giving an appropriate focus for revision.

This is the fourth time this component has been set and the third time it has been taken by a full cohort of students. This means that the current specification has now become more familiar and centres have become more confident in preparing their students for the exam. This can clearly be seen in the quality of extended written answers this year. There were also far fewer examples than previously seen of students seeming confused about how many questions to answer.

Section A: Listening [56 marks]

Generally, in Section A, students did well on questions about instrumental timbres and techniques and were less secure in questions about harmony and intervals. Multiple choice questions involving musical notation produced very mixed results, but in the main those that focused on rhythm were better handled. In the 10-mark questions a lack of consistent analysis of musical elements (especially harmony and structure) was the most commonly encountered issue.

Area of Study 1 (compulsory)

Question 1: Mozart 'Martern allerArten' from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

This question featured the musical elements of texture, modulation, instrumentation and chromatic harmony. Many students were able to correctly identify octave texture at the start, but many referred to it as unison or monophonic, neither of which is precise enough at this level. The question about modulation in the middle of the excerpt was well handled, with a majority being able to correctly identify A minor. As the question is worded 'Name the key to which the music modulates ...', with the starting key of C major having been stated, it was necessary to actually name the key as A minor rather than simply putting 'relative minor'. An even greater majority were successful in identifying the correct order of solo instruments, though quite a few misheard the oboe as a clarinet. The least well done part of the question was the identification of the chromatic chord sustained for 5 seconds near the end. A large number of students opted for diminished 7th rather than the correct augmented 6th.

Question 2: Brahms Sarabande in B minor.

The dictation question featured a distinctive rhythmic motif in the first bar which most students were able to discern repeated in the bass register in bar two. As the piece progresses, while the rhythm remains the same, the melodic shape is subject to gradual change. In bar 6, the replacement of the simple scale shape with semitones and a leap of a 5th proved difficult for many students to notate. Some common problems with this question were

- forgetting to add the sharp sign to the D in bar 6
- writing the ledger lines incorrectly for the A in bar 6
- unclear writing where the placement of a notehead was ambiguous

Question 3: Telemann Violin Concerto in A major 'Die Reilinge'

The 10-mark question featured a charming concerto by Telemann in which the solo violin imitates the croaking of a toad by repeating a tonic pedal note using the technique of bariolage. The question asked students to find examples of features typical of the genre as well as addressing the programmatic element. There was plenty to write about here, with most students successfully identifying the instruments used, including the central role of the continuo. Many also discussed the use of ornamentation and melodic features such as sequence, auxiliary notes and notes of anticipation. Many were also able to write about the harmonic circle of 5ths progression heard near the start, the frequent cadence points and the chains of suspensions heard during the central episode. A feature which might have been more widely recognised was the use of ritornello form; identifying the structure of an aural excerpt at the start of a written response can be very useful in shaping the rest of the answer. Many students were imaginative in finding ways in which Telemann might have been representing a toad's movement, appearance and habitat as well as its sound!

Optional Areas of Study

The relative popularity of the optional Areas of Study remained broadly similar to that found in previous years. AoS4 Music for theatre is by far the most frequently tackled, with well over half the cohort attempting it. Following this, in decreasing order of popularity, were:

- AoS3: Music for media
- AoS2: Pop music
- AoS5: Jazz
- AoS7: Art music since 1910
- AoS6: Contemporary traditional music

AoS2: Pop music

In general, questions in this section were a little more successfully tackled by students than they have been in the past.

Question 4: Joni Mitchell 'Morning Morgantown'.

Nearly half of those who attempted the question correctly found the missing D min/A chord in the introduction. A common mistake was to opt for D maj/A. Pleasingly, most students found both a correct term to describe the polyphonic texture when the piano enters with broken chords and correctly identified lines 2 or 6 as finishing with the given melodic pattern. The most challenging part of the question was spotting the correct final interval in the vocal part.

Question 5: Daft Punk 'Emotion'

This question was well done overall. The hardest part for most was identifying the bass riff from the multiple choice options; about a third of students picked correctly. The vast majority correctly identified use of a vocoder and many were successful in explaining changes of texture, with some being helpfully precise in giving an exact timed location for the removal and reappearance of the bass line and the addition of the drum machine.

Ake mQuestion 6: Labrinth 'Last Time'

This question clearly appealed to many students who were able to call on their knowledge of the EDM genre to produce detailed descriptions of technological effects, vocal style, song structure and rhythm patterns. An area which might have been better handled was harmony; while many students referred to repetition or looping, few actually identified the chords used.

AoS3: Music for media

Question 7: Hans Zimmer 'Tennessee' from *Pearl Harbour*

Only about a quarter of students correctly identified the two chords in the opening sequence. However, the majority were able to calculate that a quaver was the shortest rhythmic value and to use the term 'legato' to describe the string articulation.

Question 8: Thomas Newman 'Main Theme' from *Six Feet Under*

As in the previous question, there were mixed fortunes here; only about a third of students correctly heard a sharpened 4th used in the string parts, but most were able to pick the correct melodic rhythm and identify the instrument playing it (though, as in Q.1, some misheard the oboe as a clarinet). A huge majority correctly named pizzicato.

Question 9: Bernard Herrmann 'Prelude' from *Marnie*.

There were a lot of very good responses to this track. The vivid characterisation clearly gave students much to write about. While melody, orchestration and texture offered many obvious features to latch on to, not many students wrote in enough detail about rhythm, metre or harmony.

AoS4: Music for theatre

Question 10: Jason Robert Brown 'The Lamest Town in the World' from *13*.

This question was generally well done, with a majority getting each section correct. The most straightforward task was identifying the bass guitar, while the most challenging was working out the vocal range in line 7. Some students mis-named the cadence in line 6 as interrupted rather than imperfect.

Question 11: Kurt Weill 'Grabschrift' from *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

Most students were able to identify at least one of the instruments doubling the voice (pizzicato cellos and basses at the start, flute later). About half were able to work out that the vocal sequence at the start of the excerpt was a third higher. However, fewer than one third correctly chose 'tonal and sometimes dissonant' as the best description of the tonality and harmony as a whole.

Question 12: Richard Rodgers 'If I Loved You' from *Carousel*.

This classic song encouraged some long answers, which tended to go into rather speculative interpretations of the character's emotions rather than focusing on the musical elements. In particular, the harmonic subtlety of Rodgers' setting, which is such an important part of his style and of this song, did not feature in many responses. However, there were some effective

observations about melodic range, register and shape and some discussion of the orchestral accompaniment.

AoS5: Jazz

Question 13: Pat Metheny 'Phase Dance'

About half of students correctly picked the rhythm of the opening melody, but fewer than one third were able to hear two perfect 5ths in the bass. There was an even starker contrast between success rates in the other two tasks; very few recognised the tonic as the pedal note used in the guitar, but a big majority correctly identified the cymbal playing near the end of the excerpt.

Question 14: Gwilym Simcock 'Beyond the Elegant Hour'

Analysis of the opening melody proved a tricky task, with fewer than a third of students hearing four different pitches. On the other hand, there were many good answers regarding rhythm and metre and the majority of students found at least one of 'chromaticism' and 'dissonance' in the excerpt.

Question 15: Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra 'Panama'

This reworking of the typical New Orleans sound inspired some very good writing. Most students had some relevant things to say about the iconic 'New Orleans polyphony' of trombone, clarinet and trumpet and mentioned the swing rhythm and walking bass. Harmonic structure was less thoughtfully considered though, with some students assuming, incorrectly, that it must be a 12-bar blues and few going in for any actual analysis of the chord changes.

AoS6: Contemporary traditional music

This area of study was tackled by only a small minority of students.

Question 16: Bellowhead 'Old Dun Cow'

Most students were able to recognise at least one of the instruments playing the bass line at the beginning of the excerpt and to identify the metrical change from three to four near the end. As in other questions, however, working out the range of the vocal part proved difficult for most.

Question 17: Anoushka Shankar 'Beloved'

Pleasingly, a large majority correctly picked 'antiphony' as the correct relationship between the soloists in this track. Reverb or delay were also identified quite regularly as effects applied to these solo lines. Students were less secure in analysing the scale degrees used in the melody and rather weak overall in suggesting a time signature.

Question 18: Piazzolla 'Tema de Maria' from *Maria de Buenos Aires*.

This colourful excerpt featured most of the typical instruments of the 'Tango Nuevo' style, introduced gradually over a repeating harmonic sequence. Towards the end, changes of tempo and the introduction of a wordless voice introduced elements of surprise. The few students attempting this question produced some very good answers, though it is surprising how many did not comment on the recurring chord pattern.

AoS7: Art music since 1910

Question 19: Steve Reich *The Desert Music*.

The first two parts of the question were generally well done; most students confidently named a xylophone or marimba as the instrument heard at the opening and picked the correct pattern for the violin ostinato. There was less success in working out that the ostinato had an octave range or in recognising a chordal or homophonic texture for the vocal parts heard in the excerpt.

Question 20: James MacMillan *For Ian*.

This question was handled successfully overall. The hardest part seemed to be naming the ‘Scotch snap’ or ‘Lombardic’ rhythmic motif, with some students suggesting melodic features such as appoggiatura instead. Most students came up with good descriptions of how the middle section was different from its surroundings by referring to its atonality, ambiguity or dissonance. Once again, the melodic analysis question was challenging; although most students correctly found one of the intervals used, only a minority found both.

Question 21: Olivier Messiaen: ‘Regard de l’église d’amour’ from *Vingts Regards de l’Enfant Jésus*.

An epic and kaleidoscopic conclusion to Messiaen’s masterpiece, this excerpt caught the imagination of many students who were able to convey some of its awesome power. Where responses could be improved, it was generally in two areas :

- giving a clearer overview of the structure of the excerpt, including analysis of how the various sections were repeated
- being more precise in describing rhythm, melody and harmony.

Section B: Analysis [34 marks]

The pre-release of information about which set works would feature on the paper clearly enabled some strongly focused preparation. It is pleasing to be able to say that performance in this section held up very well, and in some cases was even better than that in previous years.

As we have seen in the past, the Baroque solo concerto was by far the most popular option, with over three-quarters of students choosing it. Piano music also had a majority, while Mozart’s ‘Figaro’ attracted just under half.

Question 22: Bach Violin Concerto in A minor, 2nd movement, bb.1-15.

There was evidence of a great deal of excellent preparation for this question, with even the weaker students able to offer some relevant insights. It was the most successfully tackled question overall in Section B as well as the most popular.

Most students were able to select ‘auxiliary note’ correctly for part 1, but there was some confusion over the type of dissonance in part 2, with some students trying to write about chords or intervals rather than describe the violin parts as using suspensions.

Part 3, on the harmony of the opening four bars, brought a variety of responses from the very detailed to the vaguely generic. The best answers noticed the tonic pedal, with passing modulation to F, various suspensions and cadence back into C, followed by a modulation to the dominant. Some answers showed a misunderstanding of the words ‘diatonic’ and ‘consonant’; in this passage, Bach’s writing is not wholly either of these!

Part 4 asked for analysis of melody, rhythm and texture, showing how these shaped the structure of the excerpt. This was well handled overall; there is obviously plenty for students to say about these elements and many also managed insightful comments on Bach’s technique of ‘Fortspinnung’ and on the role of the continuo in punctuating the structure.

Question 25: Mozart No.7 Trio from *Le nozze di Figaro*, bb. 101–155

The chordal analysis and instrumental transposition tasks in this question were both correctly answered by about half of the students.

Part 3, on handling of orchestral texture in the opening, was done well by only a few. While most students spotted that there were changes corresponding with the switch in focus from the Count to the other two characters, many were not able to describe these accurately. A common mistake was to describe the opening as chordal or homophonic rather than in octaves.

Part 4, as usual, asked for analysis of the relationship between musical setting and dramatic situation. This was accessible to most students, but not many managed to achieve marks in the higher bands. A tendency to focus more on explaining the drama rather than analysing the music was common in the weaker answers.

Overall, this was the least popular and least well done option in Section B.

Question 24: Chopin Nocturne in E minor, Op.72, bb. 1-22

The question about the range of the left hand part in b.1 produced a range of answers; students tended either to get it completely correct (minor 13th or compound minor 6th) or have no idea.

There were a lot of very good answers to part 2, considering Chopin’s handling of texture and use of the instrument. Where there were weaknesses, they tended to be a failure to go into detail about the variation in the density of texture and voicing in the right hand part or to mention the role of the sustaining pedal.

Part 3 produced a wide variety of responses, some outstanding in their detail, others clearly out of their depth in the complex world of Chopin’s harmony. Most managed to identify the principal keys and cadences correctly and at least mention the concepts of modulation, dissonance and chromaticism, but there was a wide spread of attainment in terms of describing any of this in detail.

Section C: Essay [30 marks]

As with Section A, there was a very clear hierarchy of popularity, as follows:

- AoS4: Music for theatre
- AoS2: Pop music
- AoS3: Music for media
- AoS5: Jazz
- AoS7: Art music since 1910

- AoS6: Contemporary traditional music

The first three of these Areas of Study in the list above accounted for more than three-quarters of the total.

Performances by students across the different Areas of Study were broadly comparable. All of the Areas showed a better average performance in the essays than in 2019. This improvement was especially noticeable in Pop music and Music for media, though these two Areas did remain least well done overall. The vast majority of students were able to write about music by two artists or composers with a suitable balance between them and often made reference to at least two works by each. The factor which differentiated most obviously between responses was the depth of detail with which individual pieces were analysed. Musical examples were used by a small number of students, usually to good effect, though it is better if these can be provided on music manuscript paper.

Question 25: Pop music – energising and relaxing feelings

Popular choices of repertoire to illustrate ‘energising’ music included:

- Stevie Wonder: ‘Sir Duke’
- Joni Mitchell: ‘Big Yellow Taxi’
- Daft Punk: ‘Get Lucky’
- Beyoncé: ‘Crazy in Love’ and ‘Single Ladies’

Popular choices to illustrate ‘relaxing’ music included:

- Stevie Wonder: ‘Signed, Sealed, Delivered’
- Joni Mitchell: ‘River’
- Beyoncé: ‘Listen’

Some students resourcefully found songs which illustrated both qualities through the use of different elements, though it was not the intention of the question that the individual songs analysed had to combine both energising and relaxing moments.

Question 26: Music for media – shock and/or surprise

Unsurprisingly, the single most effectively used scene was the murder from Bernard Herrmann’s *Psycho*. Other popular choices included Zimmer’s ‘Stampede’ from *The Lion King* and the battle music from *Gladiator*. Some students wrote more about moments of prolonged tension or suspense, rather than shock or surprise and some defined surprise in a way which suited their desire to write about particular pre-selected scenes.

Question 27: Music for theatre – comedy and/or tragedy

Effective choices to illustrate comedy included:

- Rodgers: ‘The Farmer and the Cowman’ from *Oklahoma!*
- Schönberg: ‘Master of the House’ from *Les Misérables* and ‘The American Dream’ from *Miss Saigon*
- Sondheim: ‘The Worst Pies in London’ and ‘A Little Priest’ from *Sweeney Todd*
- Brown: ‘Moving Too Fast’ from *The Last Five Years*

Tragedy was shown effectively by using:

- Rodgers: ‘Lonely Room’ from *Oklahoma!*

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- Schönberg: ‘Empty Chairs at Empty Tables’ from *Les Miserables*, ‘I Still Believe’, ‘Bui Doi’ and ‘I’d Give My Life for You’ from *Miss Saigon*
 - Sondheim: ‘The Ballade of Sweeney Todd’ from *Sweeney Todd*
 - Brown: ‘Still Hurting’ from *The Last Five Years*

Some choices were a little contrived; for example ‘Oh What a Lovely Morning’, while good humoured, is not really comedic and ‘Edelweiss’ not in itself tragic, except in the context of its final appearance.

Overall, this was the most popular and on average the best tackled essay question.

Question 28: Jazz – greatest musical contributions to jazz

This question produced the greatest number of essays in the top mark band, clearly appealing to aficionados of the genre. The artists and topics which tended to come up frequently were:

- Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, both for their solo improvisational style
- Duke Ellington and his command of harmony and big band textures
- Miles Davis for his creativity in initiating many trends, including cool jazz, modal jazz and fusion

Question 29: Contemporary traditional music – how the use of musical elements led to success

This question was tackled only by a small number of students, but generally with good success. Anoushka Shankar and Bellowhead were the most popular choices.

Question 30: Art music since 1910 – interesting features of compositional technique

All four composers were represented in responses to this question, with Messiaen being the most frequently referenced thanks to factors such as his use of modes of limited transposition, non-retrogradable rhythms and transcription of birdsong.

Conclusion

It was heartening to see the commitment of teachers and students to the subject in this paper and to note the general improvement across the board in extended written responses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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