



Music

GCSE

Music

Exemplar Candidate Work

B352

March 2016

QUESTION 1

The log and evaluation should define a clear brief, and track the process of composing.

There should be a brief evaluation of the success of the composition.

Initial intentions

My intentions for this piece is to create a piece of film music that describes the walk of a condemned prisoner to the gallows, through a crowd of increasingly excitable onlookers. I will write this piece for orchestral instruments using Garageband as a multitrack recorder. The intention is to build the tension slowly throughout the piece, by starting softly with a few instruments, and then gradually adding new layers of interest as the music gets louder. This will represent the prisoner's approach to the gallows, and the noise of the waiting crowd. I will look to include lots of strange unpleasant harmonies to underline the macabre nature of the scene.

I have listened to the pieces 'March to the Scaffold' by Berlioz, 'Pines of Rome' by Respighi, and 'Pirates of the Caribbean' by Hans Zimmer in order to help get ideas for my piece.

The Log

Session 1

I started by deciding on the key of the piece; I chose a minor key because the piece needs to create a haunting impression on the audience. I then began work on a timpani rhythm to use as the basis of the opening section – the timpani is to represent the crowd gathering, and the army marching, and the hustle and bustle of everyone as they walk to the scaffold.

Session 2

I have now added tremolando cellos and double bass to represent the crowd whispering and to build up tension as the excitement in the crowd grows. I then put in a horn and trumpet part going up a sort of chromatic scale that I wanted to represent a type of fanfare.

The scale doesn't quite sound right – next time I will have another look at this, and then add in some violin pizz parts for effect.

Session 3

I added the pizzicato violins and violas – this built up a creeping effect to help build the tension. I also decided to add a second timpani part to work in a sort of response with the other timp part – the intention was to make the music sound royal and grand, symbolising the authorities and guards regal marching. The first section is now complete.

Session 4

I decided that rather than cutting off the 'fanfare' of the trumpet and horns at bar 18, I would continue it, but again building it with more layers up so that the tension slightly reduces, before building again. I then gave the cellos and basses the same kind of tune as the lower brass to increase the dynamics and to build it up further.

Session 5

I added in a snare drum part back to bar 12 in a kind of marching pattern, to reinforce the idea of the guards on parade.

I added the next section of violin melody – an 'arco' tune influenced by a piece called 'Pines of Rome'. The dotted rhythms change slowly between semitones, which creates a creepy effect to the listener.

I changed the tempo of the piece so that it started to accelerando from bar 30. I added some scales for the strings to indicate that the moment of the hanging will soon be upon us.

Session 6

I have worked on the end section of the piece - I added a snare drum roll that crescendos. This is to signify that the prisoner is now standing at the scaffold. All the instrumental parts have now crescendoed to fff which adds to the sense of excitement.

I decided that the strings should stop on a trilling long note while the brass hold a long chord, and the timp rolls – this suggests the noose is being placed over the prisoner's head. I then finished the piece on a long low note to represent the body hanging from the noose as the rest of the instruments gradually stop playing.

Next time I will check the balance of the piece.

Session 7

After listening to my piece all the way through again I decided that the first section was too long and repetitive. I therefore shortened the Intro, so that the Timp part doesn't go on for so long. I also adjusted some of the notes in the trumpet fanfare to try and make it sound less triumphant. After this I added all the dynamics and articulation to make the key moments of the music stand out.

Evaluation

My intention in creating this piece was to build tension and anticipation in the listener from the start to the finish, as the prisoner takes his last walk to the scaffold. I think the piece is quite successful in this respect. The thudding timp rhythm begins the piece and creates an expectant air. As the Brass and lower strings are added, the dynamic of the music grows and grows – this creates the effect of the excitement building in the watching crowds. I particularly like the addition of the snare drum to depict the Royal Guards. I am also pleased with the big fff chord at the end, followed by the much quieter long unison note that depicts the now lifeless body swinging on the end of the rope. The contrast provided by these two final notes is very dramatic.

The scale patterns in the upper strings as the piece builds are interesting – they are meant to sound unusual and uncomfortable to show the bad side of what is happening to the prisoner. However they don't quite work as well as I had hoped, and could have done with some more changes to make them sound less awkward in places.

I was pleased with the other changes I made to the piece – shortening the introduction helped to prevent the opening from being too repetitive. I also deliberately added additional instruments to the fanfares, so that they weren't only played by the Trumpets – this made the texture thicker and more interesting. The use of pizzicato in the violin scales created a good effect as the tension grew.

Overall I am very pleased with my composition – the story is clearly defined in the music, and you can imagine a prisoner taking the long walk through the crowd to the gallows. The long crescendo throughout the piece builds tension and excitement right up to the powerful ending chord.

COMMENTARY

This is a top band log and evaluation for an Area of Study 4 composition (Film and programme music).

Please note that there is no requirement to use the Log and Evaluation template provided in Appendix B of the specification.

Initial intentions (Brief)

The initial intentions paragraph is important as it provides the information to evidence the assessment of the Area of Study mark. The Area of Study 4 intentions are especially important as there are no defined 'fingerprints' relating to the storyline or mood chosen by the candidate. An Area of Study 3 composition (Dance Music) has a more clearly defined intention through the choice of dance – for example, the features of waltz, or disco, or Irish jig and reel can easily be evidenced within the composition itself, without the need for a lengthy explanation of what features of these dance styles will be used.

As a result of this, the Area of Study 4 initial intentions paragraph must clearly state the stotyline or mood that the candidate is intending to portray in the music.

For a top band mark, the initial intentions should be 'musically conceived and detailed'.

This initial intentions (brief) firstly sets out a clear programmatic element to the composition that the candidate intends to write. Having stated the resources that will be used, the candidate goes on to describe how this will be achieved. The use of musical vocabulary is appropriate and a clear idea of how the candidate intends to describe the chosen scene is provided. The candidate also relates their choice of programme to a couple of relevant compositions that they have listened to for ideas and inspiration – this is good practice.

The Log

The log should be a session by session record of the composition process. It should demonstrate an 'understanding of the musical impact of the piece as it progresses'.

This log clearly describes the progress made in each session, often with reference to bar numbers and specific instrumental parts. In addition to this the candidate has added explanations and justifications as to why each musical decision was made. This is often related to how it helps the music to describe the programmatic element of the composition. The following statement from Session 2 of the Log exemplifies this – it includes appropriate use of specialised musical vocabulary (tremolando) – another indicator of top band work.

'I have now added tremolando cellos and double bass to represent the crowd whispering and to build up tension as the excitement in the crowd grows.'

This statement from Session 5, makes explicit reference to the source of the idea for the section that the candidate was working on. This again makes use of musical vocabulary and explains the intended effect.

'I added the next section of violin melody – an 'arco' tune influenced by a piece called 'Pines of Rome'. The dotted rhythms change slowly between semitones, which creates a creepy effect to the listener.'

The final session log indicates that the candidate took an overview of the almost finished composition, and made structural changes to the piece as a result – more evidence of considered musical understanding.

'After listening to my piece all the way through again I decided that the first section was too long and repetitive. I therefore shortened the Intro, so that the Timp part doesn't go on for so long.'

At times, the candidate has included additional comments (in italics) as a reminder about work that needs to be revisited in the next session.

Evaluation

The evaluation should 'provide perceptive insights relating to the effectiveness of the outcome'. The candidate is required to comment on the overall success of the piece – features that worked well, as well as features that were less successful. Higher level responses are able to provide musical reasons to justify their opinions. The evaluation needs to be more than a repeat of the justifications for the musical decisions that have already been stated in the log.

This evaluation identifies the key features of this composition that have been used to successfully depict the dramatic scene. The candidate then goes on to discuss an area that seemed to be less successful. This is slightly less satisfactory as the candidate is only able to identify the scale patterns in the upper strings as 'awkward', without actually being able to say WHY they are awkward. Presumably though, if the candidate had been able to identify the reason for the awkwardness, this would have been corrected in the final version of the piece anyway. Therefore, this is not a significant issue in terms of the assessment of the log and evaluation.

The latter part of the evaluation summarises the effect of the changes made to the composition as part of the final revision, before the final paragraph gives a concise summary of the overall effect of the piece.

Overall this is a good quality log and evaluation. The initial intentions are clear; the composition process is clearly documented, with reasons provided for musical decisions made along the way. The evaluation is the weakest part of the candidate response as doesn't really add much new insight into the composition. However, this is mainly due to the excellent detail provided in the log, where some evaluation of the musical features had already taken place.

This work therefore shows the 'high level of musical understanding required' for a top band response.

Given the quality of the musical detail in Sections 2 and 3, this brief is adequate. It leans heavily on the techniques identified in the performance piece, but does suggest that additional contrast is to be provided by the use of staccato notes, and the minor key.

SPaG

The accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar also forms part of the assessment of the commentary. Particular care should be taken the accurate application and spelling of musical vocabulary. The odd occasional error is unlikely to be penalised. More persistent errors results in a reduction of one mark, while particularly badly written commentaries are reduced by two marks.

The exemplar in this document has been re-typed for ease of reading but is taken from real candidate work and therefore includes the original spelling and grammatical errors made by the candidate at the time.



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