
A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/W Appraising music
Report on the Examination

7272/W
June 2023

Version: 1.0

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2023 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.
AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Introduction

For 2023, the 'Appraising music' paper returned to exactly the same format as 2019, in that there was no pre-release of information regarding the set works to be assessed in Section B. The average mark for the paper remained almost identical to that for 2022, showing that centres and students have managed to prepare very effectively for the exam.

Section A: Listening [56 marks]

Area of Study 1: Western classical tradition 1650-1910

Question 1 [4 marks] Torelli Trumpet Concerto in D major, 1st movement

About a quarter of students managed to fully identify the opening interval. A common mistake was to hear the major tonality and assume that a major 3rd was played. As the melody opens with the 5th note of the scale falling to the 3rd note, the interval must be a minor 3rd. The multiple choice question on modulation was quite well done, with slightly over half of students correctly identifying A major and B minor. Almost two thirds of students correctly named the circle of 5ths as the harmonic progression heard near the end.

Question 2 [6 marks] Mozart 'Madamina' from Don Giovanni, Act 1

The task broke down into two parts: a fairly straightforward descending major triad in the bass voice in bars 2-3 and a more demanding disjunct 1st violin line in bar 8. The full spread of marks was achieved here, with about 15% of students obtaining full marks and over half getting at least 3 marks.

Question 3 [10 marks] Grieg 'March of the Trolls', Op.54, no.3

The question featured Grieg's vivid picture of small, mischievous, ugly trolls on the march. Most students were able to capture at least some of the salient musical features, with the 2/4 march metre, staccato articulation and tonic-dominant ostinato of the opening highlighted in most answers. Two big areas of differentiation among responses were the degree to which harmony was dealt with in detail, and the ability of students to write about the whole excerpt including the contrasting major key 'Trio' section.

Optional Areas of Study

The relative popularity of the different optional Areas of Study has remained broadly similar to recent years. In descending order of popularity:

1. AoS3 (Music for media), just over half of students opted for this
2. AoS4 (Music for theatre), very close behind AoS3
3. AoS2 (Pop)
4. AoS5 (Jazz)
5. AoS7 (Art music since 1910), some way behind the others
6. AoS6 (Contemporary traditional music), taken by a very small number of students

Area of Study 2 (Pop)**Question 4 [4 marks] Labrinth ‘Something’s Got to Give’ from Imagination & the Misfit Kid**

This was a well done question overall. Most students managed to answer each part correctly. The most challenging task seemed to be identifying the rhythmic value of a triplet in the voice part. The most straightforward task seemed to be naming the chromatic scale heard in the piano.

Question 5 [4 marks] Stevie Wonder ‘Part Time Lover’ from In Square Circle

The multiple choice questions on the introduction’s vocal rhythm and the structure of the verse were both well done. The question on key and cadence proved much more challenging, with only about a third of students scoring 1 mark and a small minority scoring 2.

Question 6 [10 marks] Joni Mitchell ‘Hejira’ from Hejira

This gently moving, melancholy track comes from a period when Mitchell worked with jazz musicians such as Jaco Pastorius, whose fretless electric bass guitar can be heard prominently on the track. Identifying this instrument proved difficult for some students, as did getting away from a discussion of the lyrics to focus on musical elements. This was one of the less well done 10-mark questions in Section A.

Area of Study 3 (Music for Media)**Question 7 [4 marks] Michael Giacchino ‘Monumental Meltdown’ from Spider-Man: Homecoming**

The two multiple-choice questions, which were both focused on aspects of pitch, balanced each other out in terms of student success. Just under half found the correct melody pattern for the violin motif near the start, while nearly 60% identified minor 3rds, changing to perfect 4ths as the intervals played in the wind and brass motifs. Nearly all students managed to find at least one feature of dynamics to comment on.

Question 8 [4 marks] Thomas Newman ‘Main Theme’ from The Green Mile

The different parts of the question produced quite a range of success. Most students confidently picked 3/4 as a suitable time signature, and just over half worked out that the melodic range of the violin melody was a perfect fourth. The multiple choice question on harmony/tonality was answered correctly by just under half, while only a small minority identified the cor anglais playing a solo. Many chose its close relative the oboe.

Question 9 [10 marks] Nobuo Uematsu ‘Liberi Fatali’ from Final Fantasy VIII

Overall, this was the best handled of the Section A 10-mark questions. There proved to be plenty to write about in the orchestral and choral score, most of which could be convincingly related to the idea of the beginning of an adventure. Many students wrote at length on the excerpt, though a common issue was for this to turn into a list of instrumental entries, rather than a description of what the role of each instrument was and how the composer used musical elements other than texture and dynamics.

Area of Study 4 (Music for Theatre)**Question 10 [4 marks] Sondheim 'Colour and Light' from Sunday in the Park with George**

The unusual sound world and melodic style of this song were the main focus for the question, which was handled quite well overall. Most students named syncopation as the rhythmic feature in the vocal part, and made sensible suggestions regarding the word-painting of 'lighter' (such as a higher register and change of key). There was less success with the multiple choice questions as fewer than half picked the correct harpsichord melody or worked out that string harmonics were not used in the excerpt.

Question 11 [4 marks] Jason Robert Brown 'See, I'm Smiling' from The Last Five Years

The multiple choice questions balanced one another out; just under one third of students successfully chose sus² from the list of chords, but about two thirds identified the correct rhythm. About half of students worked out that the vocal range was a perfect fifth.

Question 12 [10 marks] Schönberg 'A Heart Full of Love' from Les Misérables

In this excerpt, the alternately ardent and embarrassed outbursts of Marius and Cosette are intertwined with Eponine's bitter and regretful commentary on their meeting. Schönberg's music conveys this situation through twists and turns of harmony and an interplay of vocal textures. Some students attempted to deal with the harmony, but it was not often handled well, with generally more success in analysing the shapes of vocal melodies and their counterpoint. Weaker students were drawn into commenting on the lyrics without considering the musical elements sufficiently.

Area of Study 5 (Jazz)**Question 13 [4 marks] Louis Armstrong 'Potato Head Blues'**

This was one of the best tackled questions in Section A, with a majority of students able to correctly identify the banjo, pick out the trumpet melody and work out the rhythm pattern of the accompanying chords. Only naming the 'rip' technique on the trumpet proved elusive for most.

Question 14 [4 marks] Miles Davis 'Milestones' from Milestones

The multiple choice questions proved tricky here, especially that requiring students to identify chord types. However, there were a lot of good responses to the task of describing differences between the A and B sections of the head melody, such as changes of articulation, rhythm and bass line.

Question 15 [10 marks] Charlie Parker 'Just Friends' from Charlie Parker with Strings

This track offered students the opportunity to discuss the fascinating interaction between Parker's scintillating bebop style of improvisation and a lush orchestral backing, dominated by strings. The best answers managed to balance detailed discussion of both and include some accurate observations on harmony, melody and rhythm. This was one of the better handled 10-mark questions overall.

Area of Study 6 (Contemporary traditional music)**Question 16 [4 marks] Toumani Diabaté ‘Si naani’ from The Mandé Variations**

This proved to be quite a difficult question overall. About one third of students picked the correct opening melodic shape and there was a similar success rate in identifying octave texture. Just under half were able to name the kora as the solo instrument, but a good majority correctly identified ‘kumbengo’ as the term for the accompaniment pattern heard at the end of the excerpt.

Question 17 [4 marks] Anoushka Shankar ‘Pratham Prem’ from Anoushka

The two multiple choice questions were balanced in outcomes. Just under half of students spotted the relationship between the higher-pitched tabla and lower-pitched baya and a little over half found the right relationship between the three drone notes. The question on rhythmic features in the opening proved difficult: just under half of students identified one valid feature and very few found two.

Question 18 [10 marks] Mariza ‘Beijo de saudade’ from Terra

This was a soulful piece of Portuguese fado, featuring typical instrumentation augmented by drum kit and trumpet. Although there were some good answers, this was the least successfully tackled of the Section A 10-mark questions.

Area of Study 7 (Art music since 1910)**Question 19 [4 marks] Messiaen ‘Transports de joie’ from L’Ascension (organ version)**

There was a consistent pattern across all parts of the question, with approximately half of students correctly choosing ‘octatonic’ for the scale and ‘dominant’ for the scale degree multiple choice questions. About two thirds of students found at least one alteration in the repeated melody for part 19.2.

Question 20 [4 marks] James MacMillan Christus Vincit

About half of students chose the correct sequence of intervals interrupting the opening unison. The fact that the third interval (a perfect 5th) occurs below, rather than above, the main note required particularly attentive listening. Slightly under half of students were able to suggest a suitable time signature or textural device, but an ‘a cappella’ texture was confidently chosen by a good majority.

Question 21 [10 marks] Steve Reich Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ

In general, students made a good attempt at explaining the hypnotic overall effect of this excerpt and some of the techniques typical of minimalism that it displays. Many were able to say where they heard changes of harmonic, melodic or rhythmic pattern, but far fewer were able to explain these changes in accurate technical detail.

Section B: Analysis [34 marks]

Overall performance in Section B remains the weakest part of student responses. However, the return this year to a normal situation, with no pre-release of information, did not seem to affect students adversely. The average results were broadly comparable with 2022.

Question 22 [17 marks] Purcell Sonata for Trumpet and Strings, 3rd movement, bars 1-27

This was by far the most popular choice, attempted by almost 90% of students. It was also the best handled of the questions in Section B.

A strong majority correctly identified the perfect 5th between 1st violin and viola for part 1.

Part 2 required analysis of the texture of the first 15 bars; many recognised that imitation was involved, but not all students made reference to fugue and therefore somewhat missed the point.

Part 3 asked for an analysis of Purcell's use of melody, rhythm and harmony in the whole excerpt; there were some good answers here but, too often, students were drawn into repeating the observations they had made about texture in the previous question. Really precise and continuous analysis of harmonic progression was rarely found.

Question 23 [17 marks] Mozart 'Via resti servita' no. 5 from The Marriage of Figaro, bars 1-38

This was the least popular option of the three, with about half of students choosing it.

The chord identification in part 1 was only moderately well done. Many students were confused between a 'major 7th' chord and a 'dominant 7th' and many did not specify the inversion or got it wrong.

Part 2 was on the harmony and tonality of bars 9-17; most managed to recognise the modulation to the dominant and the use of a pedal. However, observations about harmonic rhythm, dissonance treatment or actual chord progressions were harder to come by.

In part 3, the role of rhythm, melody, texture and dynamics in portraying the conflict between Marcellina and Susanna was to be examined. Stronger answers included useful points to make regarding the contour and phrase lengths of the vocal parts and how they related to one another texturally. Weaker answers tended to focus too much on the words themselves and did not get far beyond simple observations on the music, such as the ostinato triplet figure in the 2nd violins.

Question 24 [17 marks] Brahms 'Ballade' in G minor, op. 118 no.3, bars 1-36

About 60% of students attempted this question. It was, however, the least well done overall. While there were some very accomplished responses, there were far more which suggested that students were out of their depth discussing Brahms's technique.

In part 1, over one third of students correctly identified both the key and the cadence. About two thirds managed one or the other feature.

Part 2 required an analysis of the harmony and tonality of the opening ten bars. While there were some strong answers, too many made vague references about chromaticism or modulation without

describing the chord progressions in detail. The fact that all the harmony is in root position in this section, giving it a particularly robust quality, was missed by most.

Part 3 produced a disappointing overall response, though it must be said that a minority of able students did very well. Frequent issues included only dealing with the opening bars of the excerpt, writing about texture and dynamics instead of melody and rhythm, and most significantly, not being able to explain coherently how the opening motifs are progressively developed during the excerpt.

Section C: Essay [30 marks]

The relative popularity of the different optional Areas of study has remained in a fairly stable pattern for the essay topics:

1. AoS4 (Music for theatre)
2. AoS3 (Music for media)
3. AoS2 (Pop)
4. AoS5 (Jazz)
5. AoS7 (Art music since 1910)
6. AoS6 (Contemporary traditional music), taken by a very small number of students

Overall student performance in this section was at the same level or above that recorded last year. Areas of study 3 and 7 both showed an improvement in average mark over 2022. Many students wrote at length, and there were very few examples of students being penalised for dealing with only one composer/artist.

Question 25 Creativity in using texture and sonority

This was the least successfully tackled essay overall, with the lowest proportion of marks in the top two bands and largest proportion in the lowest band.

Students were often able to convey basic information about instrumentation, but not always to investigate or describe ways in which they thought it was 'creative'.

Examples frequently encountered included:

- Stevie Wonder's use of brass instruments and saxophones in 'Sir Duke'
- The mix of acoustic and electronic sources found in the work of various artists, especially Daft Punk

Question 26 Creation of moods of terror and/or triumph

This was one of the best answered essays overall, with about 40% of students obtaining marks in the top two bands.

The most obvious examples to illustrate 'terror' unsurprisingly came from Herrmann's score for Psycho, though there were also convincing uses of the same composer's Vertigo. 'Triumph' was well illustrated using music from Gladiator by Zimmer and The Incredibles by Giacchino.

Most students chose to write about both terror and triumph, though it was not essential to do so in order to achieve a high mark.

Question 27 Is melody the ‘most important element’ in musical theatre?

This was a well handled essay overall, with many students able to reference a wide range of suitable material in detail.

The question was intelligently tackled by most students. They were able to discuss straightforward examples where melody is clearly the main focus (eg ‘O what a beautiful morning’ and ‘Do, re, mi’ by Rogers) and contrast them with more sophisticated pieces (eg ‘The ballad of Sweeney Todd’ by Sondheim, or ‘Lonely Room’ by Rogers), where harmony and texture are at least as important. Another popular choice was ‘I’m Still Hurting’ by Jason Robert Brown, which moves from simplicity to complexity of melodic writing.

Question 28 The role of size of ensemble in creating musical character

This question was also well done overall.

As with question 27, there was no expectation that a particular conclusion would be arrived at in answering the question. Students were often quite sophisticated in teasing out which elements were significant in generating ‘character’ in addition to ensemble size.

The examples most frequently used included:

- For solos – Simcock: ‘These Are The Good Days’ from Good Days at Schloss Elmau
- For small ensembles – Armstrong: ‘West End Blues’
- For larger ensembles – Ellington: ‘The Mooche’ and ‘Take the A-Train’

Question 29 How contrast is used in structuring music

Only a small minority of students attempted this question. It was well done overall, often showing a very detailed level of preparation, mainly on songs by Bellowhead and Anoushka Shankar. An issue which prevented some students from doing better was a failure to properly engage with the question. While students described contrasts in terms of style and instrumentation between traditional and modern instruments or harmonies, they did not specifically discuss how these were used to structure the pieces discussed.

Question 30 The role of texture and sonority in creating a ‘personal sound world’

The overall level of response on this question was excellent; by some degree it was the best answered essay.

The most frequently referenced material included Messiaen’s use of the ondes Martenot and of Balinese gamelan-inspired sonorities in his Turangalîla-Symphonie and the various textural combinations of a much smaller number of instruments in his Quatuor pour la fin du temps. Shostakovich’s use of fugue at the start of his Eighth Quartet and some of the vivid scoring of his Fifth Symphony also featured several times.

Presentation of scripts

Many students like to provide musical examples for their essays. This is an excellent idea, made much more effective if centres can provide exam board music manuscript paper for this purpose.

Centres are reminded that there are extra pages of lined paper at the end of the examination booklet, on which students can continue their essays or extended answers if they exceed the space allocated in the question. It is helpful to examiners if students can remember to point out briefly that their answer is continued later. If this extra space is not enough, students should write on a Supplementary Answer Booklet (SLAB). Please do not give out a whole additional exam paper for this purpose.

Students with handwriting which is difficult to read are encouraged to talk to their centres well in advance of the exam about the possibility of access arrangements such as using a word processor.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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