

Examiners' Reports

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Music (J535)

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Unit B353 Creative Task

General Points

Just over 500 candidates were entered for the unit and this represented the full range of attainment. There was a disproportionate number of very weak responses however, and this raised the question of the appropriateness of entering such candidates for the unit before the end of the course.

The Creative Task is marked by OCR examiners and **not** moderated like its predecessor, the Terminal Task. Therefore, the work of all candidates is considered and all candidates are awarded marks which precisely reflect their attainment.

Centres should ensure that both the attendance register and a centre authentication form are sent with the work to the marker.

High quality recordings and an accurate hand list greatly assist the marking. In a minority of cases, centres presented CDs without any indication of which candidate's work was on which track. Examiners cannot be expected to make assumptions that the work was in the order provided on the attendance list, or in the order in which the cover sheets were presented (which was sometimes different).

The cover sheets are an essential part of the process because they provide the examiner with information which may not otherwise be available. In particular, detail of any ICT used to support the composing process and/or to communicate the task is essential. It is insufficient just to name the piece of software used; centres must be precise as to the extent of the candidate's individual creativity, acknowledging fully any use of samples presets, or any other devices that facilitate the composing process.

Examiners do not make contact with centres, and therefore it is very important that all the information is provided to enable access to the candidate's work. Failure on the part of the centre to do this is dealt with as an infringement of examination arrangements.

Candidates are now given 45 minutes to complete and communicate the task and there was some clear evidence that this enabled many candidates, especially those at the higher end of the ability range, to achieve a more musical outcome. With the exception of the Melodic Phrase, the work presented must be entirely that of the candidate. If, for example, the candidate chooses to use ICT, they must input the stimulus entirely themselves.

There is no optimal length for a successful response: marks are awarded for the quality of the music, not the length of the piece. On average, responses lasted between 45 seconds and two minutes. Often those that were longer lacked direction and a clearly defined structure and, in drifting from one idea to another, lost marks by outstaying their welcome.

Quality of Response

The response no longer has to be purely melodic, although many candidates, particularly those who wrote their responses in score form, provided single line melodies. This is perfectly acceptable, although in some cases teachers might have considered whether this approach best enabled their candidates' musical understanding to be shown.

To achieve a mark in either of the top two mark bands (10-12, 13-15) there must be evidence of musical development, musical devices, and compositional techniques; these must be used well, that is with a sense of cohesion, appropriateness of style and, above all, they must produce an outcome that is musically satisfying. A sense of style cannot be achieved simply by introducing a series of devices such as repetition, sequence, modulation, and pitch shifting. The random combination of musical features can, at best, be judged to be of only satisfactory quality by examiners, who will appreciate that a candidate has recognised and constructed idioms with some musical skill. However, to reach the highest marks this music must be *stylish and imaginative* and produce a composition that is both *effective and memorable*. For example, it may be seen as desirable to add chords to a melody created from the rhythmic phrase but these must imply harmony that works and fits with the melodic line, not simply added as a random device. It is therefore worth noting that formulaic responses, where candidates are prepared prior to the examination to produce a composition in a set format, using as many devices as possible, will not automatically lead to high marks.

The response must be based on the given stimulus. In cases where the stimulus was not used correctly in the composition, the maximum mark that could be awarded in this section was six. Some candidates included the stimulus but did not **use** it, and these responses could not gain high marks. Examples of this were pieces where the rhythm was recorded as a backing part to unrelated melodic materials, or where the chord progression was looped with a melodic part over the top which clashed with the chords.

There were several responses to the stimulus which were in an ABA structure with the B section bearing little stylistic continuity from the A sections. This implied that perhaps candidates had prepared their middle sections in advance with an element of optimism that they could be slotted in, and fit.

There were a worryingly large number of ICT based responses which seemed to consist of a totally unstructured selection of pitches with no sense of pulse, and conflicting layered parts which bore no relation to each other and were not in time with each other. Whilst the stimulus was generally present in these, the outcomes were totally indigestible as pieces of music, and these candidates would probably have scored more marks if they had attempted something simpler.

The rhythmic stimulus created more of a challenge for those who performed their realisation than for those who used IT or submitted a written score. Many such pieces slipped in to 4/4 after a few bars or stumbled along in a kind of 3+3+2 pattern. The specification states that the time signature will be 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 or 6/8 and candidates preparing to use the rhythm stimulus need to be comfortable in any of these metres.

The note pattern stimulus was used frequently and there were some highly imaginative rhythmic patterns applied which brought the pitch shape to life. However there were a lot of weaker candidates who did not attempt to do any more than play the pattern as a series of crotchets. Some more able candidates created a set of variations, including a section in the tonic minor key. In some such cases however, the handling of the melodic minor scale presented too much of a challenge.

Candidates should be reminded that they should select just **one** of the stimuli. Some candidates, for example, combined the words with the chord sequence, or used the note pattern

to shape a melody based on the rhythm. In doing so they were basing their work on two ideas rather than one and this restricted their original ideas, and hence the credit that could be given.

Area of Study 1

Now that there are a specific set of criteria relating to Area of Study 1, it is important that candidates explore the potential of the instrument they are composing for, in their composition. It is not necessary for candidates to use the same instrument that they used to perform in Unit B351.

It was pleasing to note that some candidates used their instrument well, employing a range of techniques: this was observed especially with guitarists who, in the case of the chord sequence, did more than strum the four chords. The careful deployment of effects and techniques such as broken chords, slapping, stopping and vibrato, produced effectively shaped and developed responses. Over indulgence in the use of electronic effect racks by lead guitarist should not be seen as an advantage if the outcome results in the music composition being shrouded in a mist of noise.

In order to achieve three or more for the AoS 1 mark, the piece has not only to be playable on the instrument but needs also to show some understanding of the instrument's capabilities. Some candidates achieved this by effectively exploring the range and using instrumental techniques, with appropriate articulation. There were equal numbers of responses that showed a very limited range of notes and the technical capability of the instrument was not fully explored.

Some candidates wisely had the melodic stimulus transposed into a more suitable key for their instrument and this enabled them to compose effectively for it. Pianists who wrote right hand only melodies were not penalised for not using the left hand. Good responses included melodies that lay well under the hand, incorporating well judged hand position changes as well as exploring the range and perhaps adding a chord at cadence points.

Singers, using the words, seemed to be overcome by the poem, concentrating more on the metre and scansion of the lines rather than developing a coherent musical response. However, there were examples of some quite remarkable compositions for voice and piano that exuded natural talent and originality. Many singers also improvised their own words to extend the text given. This was acceptable provided the given words were used in full. It is acceptable to alter the order of the lines or verses, indeed a number of candidates elected to use the second verse first. Missing out words, or altering the wording of individual lines is however not permissible.

There were a number of weaker singers who found it difficult to maintain a tonal centre unaccompanied. Some included a chordal piano part to help them in this respect, however the addition of chords to accompany the melody sometimes had a detrimental effect on the outcome if the chords didn't fit and the performance became hesitant.

Using ICT requires more than simply deploying instruments to different tracks in a sequence. Some thought needs to be given to the combination of timbres and their appropriate choice in relation to the combination. In many cases, it appeared that the choice of instruments was either random or 'favourites'. In addition, the using of monophonic instruments (such as the flute or clarinet) to play chords was judged inappropriate unless the instruments were being used in a two part homophonic or polyphonic texture.

Area of Study 2

The melodic phrase stimulus is designed to provide opportunities for those candidates who understand the principles of two-part writing to show what they can do. There were some very effective responses here which gained high marks. Although it is possible to gain full marks by simply adding a stylish and musical second part (either a descant or a bass line), many

candidates extended the materials, and there were some remarkable compositions which were in ternary form, with some elaboration of the original materials in the final section.

The task will always be written in a way that enables candidates to demonstrate both textural as well as harmonic understanding. It was pleasing to see that most candidates understood this and there were very few note-for-note responses. Some responses had good harmonic understanding which was combined with a musically shaped second melody. Teachers can be assured that the occasional consecutive fifth or octave is unlikely to be penalised since the assessment of the task takes into account a wide range of musical achievement. A small number of candidates, particularly those who wrote for piano, included chords in the lower part. In such cases, markers based their assessment on the lowest note of the chord.

As stated earlier this is the only task where the candidate can enlist the support of another player to perform the stimulus. This rarely happened because the vast majority of candidate chose to submit their response in written form.

Area of Study 4

The Sequence of Events stimulus is intended for those candidates who are skilled in using ICT. It provides very limited scope for responses when using instruments such as the drum kit or guitar. Candidates who attempted the task in this way did not score high marks.

The stimulus will require candidates to establish a mood, and change that mood following an event. This is a very different stimulus from the others. Candidates who did not create the correct mood (in this case happy and party-like) and include an event (the smashing glass) could not be given a mark for responding above six.

Candidates were also challenged to consider how to portray silence through music apart from just stopping. Some did just this, whilst more effective responses had pulses beating or a sustained unresolved chord to suggest the tension in the air.

Quality of Communication

To gain high marks for communication there must be evidence of a good command of the medium but this must be coupled with accuracy and clarity of the intended style. Just as there were some responses that were mechanical because of random and ill judged use of compositional techniques, there were also some performed responses where the candidate clearly thought that they could gain extra credit by deliberately including dynamic changes, accents, staccato and legato, and tempo change. To access high marks these need to be musically applied. For example there were a number of instances of piano responses with randomly played harsh accents, or sudden changes of dynamics. Where these did not enhance the stylistic outcome, then they could not achieve credit beyond the 5-6 band of marks.

Similarly, in the case of ICT, the addition of effects, tempo changes, and dynamic changes provided by the software should be matched with the composition in the sense that these devices add something to the overall outcome. Quite simply, to be able to operate a computer and use aspects of its software do not automatically lead to a piece of music that reveals the *stylistic and expressive intentions of the composer*.

In terms of written responses, to achieve high marks, the dynamics and articulation need to be musically and stylistically applied, not just sprinkled randomly across the page. There were a number of candidates who may have fared better to have performed their responses (perhaps from their written score) since such things as articulation and tempo will be embedded in the response. It is recognised that it is quite challenging to achieve the top band of marks through a written response, because of the detail of the performance directions that need to be included.

Whilst there were fewer written responses, there were a number that appeared to have been constructed without any consideration of what the outcome would sound like. The practice of sitting candidates down in silence to create their piece is totally inappropriate to the spirit of the examination and the process of preparing them for this approach does disservice to their musical development.

Candidates who performed their responses were less likely to gain very low marks against the criteria, although there were some ICT generated offerings with layers of sound which did not synchronise with each other.

No set of criteria will legislate for every possible response and examiners had to adopt a best fit approach in many cases. There were a number of candidates for example, who performed their responses hesitantly, without complete pitch and rhythmic accuracy but who did include appropriate dynamics and articulation. Typically these responses were placed in the 5-6 band of marks. This band was also often appropriate to vocalists who had difficulty maintaining a tonal centre.

Unit B354 Listening Examination

There was a wide spread of marks and the overall performance of candidates was good with rather more scores in the upper range of marks than has been seen before. As this is the first examination of this unit in a January series, it remains to be seen whether the candidates entered might be presumed to be those who were ready to take this unit early, i.e. of slightly higher ability than the majority.

Q1A This question was generally well answered with many candidates having a good understanding of the dance style.

Q.1A(i) Nearly all candidates were able to recognise this music as *Country and Western*.

Q.1A(ii) Most candidates were able to identify *Line Dancing* as the correct answer. A few candidates inappropriately wrote barn dancing.

Q.1A(iii) Many candidates scored full marks here with answers like *fast, four beats in a bar, major key* and the identification of *violin and accordion* being the most popular. Some candidates mistakenly thought that they heard a banjo or harmonica.

Q.1A (iv) Many candidates were able to score at least one mark here, but a good number showed that they had an awareness of the moves used and gained full marks. The most common answers were *danced in a line, synchronised moves, facing different walls* and specific steps such as *grapevine and box step*.

Q1B This question based on Descriptive Music was answered well. Candidates were able to gain a good range of marks for their descriptions of the music and linking them to the title.

Q1B(i) There were only a few candidates who did not identify the shape of the melody correctly, although all of the answers were seen.

Q1B(ii) Many correct answers were seen, however some candidates either did not understand the term percussion or did not take it into account and wrote incorrect answers such as violin.

Q1B(iii) Most candidates were able to score at least one mark here and some excellent answers were seen. Some candidates wrote too vaguely about the music, making simple comments like 'it was fast', 'it was loud' and 'there were brass instruments'. Detail showing the progression of the storm was required. Answers like '*the music got louder*', '*brass played loud aggressive notes*', showed more understanding and higher ability candidates also added detail linking the storm with the music.

Q1C This question was answered very well by candidates of all abilities.

Q1C(i) Most candidates recognised this as *Gamelan*.

Q1C(ii) Many candidates recognised the instruments as metallic and gained credit. Some were able to provide the names *metallophone* and *gong* as correct answers. Other candidates were more specific and cited names of the type of metallophones and gongs; while this in-depth knowledge is very pleasing to see, it is not necessary to gain marks in this style. There were however, a significant number of candidates who wrote about xylophones, which are not metallic and so they did not gain credit, and others who used incorrect terminology e.g. Pelog.

Q1C(iii) Most candidates recognised that the music was *in layers* and used *repeated phrases*. Fewer recognised that *each part had a different rhythm* instead favouring the final option of the main tune having the slowest rhythm.

Q1C(iv) The majority of candidates gained a mark for the correct answer.

Q2 This question was generally the least well answered. Many answers were rather vague and lacking in detail with incorrect information and a lack of chronology.

Q2(a) The correct tempo was seen quite often although all speeds were given. Some candidates opted for 120 beats per minute, which did not gain marks here.

Q2(b) This new style question saw very few marks in the top band (7 to 8). Most answers ranged between 3 and 5. It is important for centres to teach the skill of answering this type of question throughout the course in order to prepare candidates thoroughly. Correct instrumental detail is required, as is specific detail of the features heard in this music. Links to the programme are also important, but a link to every musical point is not necessary. Weaker and middle ability candidates tended to write too much about the programme and not enough about the music. They were also apt to repeat the same link over and over again which will not gain credit. To gain marks in the higher mark band, a sense of chronology is helpful, which enables the candidates to show a depth of understanding of the extract.

Q3 The answers to this question were quite mixed with the higher ability candidates faring well and the lower ability not really grasping the type of answers that were required.

Q3(a) Few gained full marks here. A good number of candidates recognised the use of *harpsichord*, although some thought it was a harp, but fewer identified the oboe, opting instead for the flute or clarinet.

Q3(b) Many correct answers of *sonata* were seen, but all of the other options were given, in particular concerto.

Q3(c) Candidates who recognised the use of the harpsichord correctly gained a mark here for *Baroque*, but those who did not frequently wrote incorrect historical periods, the most popular of which was Classical.

Q3(d) Higher ability candidates were able to recognise the modulation to the *dominant*, but all of the other options were seen, including relative major which was not possible.

Q3(e) There were mixed responses to this with very few candidates gaining full marks and few gaining under 2. Most were able to hear that the melody descended and were able to gain marks for shape. Many gave the correct first note but then were not able to get the next interval right. This meant that their notes were not correct but their shape was, so some marks were accessed.

Q3(f) A good percentage of candidates heard the imitation in bar 15 but fewer in bar 9. Many other bars were cited, but the most frequent incorrect bars seen were 8 and 12.

Q3(g) Able candidates gave good responses to this question, identifying the use of *faster notes* or more specifically *triplets* being played in the *right hand* while the oboe was playing a long note. Many middle ability candidates were able to hear *chords*, *broken chords* or *arpeggios* and so gained one or two marks. Some candidates wrote about the role of the harpsichord as a continuo instrument, which did not answer the question.

Q3(g) The most popular answer was concert hall, which did not gain credit without reference to it being small. Area of Study 2 has a number of genres within it and the difference in the venue used for the performance of a small chamber work as opposed to a concerto or a great choral classic needs to be recognised. Some candidates did show this knowledge, giving answers such as *recital hall*, *room*, *church* or *home*.

Q4 There were mixed answers to this question. Many candidates showed a good level of knowledge and understanding of this style, but fared less well when describing the features of what they heard or the technology by which the music was produced.

Q4(a) (i) A good proportion of candidates recognised the opening technique as *sampling*. However a number listened too far into the extract and underlined incorrect answers such as *looping* and *overlay*. It is vital that candidates listen to the questions for the key words in order to ensure that they focus on the correct passages of music.

Q4(a) (ii) Those who answered *sampling* correctly in the previous question often went on to gain one mark here, but few gained two, with some weak explanations of the term being seen. Those candidates who incorrectly wrote looping or overlay as their answer to (i) gained some credit for correct descriptions here because these features were seen in the rest of the extract.

Q4(b) Nearly all candidates gave the correct answer here.

Q4(c) It was good to see that many candidates had learnt the correct terminology for the instruments and rhythm pattern and therefore gained marks for *dohl* and *chaal* here.

Q4(d) This was less well answered with some candidates not focussing on the melody, but writing about the rhythms of the other parts. Others lost marks because they wrote about the Indian language instead of the correct *Phunjabi language*. Some candidates identified the *decorated* or *microtonal* melody while others recognised that the melody was played by the *sitar*.

Q4(e) Many candidates scored marks here for recognising a *strong* and/or *steady pulse*, but many wrote about the tempo, which is not specifically a feature of this piece that makes the music suitable for dancing to.

Q5 This comparison question saw very high marks from the able candidates and pleasing marks from the middle and lower ability candidates. A significant number of features were heard and commented on.

Q5(a) Most candidates recognised this as a *pop ballad*. The word 'pop' was not necessary to gain marks but 'pop' on its own was not worthy of credit and so some candidates lost out here.

Q5(b) The vast majority of candidates recognised that the tempo of both extracts was *the same* or *similar*.

Q5(c) Again, most candidates heard that the *voice in extract A was lower than in extract B*.

Q5(d) This was answered less well because more refined listening was required. A significant number of candidates heard that the introduction to extract A was *longer* than extract B. Other answers were not so forthcoming and quite a lot of incorrect detail was seen. A surprising number did not comment on the differences between the two extracts but wrote about the guitars, which were the same in both and so did not gain credit. Marks were given for the use of *vocal sounds* in extract A that were *not* present in extract B, or the fact that there was a *bass guitar* in A but *not* in B. Some candidates again did not write specifically about the introduction and commented on the use of male and female voice, which was not appropriate here.

Q5(e) The vast majority of candidates answered this question correctly.

Q5(f) Box 1 – This was the box that consistently saw the best marks. Many candidates scored for hearing *male and female voices* and a good many went on to say that there were *two different male voices* in A and *one female voice* in B. Some noticed the *vibrato* used in both as well.

Q5(f) Box 2 – This was answered less well with some seemingly more obvious answers being missed. There were also a number of muddled and incorrect answers seen. Correct answers that were most common included recognition of the fact that both guitars *played chords* with some hearing that they *played the same rhythm*. More able candidates recognised the rhythm played as *syncopated*. Few candidates commented on the bass guitars, which were worthy of credit here.

Q5(f) Box 3 – Few candidates scored well here. Little precise information was given, the correct answer seen most often was that both used *a drum kit*.

Q6 Many candidates scored well on the first and last parts of this question but fared less well when describing the features of what they heard, or the technology by which the music was produced.

Q6(a) Most candidates answered this correctly.

Q6(b) (i) All of the answers were seen here with a good number getting 4th correct.

Q6(b) (ii) This was not answered well. Many candidates wrote about computers or autotuners instead of correct answers such as *vocoders*, *distortion* and *FX*.

Q6(c) Some candidates gave labels such as 'looped rhythms' instead of additional details about the accompaniment, which did not gain marks. However some gained marks for identifying the use of *clapping* with specific detail and the use of *quavers* on the *hi-hat*.

Q6(d) Many candidates did not refer to technology and wrote vague answers about repetition. Use of *looping* and *synthesisers* was required here and those candidates who used this language gained marks.

Q6(e) Candidates gained better marks here with most scoring well for answers such as *repeated pattern*, *descending*, *scale* and *quavers*.

Q7 This question was answered quite well overall with a pleasing number of candidates gaining over half marks.

Q7(a) The true or false questions were generally answered very well with a good proportion of candidates gaining all five marks and all candidates gaining at least one mark. Most candidates answered (i) and (ii) correctly. A good number heard that the music was in a *minor key* in (ii). Some candidates did not understand the term *pizzicato*, a word in the language for learning, and so did not answer part (iv) correctly. Part (v) was the question that was incorrect most often, with candidates failing to recognise that the music did not have the same two chords throughout.

Q7(b) A significant number of candidates heard correctly that the music had *three* beats in a bar: the most popular incorrect answer was four beats in a bar.

Q7(c) Most gained a mark here for hearing that there was *a rest in every bar*.

Q7(d) A pleasing number of candidates heard a correct instrument – *tuba* being the most popular. Some candidates wrote double bass but this was not 'added' at that stage in the music.

Q7(e) Weaker candidates often gave *fast* here which was not enough. More able candidates were able to write *fast notes* while high ability candidates correctly identified *triplets*.

Q7(f) A good number of candidates wrote a suitable composer but a number of incorrect answers such as Strauss, Beethoven and Mozart were seen.

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