

GCE

Music

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H143**

OCR Report to Centres June 2017

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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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OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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H143/01 Performing

General Comments:

Centres adopting this specification have generally embraced the aspect of “performing” eagerly, and many recitals were recorded with a live audience, including applause and even some programme announcements. The larger spaces (and additional audience in some instances) – such as theatres, churches or drama venues - had a clearly positive effect on the performers, allowing them to project more, and with a sense of purpose and integrity, especially when there was an audience present. Conversely, performances given in smaller spaces, (e.g. practice rooms or offices) tended at times to lose some of the sense of involvement and communication with a lack of projection apparent.

In terms of the positioning of the camera and performers, the most successful were those that were filmed centre-on, from the front. Sometimes performers were filmed with their backs to the camera which was less helpful from a visual point of view.

Where performing was presented in ensembles or duets, centres made it clear who the candidate was (both on the video and the essential Cover Sheet), and there were some examples of nifty camera work where an ensemble morphed into a solo with piano. (The coversheet is a vital and mandatory document, detailing candidate information, instrument/voice and programme duration, and will in future series require centres to indicate the grade of the music performed.

Care should be taken to ensure that the sound quality of recitals is as high as possible – there was certainly some variation here. Additionally, backing tracks should be balanced well against solo playing, so that details and finesse in varying dynamics and tone can be projected. We are grateful to the many excellent (usually unnamed) piano accompanists who supported candidates in a wide range of styles, while often also operating as cameraman and announcer.

In general performances were uploaded to the OCR Repository via Interchange, and although there were initial teething problems with this procedure (due to some very large files) the capacity has now been increased hugely. Ideally files should be “zipped” wherever possible for ease of downloading, along with copies of the music and the Coversheet.

There were some problems accessing some formats of recording and there were some mishaps in loading up the correct work to the correct candidate’s folder.

The range of styles and instruments/voices presented was enormous: Trinity Rock and Pop songs, madrigals, string quartets, saxophone improvisations, musical theatre medleys and tuned percussion solos, to cite just a few. In most cases a good range of techniques and contrast was demonstrated, although some recitals fell short of the six minute minimum: **recitals which do not achieve this timing will receive zero marks**. Repertoire should be of at least grade six standard to access all mark bands under the heading of “Technical Control”.

Some recitals began confidently but lost precision and detail as the pieces progressed or modulated, or when textures became more challenging. Candidates opting to play or sing from memory should be mindful of the performance directions and markings on the scores as these were at times overlooked or under-projected.

H143/02 Composing

This is the first year the Repository has been used to submit work for a composition unit. Most centres successfully used the uploading system and, in the majority of cases, examiners could access the work trouble free.

Examiners encountered some problems downloading very large files. The easiest type to manage were zipped files, and it is recommended that all files are delivered in this way in future series.

There is a requirement for work to be accompanied by a cover sheet for each candidate, and this year, not all centres followed this practice. Registers are also required to be posted to the relevant examiner and stationary is provided for this. Many centres did not provide the required paperwork; from 2018, all administration must be in place.

For each Section 1 composition, there must be a recording and a score or written description. For Section 2, the requirements are the same but with the addition of a learner set brief. Most centres successfully supplied each of these, although a small number of pieces of work did not arrive by the deadline.

Two compositions are required and the total time for both pieces must be a minimum of four and a half minutes. Candidates not complying with this requirement will be given a score of zero. Some candidates wrote overly long pieces which often started well, but subsequently ran out of ideas and lacked development; effectively, this would dilute any inventiveness and underlying coherence in the work.

Section 1: It was felt that candidates rose very well to the challenges set by the OCR briefs. Many works were inventive, coherent and very much in keeping with the chosen style. Some candidates chose a pastiche style and others chose to use elements of the brief's style to weave these around their own original ideas. Good work resulted from both these approaches. However, the strongest candidates were able to demonstrate an even more in-depth understanding of the language, structures and musical shaping of the tradition or style which they had chosen.

There is no need for candidates to submit both scores and commentaries, but it is evident that some candidates enjoy the process of outlining their work rationale within a commentary. However, it is worth noting that these are not taken into consideration in the marking process. There are six briefs, one for each area of study, and it was pleasing to see each of them appearing in the submissions. The most popular choices were Area of Study 1 – a Classical Serenade – and Area of Study 5 – a piece of programme music portraying the journey of a Humpback Whale. It was pleasing to see candidates submitting pictorial stimuli, particularly in relation to the Hockney brief and the Humpback Whale brief, demonstrating a confident embracing of the subject matter; however, this is not a requirement of the component, only adding to the context in which the composition was written.

The least successful submissions were those which did not really engage with a particular style. For example, in Area of Study 2, the brief was to write a ballad; some submissions were rather general and uncharacteristic of the required Popular song style, which is in the Area of Study 'Blues, Jazz, Swing and Big Band'. The specification gives appropriate guidance on suitable study for each of the six Areas of Study.

In Section 2, candidates are required to set their own brief. There are five marks attached to this and some briefs were perfectly constructed. Please refer to the OCR set briefs for examples as to what is required in terms of length and content. It is hoped that candidates will produce a concise brief which includes some of the following: style, tradition, form, structure, stimulus, an event, a venue, a commission, instrumentation or music technology plans. There is no need for

a detailed description of the composition process, modulations, changes of orchestration and so on.

There were some excellent examples of briefs this year, with some wonderfully imaginative titles which often acted as a successful springboard for the composition. There were quite a lot of film score type pieces and these varied in success; whilst some used an imaginative backdrop, building musical ideas from it, others remained static and without any real development of ideas. Candidates can choose to write for solo instruments if they wish, but in choosing to do so, must be able to demonstrate idiomatic and inventive writing to access higher marks.

It is perfectly fine for candidates to compose a piece using an Area of Study; however, in order to access the full five marks the learner brief must not follow the pattern and ideas of the OCR set brief.

In terms of criteria, the section 'Response to brief and ideas' has the highest mark value. Here we are looking for how candidates have responded to the brief in terms of the musical language, the understanding of the style, overall structural impact, engagement with the commission or event, venue or location. Assessment will include how their aural familiarity with the chosen style (as seen in how successfully they shape and manage materials, together with how their understanding of the conventions of the style or tradition) are embedded within the music. There were some excellent responses to both the OCR set brief and the learner brief, but generally speaking, the set briefs garnered the most successful responses.

In Technique, candidates are assessed in their micro-management of structure, harmony, rhythm, texture, shaping of melodic ideas and motifs, idiomatic use of instruments and competence in musical technology or word setting where appropriate. Most candidates managed a good number of these musical elements competently, some achieving very good results.

In Communication, candidates are assessed on how well their compositions come off the page in realisation. It must be stressed that the performance itself and the score are not assessed – only the actual composition and its successfulness as a cohesive, manicured and appropriately interpreted piece of music.

H143/03 Listening and appraising

General Comments:

Examiners were pleased by the response of candidates and Centres to the Listening and Appraising paper, the first of the new specification. The format of the paper is similar to the legacy G353 Introduction to Historical Study: Section A is unprepared listening, Section B is on prescribed works and Section C is an essay question. The focus on the new Areas of Study does not seem to have caused any major difficulties, with many candidates able to demonstrate their knowledge confidently across the whole paper.

Most candidates were familiar with the prescribed works at AS level and able to comment (often in precise detail) on significant features of the music of Mozart, Sammy Davis Jr. and their chosen work in Section C.

Unfamiliar listening provided the most challenge for candidates. Section A broadly followed the format of the Sample Question Paper (available on the OCR website), comprising two extracts (Haydn and Rebecca Ferguson), with eight shorter questions for Q.1 (20 marks) and four longer questions for Q.2 (20 marks). Centres will note that in Q.1 and Q.2, Area of Study 1 and Area of Study 2 are interchangeable.

The majority of candidates scored fewer marks on Area of Study 1 and more on Area of Study 2. Candidates responded well to Area of Study 2. There were many detailed, analytical and appreciative responses to the songs in Sections A and B of the Question Paper. By contrast, some candidates found Haydn and Mozart more challenging, particularly the questions which tested aural skills or knowledge of harmony and tonality.

Both Areas of Study are equally important. The focus on popular vocal music in Area of Study 2 complements the study of classical instrumental music in Area of Study 1. Examiners hope that Centres will give candidates the opportunity to engage with instrumental and vocal music by performing, composing and listening to both. Instrumental musicians may be particularly prone to overlook the art of the singer. Discussion about songs, their performance and composition, and discussion and collaboration with singers will provide valuable experience and insight to all musicians. Likewise, singers will benefit in developing as all-round musicians from gaining a deeper understanding of instrumental music.

Mark Scheme

Centres are advised to refer to the published Mark Scheme. The Subject-specific Marking Instructions (on page 6) include some useful general points.

Centres and candidates may find the published Mark Scheme useful as a resource for teaching and learning. The Mark Scheme is intended to cover the range of relevant answers that Examiners might expect to see. Inevitably it includes much more detail than could reasonably be expected of examination candidates. Centres should be reassured that candidates do not have to cover everything in the Mark Scheme in order to get full marks. The Guidance column shows how marks are allocated.

Use of writing space in the Question Paper

In preparing candidates for the Listening and Appraising examination, Centres may wish to discuss how best to use the space available in the Question Paper. Candidates will find it an advantage to write concisely in medium-small handwriting. Candidates with larger handwriting should continue their answers on the Additional Answer Space and/or ask for extra paper. A few

candidates ended their answers when the lines ran out, even though they clearly had more to say.

In Section B candidates benefitted from some sensible 'exam technique'. However, a small number used up lines with a brief introductory sentence. Others wrote at length on a single point, leaving little space for the rest. Section B questions have space at the bottom of the page that can be used. Candidates have to decide if they are going to write in the unlined space or continue on additional lined paper.

A page of music manuscript page is provided in the Question Paper. This is available for candidates who want to include a music example as part of an answer. A few candidates took advantage of this, for example to notate the X-motif from Ellington's *Ko-Ko* or the opening theme of the *Hebrides Overture*.

Section C

Responses to the essay question in Section C showed that most candidates were well prepared on the prescribed work for their chosen Area of Study.

Centres are reminded that in Areas of Study 3-6 the 'related background' should be studied alongside each prescribed work, as indicated in the specification. This is intended to widen the scope of study beyond the prescribed work. It is also intended to help candidates continuing the study of Music to A level. Some questions will be set which require comparative links to wider repertoire. Q.8 (see the comments below) is an example of a question in which candidates must compare other listening of their own choice with the prescribed work. Centres will note from the Mark Scheme and comments on Q.8 that candidates who discussed only the prescribed work were limited in the marks they could achieve.

The study of related background can be done as a theoretical exercise, but Examiners prefer candidates to listen and engage with relevant examples of other music. Candidates are not expected to be closely familiar with other music (as with the chosen prescribed work), but they should be familiar enough to make some informed comparisons. One approach is to choose other repertoire that demonstrates different characteristics of the related background. For example:

- Duke Ellington: 1920s jazz repertoire (Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton);
- J.S. Bach *Wachet auf*: earlier Lutheran music (such as Schütz);
- Mendelssohn *Hebrides Overture*: concert overture (Berlioz or Tchaikovsky);
- Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring*: late-Romantic (Elgar, Mahler or Rachmaninov).

Examiners were encouraged by the quality of writing in Section C. The asterisk against each question reminds candidates that the quality of extended responses is being assessed in this section. Almost all candidates organised their thinking into paragraphs, beginning with a brief introduction and (less frequently) a brief conclusion. On the whole, the language used was accurate and error free. While the content varied in its quality, most essays showed a logical sequence of ideas, organised either in order of time (for example, beginning with the opening movement of *Wachet auf* and working through to the final chorale) or by the grouping of similar characteristics (for example, beginning with melodic ideas in Mendelssohn, then writing in turn about the use of the orchestra, dynamics, tonal organisation and the Romantic fascination with Scotland).

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Q.1(a)

'Octaves' was the correct answer, often successfully identified.

Q.1(b)

Candidates were required to identify the chords, writing the answer in either Roman numerals or chord symbols. A few candidates wrote answers in both forms (for example Bar 9¹ – IV, Am), but marks were only awarded if both Roman numeral and chord symbol were correct (not for contradictory answers).

The melody line in the Insert provided some help in working out the chords. Candidates should be encouraged to work out the bass line. The notation of the bass in bars 5 and 10 (and the chords in bars 6 and 8, named in the question) gave more help: the clear D# in the bass in bar 7 allowed able candidates to identify a dominant chord in first inversion.

Q.1(c)

There were several fully correct answers on the treatment of 'Motif X'.

Q.1(d)

'Appoggiatura' was often identified, but sometimes confused with 'acciaccatura'. Some candidates commented on the rhythmic effect of even semiquavers for 1 mark. Also credited was a description of the notation as an accented dissonance. Candidates should be taught about the appoggiatura, both as a melodic ornament and as a harmonic device.

Candidates should be reminded of the use of superscript numbers to show the 'beat number'. In this question 'bar 15¹' and 'bar 16¹' showed that only the notation of the *first* beats needed explanation. A small number of candidates went on to describe the staccato crotchets in the rest of bars 15 and 16, but there was no credit for this.

Q.1(e)

The question asked about 'composing devices'. Sequence was the most often identified, with a further mark for descending (if applied to the sequence, not to the melody). A few candidates appeared to be disadvantaged by focusing only on what they could see in the skeleton score, rather than listening to the recording. The semiquavers in bar 28 are printed in the score, but only by listening could candidates hear their repetition in the following bars as a descending sequence (2 marks) and in imitation (1 mark) by the second violins (1 mark).

Q.1(f)

This type of melodic dictation will be familiar to Centres that taught unit G353 in the legacy AS level specification. The method of marking is given in the Mark Scheme, with some examples in Appendix 2. Candidates are credited for correct intervals, with an error marked when a sequence of correct intervals breaks down. Most candidates were able to record a reasonably shaped melody for 1 mark, and many were more accurate.

Candidates are allowed to write on the Insert, where they can notate a practice copy over the bass. The final answer must be transferred to the answer stave on the Question Paper so that it can be marked. Examiners do not see the Insert. The vast majority of candidates answered the question in the correct place.

Q.1(g)

Some candidates lack confidence with tonality questions. While there were many correct answers, weaker candidates tended to generalise ('it begins in a major key'), rather than naming the key or the key relationship (G major/relative major). Candidates were credited for recognising that the section ended in the dominant (B major or imperfect cadence).

Q.1(h)

Examiners were pleased with the answers to this question. Candidates are expected to be familiar with musical and historical context in relation to unfamiliar music. Most candidates were able to identify one or more features which are regarded as characteristic of 'Sturm und Drang'.

Q.2(a)

There were many very good answers to this question, identifying and explaining a number of differences in rhythm and pitch between the score and the performance. Examiners were pleased that candidates understood that there may be differences between the performance and the printed score in this repertoire. Candidates were expected to identify examples of changes by bar number or the words being sung and then to explain (even in general terms) the nature of the change. Most candidates showed awareness of the conventions of notation in jazz or pop, for example in interpreting a notated dotted rhythm as a swung rhythm.

Q.2(b)

There was a positive response to the song. Many candidates were able to comment effectively on instrumental textures and link the accompaniment to the words of the song. A few candidates describe texture as either 'thick' or 'thin'. At AS level they must be more specific about what can be heard in the music. For example, at bar 17 (the bridge section) the best answers commented on the legato strings, the glissando fills in the violins, the firmer rhythm in the drums (with ride cymbal). Answers were better still if these musical points were linked to the lyrics: the emotional build-up, the 'sigh' of the glissandi, the dramatic break in the accompaniment at the climax to leave the final word 'alone' unaccompanied.

Q.2(c)

Many candidates were able to make positive and perceptive comments about the effectiveness of Rebecca Ferguson's singing. Candidates should be encouraged to listen to a range of singers for Area of Study 2. In preparing the prescribed repertoire for Section B (this year by Sammy Davis Jr.), Centres should spend some time comparing the performance and arrangement of the prescribed songs in recordings by other singers. This will develop the ability of candidates to respond to unfamiliar songs and performances in Section A.

Candidates should be able to recognise vocal techniques and features of interpretation used by singers. The best answers on unfamiliar songs will recognise and explain the skill of the performer in communicating the mood or meaning of the song. In answering questions, higher band answers were specific about musical detail and regularly referred to sections of the song, lyrics and bar numbers. Examiners were pleased when candidates responded convincingly to the expressive, vulnerable qualities of Ferguson's singing and when they went on to explain why her singing is effective (using the evidence of the breathy tone and the shortening of long notes, with detail on the decoration of 'Hear me willow' as it is repeated at the end of the song).

A few candidates expressed a more negative view of the effectiveness of the singing. This is perfectly acceptable, but such answers must be supported by evidence and specific detail. One candidate, for example, argued that Ferguson's singing was cool and lacking in passion. The lack of vibrato was used as evidence, but the point would have been stronger with a specific example (with bar number or lyric). Candidates need to show some caution in criticising the work of successful professional musicians, but Centres may wish to discuss with candidates the skill of writing effective and persuasive criticism.

Q.2(d)

Candidates are expected to recognise AABA as by far the most common song structure in the popular genres covered by Area of Study 2. Examiners were pleased that many candidates identified AABA or 32-bar song form. Most candidates recognised the basic structure of the song and were able to explain it with some accuracy. Some credit was awarded for other versions (such as ABA, AABBA or verse-verse-chorus-verse).

At its simplest, candidates could get full marks for Introduction – AABA – Coda. In writing shorthand answers, candidates are perhaps relying on getting it exactly right. There is more safety in longer answers, with marks also awarded for bar numbers, the length of phrases and noting that the repeat was not observed in the recording.

Section B

Q.3(a)

The question asked candidates to write about three aspects of the extract: harmony, tonality and melody. Melody proved the easiest of the three, with detailed comments and regular referencing of bar numbers in the extract. A few candidates were distracted by the instrumentation, features of the accompaniment or interesting context such as Anton Stadler's basset clarinet, but most focused consistently on the melody in the clarinet and the strings.

Many candidates struggled with harmony and tonality. Some ignored it completely, which restricted the marks they could gain. Where marks were scored, answers most often identified E major and the perfect cadence at the end of the extract. Harmonic language is an important part of the Areas of Study. Examiners are grateful for the continued efforts of Centres in teaching the recognition of keys and chords, aurally or from score. These are useful skills for the musician.

Q.3(b)

Candidates wrote well on instrumentation. Many had accurate explanations of the writing for the clarinet and the orchestra, supported by references to passages in the music.

Some candidates wrote only about the extract, when the question asked about the whole movement. Candidates are urged to read the question carefully.

Q.4(a)

Examiners were pleased by responses to this question. Candidates wrote well about Sammy Davis Jr.'s performance of *What Kind Of Fool Am I?* and made effective comparisons with the version by Sarah Vaughan. At their best, general points about tempo and instrumentation were supplemented by specific evidence of detailed listening. Good answers observed (with reference to particular lyrics) how Vaughan sings a more sustained line, taking the end of a phrase and the beginning of the next in one breath, and using melisma to decorate the melody in a characteristic blues/gospel style.

Middle or lower band answers tended to have little comment on Sarah Vaughan's singing. There would be some promising, accurate detail on the accompaniment, but then nothing on the singing. Examiners wish to encourage Centres and candidates to engage with the singers and their singing as much as possible in Area of Study 2. Instrumental accompaniment is an important part of the music, but not at the expense of the voice.

Q.4(b)

Many candidates gave detailed answers on one of the songs, showing appreciative understanding of Davis's gifts as an entertainer and singer. Examiners understand if candidates use a shortened form of a singer's name. In general, a surname ('Davis', 'Vaughan') strikes the correct tone, respectful and academic. 'SDJ' is practical, but first names ('Sammy', 'Sarah') are rather too casual.

Section C

Q.5

There were many good answers to this question. Most candidates had a clear understanding of many of the issues. There were specific and detailed references to the role of Ellington's players, for example, in creating his unique sound. Answers frequently discussed the signature sounds of Cootie Williams and Joe Nanton, including information on their technique and use in the prescribed works. Some answers were less successful in accounting for Ellington's role as composer and band leader, mentioning only his piano playing and his encouragement of his sidemen. Credit was given for helpful and informed reference to other Ellington works and for relevant contextual information (for example, on Ellington's association with the Cotton Club or the band's tours of Europe).

Q.6

Most candidates were very familiar with *Wachet auf*. There were several detailed answers, describing the work from beginning to end, some with one paragraph for each movement in turn. A few of these answers turned into lengthy commentaries on the cantata itself, not always directly related to the question. More convincing answers were able to address the question and identify features which were typical of Lutheran church music. Most candidates referred to the importance of worship in the German language, the role of the chorale and the degree of involvement by the congregation. Other answers were able to account for the role of recitative and aria in the cantata and make specific points about the melody and harmony (required by the question) in expressing the meaning of the words.

Q.7

Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture was the most popular choice of essay. There were many intelligent and knowledgeable attempts to relate musical techniques with the creation of the atmosphere. There were precise references to melody, instrumentation and key changes, often supported by clear examples, such as accurate bar numbers. Candidates benefit from having a good memory for the location of examples.

Q.8

The Rite of Spring was the least popular of the options in this section, but many of the essays showed detailed knowledge of the music and accurate references to examples. Candidates were given credit for correct locations from the score, for example, by rehearsal number ('accented string chords at fig. 13') or related to the title of the section ('accented string chords in The Augurs of Spring').

The question required candidates to compare the prescribed work with a work by a late Romantic composer from after 1900. On the whole, candidates were less successful in choosing a composer to make an effective comparison. Examiners were able to credit references to rich Romantic textures and so on, but not works that were outside the period (e.g. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*) or which represented another style (e.g. Debussy). Examiners were encouraged by candidates who were able to provide a valid comparison with Elgar or Rachmaninov.

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