

GCSE

Music

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J535**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

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.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

© OCR 2014

CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Music (J535)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
B351 Integrated tasks	1
B352 Practical portfolio	4
B353 Creative task	8
B354 Listening	13

B351 Integrated tasks

General Comments

The unit offers opportunity for candidates to develop their understanding of the instrument that they play and to explore styles and genres that they are interested in. The title, 'My Music', should always be at the forefront of the mind when preparing work for this unit.

Evidence from the moderation samples indicates that the unit is accessible to candidates at all levels although there is a significant minority whose level of musical understanding and skill is well below that which would be expected from a course of two years' study. At the higher end of the spectrum there were, as always, a substantial number of candidates who were working at a level well beyond that which is expected for the highest grade at GCSE.

In the majority of cases candidates had been prepared appropriately for the examination.

Administration

Most centres presented their work professionally with good quality recordings. Moderators who needed to contact centres with questions were generally dealt with efficiently. Examinations Officers and/or the Head of Music were generally very helpful and most issues were resolved by return. Most centres send materials in a simple easy to handle form. Centres are discouraged from using large ring binders or folders which are costly to send and difficult to manage within the limitations of a moderator's workspace.

There is no required way of organising sample materials and moderators appreciated the thought that had gone into presenting candidates' work in a simple, logical and accessible manner. As this is a separate unit from unit B352, with different candidates required in the sample, it was helpful when centres did not mix the units together on the same CDs. The most manageable presentations normally involved one compilation CD with candidates' performances and compositions presented on adjacent tracks, with an accurate hand list provided separately. Announcements on the CDs, which are time consuming to listen to, are then unnecessary.

Centres are encouraged to use the OCR repository as it enables easy access to the materials for the moderator. Centres who currently present work on data CD will find the move to a repository entry very straightforward. Centres need to take care to attach work to the correct candidate name.

Centres need to be alert to the fact that OCR sends two sample requests: one for unit B351 and one for unit B352, and these will not normally involve the same candidates. This is to ensure that a balanced sample is taken for each unit, and moderators do not have the authority to change the sample if the centre sends the wrong candidates' work. It is not necessary to send Candidate Assessment Forms for the whole cohort. Clerical errors on the Candidate Assessment Forms were eliminated when the interactive form, available on the OCR website, was used. This year the sample was increased to fifteen to ensure that additional materials could be drawn on if needed to confirm accurate judgments.

The requirement to provide a compositional annotation where there was not a score was generally met by centres using the reverse of the Candidate Assessment Form to provide the information necessary to moderate the centre's work. Where this was not done, the process became more time consuming for all concerned when moderators had to make further enquiries relating to the work.

Performing

The overall standard of performing was good with candidates choosing to present a wide variety of repertoire involving a range of instrumental and vocal styles and genres. In particular, moderators noted a large number of excellent pianists and vocalists this year. Candidates fared best when they chose to perform music that lay well within their technical capabilities and could perform confidently with attention to expression and interpretation. There was evidence of some candidates attempting to play music that was beyond their skill level in an attempt to gain more status and respect through their association with more sophisticated and demanding repertoire. In such cases, marks tended to be lost rather than gained. Where ICT has been used to enhance a performance, this must be declared and accounted for in the mark awarded.

As always there were some exceptional performances from a significant number of mature and talented musicians that merited full marks. In some cases the marks of 12 + 12 + 6 were fully justified. Centres are reminded that such performances should be well beyond the standard normally expected at GCSE level. Performances were generally accurately marked: the only area where inaccurate assessment was prevalent was in the award of the highest marks for performances which had audible shortcomings. The difficulty mark of 6 was in some cases awarded for music that warranted only 4 or 5 marks.

The choice of piece can impact on the quality of the commentary that candidates write. Well-chosen pieces written specifically for the instrument were the norm, although sometimes arrangements for an instrument for which the piece was not originally written curtailed the discussion in the commentary. Centres are reminded that performances in this unit should normally be of commercially available music, and not the compositions of candidates. The only exceptions are with instruments that are only ever improvisatory and in such cases centres should consult the specification for guidance. A very small number of candidates lose their performance marks each year because of this.

Accompanists were normally of high quality and OCR recognises the time that teachers and instrumental tutors put into the preparation of their candidates for the examination. It is not possible to give a musically convincing unaccompanied performance of a piece that relies on another part for its musical completeness, and there were cases where candidates were significantly disadvantaged by this. In particular, guitarists often suffered from strumming the chords of a popular piece without the melody or other parts, and because of this, limited musical sense could be communicated.

Composing

The quality of compositions was generally higher in this unit than in unit B352 because candidates were writing for a resource of which they have first-hand knowledge. Moderators reported some exceptionally high quality work in this area. Teachers and students seem to really understand the purpose of this composition, and there was some fine writing for candidates' instruments, many of which were accompanied by a detailed score as well as a live performance.

There was a good number of compositions that drew very clearly and successfully on the style and techniques of the candidate's chosen performance piece. Using the style of the performance piece seemed to be a useful way of helping candidates to get started on their own composition. In a few cases the composition was so close to the original that it was difficult to identify creative input. Teachers need to be vigilant to this when monitoring the process and need to alert students to the need to demonstrate their own ability to create and develop their own musical ideas.

There was still the occasional example of compositions that did not feature the candidate's instrument and in such cases the Area of Study marks could not be awarded.

As part of the composition process, candidates need to develop the skills to communicate their work and in this unit many did so by performing their compositions on their own. When communicating their ideas to another performer, candidates need to be able to set out exactly what they require, and centres must provide additional evidence of them doing this, in order to uphold the validity of the examination. Moderators were pleased to see that the vast majority of centres that were contacted last year about the omission of first hand evidence of this had rectified this omission this year, but there were still a number of centres where information had to be specifically sought. Centres are also reminded that joint composition work and arrangements are not options in this unit.

The assessment of compositions was often too generous. Compositions achieving marks of 12 and above against the core criteria need to be musical and stylish, successfully combining a range of compositional devices. It was often the case that compositions awarded marks in this band lacked the necessary stylish impact, and had features that more comfortably fitted into the band below.

Moderators were pleased to see candidates exploring the technical capabilities of their instrument and thus meriting high area of study marks. In some cases, where computer technology was used, the compositions far exceeded these capabilities, thus compromising the mark that could be awarded.

Commentaries

The commentary needs to have a very specialised focus on the candidate's instrument and its techniques in the context of the piece played. Candidates who maintained this focus throughout, and included specific detail related to the piece they performed, ably deserved high marks. There is no penalty for exceeding the 400 words suggested in the specification. Where candidates wrote substantially fewer than 400 words, even if the quality was good, high marks could not be justified. In a few cases, able candidates were significantly disadvantaged by the brevity of their commentaries, which should represent the product of four hours' work.

The best commentaries clearly demonstrated original work and musical thought, rather than responses to very specific closed questions provided by the centre. Teachers need to alert candidates to the serious penalties resulting from plagiarism: as with any academic writing, outside sources need to be recognised and referenced, although in the context of this piece of work, there should be no need for reference to other authors' material.

The quality of the marking of commentaries has improved over the years. Many centres are now marking accurately. The biggest discrepancy that was found involved assessors awarding the top band of marks for commentaries that were little more than lists of information. Assessors generally accounted for lack of reference to instrumental technique in their marking when it occurred.

B352 Practical portfolio

General Comments

The unit provides opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the principles underpinning Area of Study 2 in a practical way, by engaging in a performance involving interaction with other parts, and selecting from a wide range of compositional areas drawn from understanding gained from the study of either Areas of Study 2, 3 or 4.

Candidates generally found this unit a little more challenging than unit B351. In most cases there was evidence from the performances, compositions and Log and Evaluations, that the work was being linked with learning from the areas of study, although in a few cases that link was tenuous and not embedded in the planning and development of the work.

Administration

Most centres presented their work professionally with good quality recordings. Moderators who needed to contact centres with questions, were generally dealt with efficiently: Examinations Officers and/or the Head of Music were generally very helpful and most issues were resolved by return. Most centres send materials in a simple easy to handle form. Centres are discouraged from using large ring binders or folders which are costly to send and difficult to manage within the limitations of a moderator's workspace.

There is no required way of organising sample materials and moderators appreciated the thought that had gone into presenting candidates' work in a simple, logical and accessible manner. As this is a separate unit from unit B351, with different candidates required in the sample, it was helpful when centres did not mix the units together on the same CDs. The most manageable presentations normally involved one compilation CD with candidates' performances and compositions presented on adjacent tracks, with an accurate hand list provided separately. Announcements on the CDs, which are time consuming to listen to, are then unnecessary.

Centres are encouraged to use the OCR repository as it enables easy access to the materials for the moderator. Centres who currently present work on a data CD will find the move to a repository entry very straightforward. Centres need to take care to attach work to the correct candidate name.

Centres need to be alert to the fact that OCR sends two sample requests: one for unit B351 and one for unit B352, and these will not normally involve the same candidates. This is to ensure that a balanced sample is taken for each unit, and moderators do not have the authority to change the sample if the centre sends the wrong candidates' work. It is not necessary to send Candidate Assessment Forms for the whole cohort. Clerical errors on the Candidate Assessment Forms were eliminated when the interactive form, available on the OCR website, was used. This year the sample was increased to fifteen to ensure that additional materials could be drawn on if needed to confirm accurate judgments.

The requirement to provide a compositional annotation where there was not a score was generally met by centres using the reverse of the Candidate Assessment Form to provide the information necessary to moderate the centre's work. Where this was not done, the process became more time consuming for all concerned when moderators had to make further enquiries relating to the detail of how the work had been created.

Performing

It is both encouraging and satisfying to see young people engaged in the performance of ensemble music of so many different kinds and at so many different levels. It was possible, due to some very good recordings, to appreciate the interaction and good humour and spirit that exist in some music classes. Centres are reminded of the discrepancy that occurs when either the candidate's part is unduly doubled by another performer or when the placement of the recording equipment prevents the moderator from gaining a clear appreciation of the candidate's contribution to the ensemble. The inclusion of a score with the assessment materials, giving clear indications of the candidate's part, assists in the fair moderation of the work, and is essential when the part is hard to distinguish on the recording. Centres should provide video evidence where no score is available in order to confirm their assessment of the candidate. In a few cases it was stated on the assessment form that the part was clear, when it was not, and centres had to be asked to provide further evidence. In some cases this then uncovered weaknesses in the performance that were not otherwise evident from the recording alone.

Centres are reminded that the rules of controlled assessment require the assessor to be present when the performance takes place. In a few cases, where further evidence of the candidate's part was needed, it transpired that not only had the assessor not been present, but they had awarded a mark based on a recording on which it was not clear exactly what the candidate's part was. Piano duets provided by a private piano tutor, which often fell into this category, should not be submitted unless the assessor is also present at the recording.

It is essential that candidates are able to demonstrate a practical understanding of how parts work together in their performances, and for this reason the careful selection of repertoire is essential. Candidates were able to score highly when the piece required genuine musical interaction. Accompanied solos, whilst permitted, do not always allow this at a high level and therefore could not achieve the mark that they would have achieved in unit B351 where ensemble interaction is not so strongly highlighted in the assessment criteria. In such cases, the mark for interpretation and ensemble awareness was awarded too generously. Also, performances where the other part is just included as a means of satisfying the examination requirement, and has little impact on the candidate's role, are to be strongly discouraged as they do not reflect a genuine musical experience for the candidate.

There were some outstanding performances which were at and even beyond the standard for high marks at advanced level, and for these, full marks were available. The marks of 12 + 12 + 6 were awarded by some centres for good performances that fell short of this, and as a result mark reductions in the top range were frequently recommended. Marking in the mid and lower ranges was generally more secure.

Compositions

The choice of composition for this unit followed the general pattern of previous years. Area of Study 2 compositions were popular amongst all levels of ability and those which combined parts with sound harmonic interaction and textural interest often scored highly. Some vocalists chose to produce pop ballads that contained musical melodic and harmonic shapes. Where the interaction between the parts was fairly basic, with perhaps a guitar strumming a repeated unchanging rhythm throughout, the Area of Study mark that could be awarded was limited.

Within Area of Study 3, waltzes continued to be a popular choice and many candidates were able to demonstrate a craftsman-like approach to the traditional waltz patterns, harmonies and structures. Incidences of imaginative and musically conceived waltzes were more rare. There was a notable increase of interest in Latin dances such as tango and salsa. With all dance compositions, candidates who had researched their chosen style before embarking on the composition and were able to incorporate more than basic mechanical features (such as correct time signature, speed and standard figurations), maximised their achievement.

An increasing number of students chose to compose a descriptive piece. Here, a detailed brief is vital in supporting a positive assessment in terms of both the core and area of study criteria. For example, the structure of such a composition is often determined by the progress of the scene that is being described and therefore information about this is needed before the composition can be fully understood. Several highly detailed briefs were presented, but there was an increasing number of cases where this was not done and it was difficult to justify any marks against the Area of Study criteria in such cases.

In this unit, arrangements are allowed and those that were created with an understanding of the requirements of the assessment criteria scored well. Transcriptions have never gained credit at GCSE level and therefore should not be submitted.

Candidates are required to create their own musical ideas in all composition work, and this needs to be borne in mind when planning arrangements. There were some excellent examples of imaginative treatments of well-known pieces, incorporating counter melodies, a range of figurations and interesting harmonies. Less successful arrangements tended to consist of somewhat simplified versions of the original, often in the pop genre, and these could not be awarded many marks. Centres are reminded that it is a requirement that a copy of the original stimulus is provided with the completed work.

A number of students used technology to compose and realise their pieces in this unit. Moderation was straightforward when page two of the Candidate Assessment Form provided full detail of how the technology was used. It is not helpful when the assessor only names the programme (such as GarageBand) or makes vague and unspecific statements that do not clarify exactly what the input of the software is. Compositions that depend only on pre composed loops and samples, whilst allowed, cannot achieve high marks against the criteria.

There were significant numbers of compositions in this unit that relied on others to perform for them. In cases of compositions created for a group of performers in popular styles, assessors were generally diligent in identifying and not including improvisatory input of other candidates in their assessment. When communicating their ideas to another performer, candidates need to have developed the skill to set out exactly what they require, and centres must provide additional evidence of them doing this. Moderators were pleased to see that the vast majority of centres that were contacted last year over lack of first hand evidence of this had rectified the issue this year, but there were still a number of centres where information had to be specifically sought.

In some cases the teacher stated that the candidate had been reluctant to perform their piece and had asked another person to perform it for them. There was no problem with this when a detailed score was provided, but accounts of the candidate demonstrating to others what they wanted, or directing their performance do not provide the robust evidence of the candidate's work to warrant credit in a public examination. Moderators would much prefer to hear the candidate realising their piece, and can make genuine allowance for imperfections in the performance, as this gets closer to the heart of what the candidate's intentions are. Teachers should seek to assure candidates that it is the composition, not the performance of it, which is subject to assessment. Moderators would much prefer to hear this, perhaps supported by a written annotation from the candidate, than someone else interpreting the intention.

The assessment of compositions was often too generous. To achieve marks of 12 and above against the core criteria, compositions need to be musical and stylish, successfully combining a range of compositional devices. It was often the case that compositions awarded marks in this band lacked the necessary stylish impact, and had features that more comfortably fitted into the band below.

Log and Evaluation

Many candidates wrote detailed logs and some higher achieving pieces of work gave musical justifications for the decisions that were made. Moderators found it easy to recognise individual thought here rather than the more formulaic approach, which may not genuinely reflect the process. The evaluations tended to be the weakest aspect of the unit. The guidance in the specification is for 200 words, although most were considerably shorter. Candidates who stood back and identified specific features of the final product that were or were not successful, scored highly. Candidates who merely repeated the brief and the process, perhaps commenting on the performance of the composition rather than on the music itself, fared less well.

Overall there were few Log and Evaluations that merited marks in the top band, and centre assessments generally recognised this. In a few cases assessors had been particularly severe on the weaker pieces of work.

B353 Creative task

General Comments

This examination session is the first to utilise the revised weightings of the four GCSE Music units that make up the J535 specification. As a result of the changes, the Creative Task now contributes 20% of the marks to the overall examination.

Although the actual content and expectation of the Unit has not changed, Examiners are marking to a new set of criteria. These are contained in Appendix C (page 71 and 72) of the revised specification that is available on the OCR website. The task is now marked out of 40, and made up of two sets of criteria, instead of the previous three. The Quality of Response now has six sub divisions, and an additional mark on top to recognise exceptional performance. The Quality of Communication is now made up of seven sub divisions, in addition to which there is again an additional mark on top to recognise exceptional work. Very few candidates achieved full marks in this session.

The previous Area of Study mark now forms part of the consideration for the Response mark under the new criteria.

The transition to the new criteria was not always clear to some centres – many filled in the old style Cover Sheets, which have space for marks against three sets of criteria. This was not a problem for examiners, but centres are asked to ensure that the latest version of the Cover Sheet is used for the next examination session.

Most centres clearly spend time preparing their candidates well for this Unit. The majority of centres allow candidates to work with the stimulus most appropriate to their skills and interests. There are some centres who prefer all their candidates to use the same stimulus. This type of formulaic approach rarely enables these candidates to access the highest marks as the outcome lacks style and creativity.

The two most common stimuli were the Set of Words and the Chord Sequence. The Note Pattern and Rhythm were also used quite frequently, while the Melodic Phrase appeared to be more widely used than in previous sessions. The Sequence of Events was a significantly less common choice.

Administration of the Examination

An ongoing issue concerns the despatch of the candidates' work to the examiner. The examination can be taken any time within the two months from March 5th until May 5th and centres are reminded that work should be despatched to the examiner as soon as all the candidates have completed the examination. The work should not be placed in the examination cupboard for posting on (or in many cases, after) the final date of the exam.

This year, for the first time, examiners were able to make direct contact with centres to follow up issues of faulty CDs, missing track lists, missing attendance registers and ambiguously completed Cover Sheets. Where such occasions arose, examiners were grateful to centres for the prompt provision of the information or materials requested.

A very small number of centres submitted the Cover Sheets for the candidates on a data disk. Examiners use the Cover Sheets to write detailed annotations about each candidate's work, before also entering the final mark onto this sheet. A hard copy is therefore essential, and OCR provides these to centres.

A very small number of centres also thought that announcements on the CD itself could replace the Cover Sheet – this is also not permitted. Cover sheets are essential for the reasons outlined in the previous paragraph.

Centres are therefore reminded

- To send the work to the examiner immediately after all the candidates have completed the examination.
- To complete a hard copy of the Cover Sheet for each candidate, complete with a contact telephone number in the allocated space.
- To include a separate track list with the CD (not written onto the CD itself) – examiners cannot assume that the order on the CD is the order of the attendance register, as this is often not the case. It would be helpful to write track numbers of recordings directly onto the Cover Sheets.
- To check the CD plays before posting.
- To include a signed and dated Attendance Register.
- To package the CD carefully to avoid damage in transit.
- That it is not necessary to provide a separate CD for each candidate – all the work should ideally be on the same CD.

Some Cover Sheets did not provide enough detail about the ICT used or what exactly the candidates had composed themselves. On the other hand sometimes the Cover Sheets provided too much information, including the structure of the piece and instrumental techniques used. The ICT box is provided to inform the examiner about the software used, and to make the examiner aware of any pre composed loops or samples that the candidate has used. This information is vital as it enables the examiner to make an accurate judgement about the actual input of the candidate to the finished product. Some centres included a recording of the loops or samples used by the candidate at the start or end of the candidate's response on the CD – this was very helpful in enabling examiners to arrive at an accurate assessment of the candidates work.

There continues to be some uncertainty in centres about which box to tick on the cover sheet when some aspect of ICT is involved in the communication of the Response. The following advice is offered as clarification:

- If the response has been produced on a score writing package such as Sibelius, but it is actually to be assessed **purely from the printed score** – tick WRITTEN.
- If the piece is a multi-tracked response involving multiple tracks and/or layers, contrasting timbres, possible use of MIDI controllers and additional FX to enhance the final mix – then tick ICT. The quality of Communication will then be assessed from the recording.

This is particularly important as some centres have unnecessarily taken to submitting both a score, and a recording, and the examiner needs to be clear as to whether the written (printed) score or the recording is to be assessed.

Centres are reminded that they must store candidate work securely after the examination has been completed. There is a variety of reasons why a copy may be requested by the Examiner, the most common one being a faulty CD. Some Examiners were informed by centres that copies of the work submitted was unavailable as the candidates had saved and stored their work on their own accounts or memory sticks.

Response

Broadly speaking, responses that were effective and stylish – and well written for the resource, were marked at Level 5. A Level 6 response was musically creative and imaginative. At Level 4, responses were typified as organised and coherent – musically sound, but lacking a sense of style. Below that there were a variety of reasons why a response fell into a Level 2 or 3. The most common of these were brevity, failure to develop the stimulus, or extreme length, often as a result of excessive repetition or rambling unfocused ideas.

Examiners were once again instructed to cap the marks of responses that failed to use the set stimulus accurately, or in its entirety. A cap of 8 marks was applied to a response that significantly altered (or omitted) part of the stimulus. A cap of 12 marks was applied to a response that contained a minor alteration or omission to the stimulus.

It is essential that candidates use the stimulus correctly – and that they develop the rest of the response from the given stimulus in order to access the higher marks. Centres need to be aware of this as a number of examiners encountered material within responses that lacked relevance to the stimulus but was often of high quality. This may have been because this had been prepared earlier.

Responses that only used the stimulus briefly at the start (and sometimes again at the end) tended to score badly due to the lack of relevance to the stimulus in the piece as a whole.

As stated in the 2013 Examiners' Report, many relatively short responses again achieved good marks because the response was focussed, organised, well-rehearsed and musically performed.

There were also some issues with written responses. In particular, Examiners felt that many written responses, usually based on either the rhythm pattern or the note pattern, were often template based. Obviously some candidates used the formula in a musical way, many did not, writing awkward modulations and sequences which failed to produce a musical outcome.

Communication

Most candidates chose to perform their response. Examiners heard a number of outstanding and stylish musical performances that gained top band marks. Performances in the 11 – 12 band were often also musically performed, but lacked a consistent sense of style – or contained a small number of errors. A performance in the 9 – 10 band was usually mainly accurate, but lacking in dynamic contrast, or musical shaping. Below that, performances tended to be characterised by varying degrees of hesitations, notational errors, intonation issues, and poor balance or synchronisation (in the case of ICT responses). Examiners did hear a very small number of very poor performances where the musical intention was hard to determine. These performances were marked in the bottom mark band.

Written responses have again been dominated by scores produced on score writing software, with Sibelius being the most commonly used. In addition to accurate notation, successful scores also indicated the instrument for which the response was written, along with good detail (musically applied) of tempo, dynamics, articulation and phrasing. Some instrument specific detail was also used successfully, most often bowing detail on string parts and pedalling on piano parts.

Less successful communication was evident in some written responses – typified, for example, in the use of extreme dynamic contrasts (from *fff* to *ppp*) all within the space of a few bars. Rapid changes between *pizz* and *arco* were a recurring feature in many pieces written for violin and cello. The musical reasoning for such instructions was often questionable, and in some cases the music was actually impossible to perform properly as a result.

Several scores were received notated as guitar TAB. If a response is created in a format other than universally recognisable standard notation (such as TAB or Drum Notation) a recorded version should be submitted. Failure to do so may disadvantage the outcome of the candidate.

Comments on Individual Stimuli

Rhythmic Phrase

The majority of candidates handled the 2/4 time signature well. Many drum kit players developed extended responses that successfully featured elements of the rhythm throughout the piece. Inevitably, some drummers fell into the temptation of resorting to standard rock rhythm patterns for the majority of the piece, and examiners reflected this with a low level Response mark. The best responses contained aspects of the rhythm throughout the piece utilising the whole kit.

Whilst many of the melodic responses to this stimulus were very good, there were a few centres that produced a set of formulaic 24 bar ABA melodic responses. These used the stimulus successfully in terms of rhythm but many were scalic and unmusical, often with lots of awkward sequential ideas and a somewhat contrived modulation.

Note Pattern

The Note Pattern is a starting point from which an interesting melodic response can be created. It is not necessary to restrict the whole response simply to notes from the Note Pattern – indeed it would be unmusical to do so. There were many repetitive melodies, where candidates generated a melody in crotchets, or just played continuously using various patterns using only the notes from the stimulus. At the other end of the spectrum there were many other candidates who showed a high level of compositional technique. There were some fine responses from pianists who created very thoughtful, musical pieces with harmonic accompaniment, as well as some good melodies by orchestral instruments or guitars.

Melodic Phrase

Examiners reported that this response was attempted by a larger number of candidates this year. To gain good marks, the response needs to add a bass line or descant to the given melody that is harmonically accurate and texturally interesting. High marks can be gained without extending the given stimulus at all. Successful harmonically adventurous responses with a rhythmically independent second part achieved the highest marks.

Some candidates still add more than one harmony part to the melodic phrase – and some try to write block chord accompaniments. Only one additional line is credited and where more than one line was written by the candidate, Examiners had to make a judgement as to which line to mark.

This stimulus does allow candidates to be accompanied by a second performer, provided the second performer is playing the melodic phrase in its printed form. Any musical enhancements to the melodic phrase (in terms of dynamics and phrasing) must be directed by the candidate, and supplementary evidence provided to verify this.

Chord Sequence

The chord sequence was once again a very popular choice with both guitarists and pianists. Most candidates used the pattern correctly, though there were a few examples of D minor being substituted for D major, and E major being substituted for E minor – these responses were capped at 12 marks. The best responses either developed the chord sequence, or repeated the chord sequence and developed melodic ideas on top. Several candidates used the chords as the basis for a successful song, but on some occasions additional sections created a lack of consistency due to the lack of connection to the stimulus chords.

There were a number that created multitracked pieces using a computer programme. Some of these were quite basic and formulaic, whilst others were quite inventive and clever. The more able candidates introduced a contrasting middle section and then returned to the first section. There were able guitarists who produced excellent multitracked pieces where they played in the chords and then improvised over the top.

At the other end of the scale, there were a number of strummed responses in different strumming and picking patterns, some of which successfully extended the chord sequence to create a complementing section.

A second performer playing the chords can accompany this response. However this part should be just that - a straightforward accompaniment of the given block chords without the enhancement of pianistic configurations, and without extension. This examination is an individual examination and not a collaborative one.

Set of Words

This remains a very popular option, and examiners enjoyed marking a number of excellent songs. The most successful responses showed development, often through a verse-chorus structure (for example, using Verse 2 of the stimulus as a chorus, and introducing extra words for the verses).

Overall there was a fairly even divide between accompanied and unaccompanied responses. Several candidates accompanied themselves on piano or guitar (either live or through multitracking). Sometimes the accompaniment was not as accomplished as the singing and this affected the mark awarded. As in the past there were a number of unaccompanied responses that were very badly out of tune making the song difficult to interpret and a small number of rappers whose response was very limited.

Sequence of Events

This has been one of the least popular stimuli this year, and the responses were very mixed. There were a limited number that were musical and effective but many that were repetitive and basic with little relation to the stimulus. This stimulus lends itself best to an ICT production or a piano piece, due to the nuances of melody and harmony that these instruments produce. However there were a number of examples of responses played on a single line melodic instrument such as a clarinet, as well as on a drum kit.

In the majority of responses it was very difficult to distinguish between the three sections of the scene and they all relied heavily on repetition. Guitarists and drummers found it quite difficult to create the impression of snowfall and then develop their ideas.

There were some very successful responses using ICT, but many used loops or sound effects and lacked the necessary development or connecting of ideas to gain high marks.

B354 Listening

General Comments

The paper was accessible to candidates of all abilities and many good answers were seen to most of the questions. There was a very good proportion of candidates who scored above 80 marks, but slightly less who scored 90 than last year. The number who scored less than 20 was also smaller than in a number of previous series.

The paper differentiated well and there was a good spread of marks that represented all of the ability ranges. There were those questions that challenged the very able students but there was also a good proportion of the paper that was accessible to weaker candidates.

Candidates responded well to the individual extracts within the paper and examiners saw a clear understanding of each specific genre. It was pleasing to see improved awareness of all the styles within the areas of study and some good preparation was apparent.

It was also good to see that the musical terminology used in many parts of the paper was known and understood by the majority of candidates. A correct understanding of terminology such as cadence, articulation and interval produced a marked improvement in the answers given from those seen in previous papers.

Question 5b was the only question where the rubric challenged a small minority of candidates. Those candidates tried to tick just one of the boxes rather than writing 'A' or 'B' in each of the boxes.

Comments on Individual Questions

Q1 The musical extracts were very accessible for candidates of all abilities and very good marks were seen for these shorter questions.

Q1a(i) Many correct answers were seen to this question with 'fast', 'allegro' and 'vivace' being used most often. Some candidates chose to write a metronome mark and whilst some were correct a number of candidates chose 120 bpm which is the tempo most associated with disco and was not correct for this extract of music.

Q.1a(ii) Many candidates gained good marks for this question. Many high ability candidates gained the full four marks and heard that the music was 'high', used 'fast' and / or 'short' notes, was in a 'major key' and had a 'violin' or 'strings' playing. Most middle and lower ability candidates were often able to gain one mark here. Some candidates incorrectly focused on the character of the little girl rather than on the music itself.

Q.1a(iii) Many candidates correctly identified the solo instrument as the clarinet although a significant minority thought that it was a flute. Very few candidates wrote an instrument that was not from the woodwind family.

Q.1a(iv) The majority of candidates correctly underlined legato, but all options were chosen.

Q1b(i) The answer here was nearly always correct.

Q.1b(ii) Most candidates recognised that the music was a reel. Some candidates chose the other Irish option of a jig and some candidates mistakenly wrote both jig and reel and therefore gained no marks.

Q.1b(iii) The majority of candidates correctly answered three instruments but answers of four and two were also offered.

Q.1b(iv) Some good answers were seen here by high and middle ability candidates. 'Fast', 'fast notes' and 'high' were the most popular correct answers. Some candidates wrote the name of an instrument, which was not an appropriate answer and there were some very unclear or vague answers that were not worthy of credit.

Q.1b(v) A good proportion of the candidates gained a mark for recognising that it is the clear or strong beat of the music that makes it suitable for dancing. Other candidates wrote that the music was fast, which is not necessarily a feature that makes pieces suitable to dance to.

Q.1b(vi) Most candidates correctly identified the drum as a bodhran.

Q.1c(i) Almost all candidates gained at least one mark here and very many candidates gained the full three marks. A few incorrectly heard an ostinato or a hook.

Q.1c(ii) Answers that gained marks most often were click, slide, and vibrato. A number of weaker candidates did not focus their answers on vocal techniques and often wrote similar answers to those in part (i) and so gained no credit. It is important for candidates to be able to distinguish between how the voices work together and the techniques used by the vocalists. It was pleasing, however, to see that this question was answered better than similar questions on previous papers.

Q.1c(iii) The answer 'a capella' was nearly always correctly stated, with just a few candidates incorrectly writing solo.

Q2 The generally popular genre of the waltz once again proved to give the candidates plenty to write about and many candidates answered this question well overall.

Q.2(a) Almost all candidates were able to gain some marks here with a very good proportion who gained three or four out of four. The most popular answers were three beats in a bar, um cha cha, fast, orchestra and strong first beat of the bar. Some higher ability candidates also heard the slow harmonic rhythm and the use of rubato within the music. A few candidates wrote that the tempo was 70bpm, which is incorrect. Candidates should remember that it is 70 bars per minute not beats per minute that characterise a waltz.

Q.2(b) A good proportion of the candidates heard that the structure was 'AABC'.

Q.2(c) This question proved to be the most challenging for this extract. Some candidates found it difficult to write specifically about the snare drum, instead writing vague comments like 'plays on beats'. However there were a good proportion of candidates that heard that it played rolls and emphasised both the crescendos and the cha cha part of the rhythm. More discerning candidates heard that it played the same rhythm as the melody.

Q.2(d) The majority of candidates knew that the waltz originated in Vienna. A range of other answers was seen including Venice, Vietnam and Argentina.

Q.2(e) Given the understanding of the waltz shown in the answers to other parts of this question it was surprising to see that many candidates did not know that the waltz was a genre popular during the Romantic period. Classical was the incorrect answer seen most often, but Baroque and Renaissance were also seen, the Renaissance period being an era not associated with this specification.

Q.2(f) Some very good answers were seen to this question. Most candidates knew that it was a partner dance and high ability candidates gave excellent answers that referred to the music and how the dance steps were reflected in it, including the three step pattern, the flowing movements, and the rise and fall of the steps.

Q3 This appeared to be a very accessible piece of programme music with many clear features that occurred one at a time and many candidates were clearly able to identify with this extract.

Q.3(a) The majority of candidates were able to access the second or third band of marks. A very good proportion of candidates heard the most basic features of the music such as 'slow', 'drum' at the beginning, 'flute melody' and that the music started softly and at a low pitch and got louder and higher. A number of more discerning answers gave more detail including features such as the low roll and high drone as the extract started, the ascending clarinet pattern that followed, and the use of the piccolo as the first melody instrument. However, given the clear nature of the music there were not as many answers in the top band as might have been expected. Quite a lot of candidates started their answers very well but then appeared to lose focus and the last section of the music was largely ignored. Nearly all candidates wrote excellent links for the extract, although some spent too much time on the programme rather than the music, which is the more important aspect of the question. Only a few candidates wrote no links to the programme at all.

Q.3(b) The most popular correct answer here was Tchaikovsky, but many appropriate composers were given including Debussy and Saint-Saens. A considerable number of film music composers were given as answers, which was not correct as candidates were told in 3(a) that it was a piece of programme music. After John Williams, Mozart was probably the incorrect answer seen most often.

Q4 This question was generally answered very well. The genre appeared to be far better understood than in previous years.

Q.4(a) The correct answer of soprano was seen most often, but other voice types such as alto and tenor were also seen as well as much more vague answers such as female or opera.

Q.4(b) There were a few candidates who left this answer blank but of those who attempted an answer, most were able to gain some credit. There were not very many who gained the full 10 marks but a good proportion gained 6 or above. Once again marks were given for shape and correct notes and many candidates gained their marks with a mixture of both.

Q.4(c) This question was answered far better than similar questions on previous papers. Many candidates heard that the piano played chords and that the singer and pianist had equal roles. Quite a lot of candidates were able to hear that the piano played melodic ideas in the bass line in between the singer's phrases.

Q.4(d) The majority of candidates were able to identify a bar where the singer sang a glissando. Bars 3, 11 and 16 were the most popular. Bar 10 was the incorrect answer seen most often.

Q.4(e) Most candidates underlined the correct answer of major but all of the other suggested answers were seen by examiners.

Q.4(f) It was pleasing to note that most candidates understood the musical term cadence and that the majority of candidates recognised it as a perfect cadence which showed their understanding of a suitable place to end. There were those however, who incorrectly identified it as an imperfect cadence.

Q5 This comparison question saw generally better answers than in previous years but the boxes of part (d) still proved problematic for some.

Q.5(a) Many correct answers were seen in this question with artists such as Gloria Gaynor being the most popular. Unfortunately some candidates did not listen to the question carefully enough and gave the name of a group, not an artist: most often The Bee Gees.

Q.5(b) Apart from the few candidates who only put a tick in one of the boxes, this question was generally answered very well and many candidates gained the full three marks.

Q.5(c) A good proportion of candidates recognised that the two extracts had the same or similar tempos. There were some who incorrectly gave a time signature or felt that the extracts had very different tempi.

Q.5(d)(i) High ability candidates gained full marks most often for the identification of backing singers singing harmonies in both extracts. Some were able to identify the use of a hook line or vibrato in the main vocalist's voice but there were a lot of vague answers that did not gain credit. Answers that referred to the fact that the same singer was used in both did not receive credit as this information had been given to them at the beginning of the question. A number wrote about them both being female which did not gain credit.

Q.5(d)(ii) Whilst this part of the question was least well accessed, many candidates recognised the use of the riff in both extracts but far fewer were able to go on to say that it was used throughout in Extract A and not in Extract B. There was some good detail about the riff in Extract A from higher ability candidates. There were those candidates who used part of the question from part (b) to say that there was a sustained bass note throughout, which was not true. Answers in this type of question often lack the precision required to gain significant credit.

Q.5(d)(iii) Once again the lack of precision and detail often meant that candidates did not achieve full credit. Very general statements like repetitive are not usually acceptable for this type of question and this was no exception. Detail of the drum kit rhythms when given accurately gained credit, and there were a good number of candidates who were able to give this, with 'four to the floor', 'snare on beats 2 and 4' and 'Hi-Hat on the off-beat' being the most popular.

Q6 Answers to this question were mixed, but it differentiated well across the ability ranges.

Q.6(a) The correct answer of '4' was seen most often. Some candidates gave the answer of 8 but with the time signature of 4/4 given in part (c); this was not an accurate answer.

Q.6(b) A very high proportion of candidates gained marks here for broken chords and plucked. A pleasing number also recognised the pattern that repeated twice.

Q.6(c) The majority of candidates chose the 2nd melody for their answer, which was correct but both of the other answers were also seen.

Q.6(d) These two answers were nearly always correct.

Q.6(e) Synthesiser and reverb were the most popular correct answers, but vague answers and those that focused on sound effect or auto-tune on the voice did not gain credit.

Q.6(f) Middle and high ability candidates had clear knowledge of the expected features in a pop ballad and were able to answer successfully with such things as slow tempo and lyrics that reflect a love theme. Weaker answers provided general features that could be applied to any song such as male singer, or features that would be used in another genre such as hook.

Q7 Candidates appeared to connect well with this extract and good marks were seen by all ability ranges in most parts of the question.

Q.7(a) The correct answer, semitone was the answer given most frequently.

Q.7(b) The majority of candidates gained at least two marks here, most often for ‘the music gets faster’ and ‘gets louder’. Some higher and middle ability candidates gave excellent descriptions of how the music changed over the first few bars, which gave them full marks.

Q.7(c) Although a number of candidates mistakenly thought that the music got faster, most gained marks for recognising that the music got louder, built up in texture, had short notes and stabs. Many noticed the cymbal and some discerning candidates heard that the music had some dissonance.

Q.7(d) This part of the question was less well answered but many realised that the music started quietly and slowly and that the original motif or the leitmotif returned later in the extract.

Q.7(e) The majority of candidates got all three of the true / false answers right.

Q.7(f) Most candidates were able to give a suitable composer with John Williams and Hans Zimmer being the most popular. There were those who wrote entirely inappropriate answers such as Mozart.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2014

