



A-level **Music**

7272/W Appraising music

Report on the Examination

7272
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Introduction

The Appraising Music examination paper for 2024 followed exactly the format of last year's paper and it is clear that centres and students are increasingly familiar with this and confident in their preparation. There were very few examples of misunderstanding or mismanagement of the combination of questions to be answered and the general level of response was quite similar to that of 2023.

The overall performance of students in the examination followed a pattern which has become familiar in recent years; a relatively strong response in the essay question (Section C), slightly less successful response in listening questions (Section A) and a relatively weaker response in set work analysis (Section B).

A detailed breakdown of information regarding responses to individual questions follows.

Section A – Listening (56 marks)

Area of study 1 (Western classical tradition 1650-1910)

Question 1 – Chopin: Mazurka in A minor, Op.68 no.2

Most students correctly identified the combination of acciaccatura and trill in part 1. The sharpening of the 4th (to make a kind of leading note into the dominant) was far less reliably identified. Many students opted for the 3rd, not realising that this would actually change the piece to the major mode. Of the two answers required in the final multiple choice question, most success was gained in recognising that Section C began in the relative major; recognising the imperfect cadence at the end of Section C proved much more difficult.

Question 2 (dictation) – Vivaldi: Flute Concerto in F major, RV 434, 2nd movement, bars 1-6

This was a slow-paced excerpt, with simple, regular rhythms. However, the chromaticism proved difficult to recognise for many students, despite the conjunct motion of the melody and bass. It is worth remembering that the harmonic relationship between treble and bass can often be used to guide responses to melodic dictation.

Question 3 – Mozart: *Die Zauberflöte*, Act 2, No.21b ('Two armed men')

The mock-baroque chorale-prelude type texture of this passage generally produced appropriate responses in terms of the serious tone. Most students made some reference to the imitative counterpoint, even if they struggled to use the correct terminology. The staccato articulation of the strings, the striking octave texture between the voices and their doubling by wind instruments were also features which most students identified, but a large number were not able to comment on details of the melody in either instruments or voices and omitted to mention the steady 4/4 march-like metre and tempo or even the minor key. In this question, it was quite common to read detailed descriptions of the orchestral introduction which did not then proceed to discuss the music following the entry of the voices.

Optional Areas of study

The relative popularity of the six Areas of study followed a pattern which has become familiar from recent years;

Most popular: Aos 3 (Music for media) and 4 (Music for theatre)
 Aos 2 (Pop)
 Aos 5 (Jazz)
 Aos 7 (Art music since 1910)

Very few: Aos 6 (Contemporary Traditional Music)

Area of study 2 (Pop)

Question 4 – Beyoncé: ‘Hold Up’ from *Lemonade*

The majority of students confidently picked reggae as the source of stylistic influence. In most of the other questions, success was around 50%, with identification of the central chord being the best done and of the range of the first four lines the least well done.

Question 5 – Muse: ‘Won’t Stand Down’ from *Will of the People*

A majority of students managed to identify the guitar solo texture as monophonic, while about half correctly counted three rising minor sixths in the first eight lines. The question about the change between compound and simple metre was often not well done; several students wrote instead about tempo or guessed that there was a change to ‘double time.’

Question 6 – Stevie Wonder: ‘Power Flower’ from *Stevie Wonder’s Journey Through ‘The Secret Life of Plants’*

This attractive track from a lesser-known album was accessible to most students, who were able to pick out general features that contributed to the ‘happy and carefree’ atmosphere, including the major key, high vocal register, warm Fender Rhodes piano tone, rich harmony and relaxed, moderately fast tempo. The opening harmonica solo was often commented upon, but the instrument was frequently mis-identified, which is a shame, given that it is so closely associated with this artist. The best answers were able to comment specifically on the rhythmic pattern of the drum-kit groove, the chromatic and extended chords in the harmony and features of the melody. Overall, this was the least successfully handled 10-mark question in Section A.

Area of study 3 (Music for media)

Question 7 – Thomas Newman: ‘Miss Hilly’ from *The Help*

The easiest question here was the last, in which almost all students correctly heard the fade-in and out framing the excerpt. Just under half of students correctly picked a minor 3rd as the opening interval. The other two parts proved quite taxing; only about one third counted two instances of the pizzicato rhythm and identified the vibraphone (several students guessed ‘synthesiser’).

Question 8 – Nobuo Uematsu: ‘Zanarkand’ from *Final Fantasy X*

About half of the students managed to identify both cymbal and violins in the first part (credit was not given for simply stating ‘strings’). In the multiple-choice melody question, between one third and a half were successful and the same is true of the question requiring students to eliminate a harmonic feature. In the latter, it was quite common for students to select ‘tierce de Picardie,’ but there is a clear turn to the tonic major in the final cadence of the excerpt.

Question 9 – Michael Giacchino: ‘Arc Reactor’ from *Spider-Man: No Way Home*

This was an action-packed track, with a great deal to write about. Many students were able to gain credit for attempting a chronologically organised summary. It was much more common to read detailed accounts of texture and timbre (admittedly very important) than of other elements such as rhythm, melody, or harmony. This was, on average, the best handled of the 10-mark questions in Section A.

Area of study 4 (Music for theatre)**Question 10 – Jason Robert Brown: ‘The River Won’t Flow’ from *Songs for a New World***

The multiple-choice question (piano rhythm) was tackled with approximately 50% success. The most success was had with picking out the excluded feature (about 90% success). Again, identification of an instrument (electric organ) proved quite difficult. The modulation from G major to C major was spotted by about one third of students, with a significant minority incorrectly but understandably guessing D major.

Question 11 – Richard Rodgers: ‘How Can Love Survive?’ from *The Sound of Music*

A two-thirds majority of students identified the circle of fifths in the introduction, and over half selected the correct melody for line 10. The third part of the question required precision; marks were awarded when the correctly identified instrument was linked with its particular role (strings doubling the vocal melody, woodwind playing a countermelody).

Question 12 – Stephen Sondheim: ‘The Right Girl’ from *Follies*

In this question, the stark contrast between the two sections was generally well observed by students and there were plenty of answers which referenced the ‘start-stop’ continuity of the opening section and its, brash, dissonant style. The best answers adhered closely to explanation of how the music of each line served the dramatic characterisation.

Area of study 5 (Jazz)**Question 13 – Louis Armstrong: ‘Basin Street Blues’ from *The Complete Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings, Volume 3***

The first couple of questions were on Armstrong’s iconic trumpet solo; most students correctly selected a major arpeggio for the opening melody, and many were successful in describing a perfect 5th heard in the

middle of the excerpt. Selecting the correct modulating chord pattern proved more testing, with only about one third of students scoring the point.

Question 14 – Duke Ellington: ‘Satin Doll’ from *Jazz Party*

This question was quite well done overall, with a majority getting each of the four components right. The most reliably answered questions were on picking the correct melodic rhythm and the use of the floor toms in the drum kit. Identifying the use of the dominant pedal in the bass at the start and the distinctive type of rhythm in the accompaniment were slightly harder.

Question 15 – Pat Metheny: ‘Spring Ain’t Here’ from *Letter From Home*

This question asked students to investigate the fusion of rock, jazz and Latin American elements and the best answers managed to cover all three of these styles equally well, while delivering a detailed chronological account. Overall, however, this was one of the less well done 10-mark questions in Section A.

Area of study 6 (Contemporary traditional music)

Question 16 – Astor Piazzolla: ‘Fear’ from *Five Tango Sensations*

Recognition of the bandoneon was achieved by nearly three-quarters of students and both of the multiple choice questions (picking the melodic pattern and the fugal structure) were successfully answered by two thirds. Overall, this was a well done question, with the majority scoring over half the marks.

Question 17 – Mariza: ‘Primavera’ from *Fado Curvo*

In this fado classic, identifying the chord sequence and textural relationship proved easier, while the intervallic range of the opening vocal melody was more difficult.

Question 18 – Anoushka Shankar: ‘Those Words’ (featuring Ayanna Witter-Johnson and Shilpa Rao) from *Love Letters*

This hauntingly beautiful song features a combination of sitar (Anoushka Shankar), Indian vocals (Shilpa Rao) and pizzicato cello (Ayanna Witter-Johnson). Identifying the latter proved one of the trickier aspects of the question, with several students imagining they heard a guitar or even percussion.

Area of study 7 (Art music since 1910)

Question 19 – Olivier Messiaen: Movement 2 from *Et Expecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*

Most students managed to name at least one of the percussion instruments heard, but a generic ‘bells’ was not specific enough (tubular bells, being the expected answer). About one third of students selected the correct sequence of textures and two thirds correctly identified changing metres.

Question 20 – Dmitri Shostakovich: Movement 4 from Piano Trio no.2 in E minor

An overwhelming majority of students named pizzicato as the string technique and a smaller majority correctly named the opening cello interval. The final cadence and the correct piano chords were less confidently found, with slightly under half doing so.

Question 21 – James MacMillan: Movement 2 from *The Berserker*

Good answers balanced discussion of the modernist non-tonal harmony and occasionally ametrical rhythm with the atmospheric aspects of melody and sonority. Finding a way to describe the harmony, rhythm and melody was difficult for some students. Overall, this was the most successfully handled 10-mark question in Section A.

Section B – Analysis (34 marks)

As in previous years, the baroque question was by far the most popular option, with just over 90% of students opting for this. Piano music attracted just under 60% and the operas of Mozart 50%.

Question 22: The baroque solo concerto – Vivaldi: Flute Concerto ‘*Il Gardellino*’, 2nd movement

The majority of students correctly found a diminished 7th in bars 7 or 9 and slightly fewer the modulation to the key of E minor in bar 8. There were also many thorough and relevant discussions of rhythm, though not always informed by a strong understanding of compound metre or knowledge of the typical baroque Siciliano rhythm. The 10 mark question on melody and tonality was well done on the whole.

Question 23: The operas of Mozart – ‘*Non so piu*’, bars 73-100, from *Le nozze di Figaro*

At the start of both this question and the next, students had to identify a first inversion dominant 7th chord. The most common mistake seemed to be not understanding that the bass note was not the root. The 5-mark question on orchestral texture was reasonably well done by many, but there was often a lack of thorough detail, such as not mentioning that the clarinet and bassoon parts were in octaves with one another, playing in parallel thirds. Responses to the 10-mark question on matching Cherubino’s emotional state with the music used to depict it were often weakened by a lack of attention to harmony and a misunderstanding of alla breve (2/2) metre.

Question 24: The piano music of Chopin, Brahms and Grieg – Brahms: *Intermezzo*, Op.118 no.2, bars 17-46

As has proven the case in the past, the sophistication and subtlety of Brahms’s compositional technique presented challenges that only the strongest students rose to effectively. In both the 5- and 10-mark questions, there was a tendency to try to describe what could be seen superficially on the page, without a genuine understanding of the processes of development or transformation evolving over the course of the excerpt.

Section C – Essay (30 marks)

As with the other sections, there were no surprises in the relative popularity of the essay questions:

Most popular: Aos4 (Music for theatre)
 Aos2 (Pop)
 Aos3 (Music for media)
 Aos5 (Jazz) and Aos7 (Art music since 1910)

Very few: Aos6 (Contemporary traditional music)

The keys to success in responding to all essay questions are essentially these two factors:

- demonstration of detailed knowledge of the works studied
- an ability to engage with the question posed.

Question 25 – Area of study 2 (Pop): Contribution to dance music/love songs/songs with a social or political message/instrumental music.

This was the least successfully tackled essay question overall. A common problem was failure to be clear about which category of music had been selected, or a lack of discipline in sticking to one of them. The most popular were songs with a social or political message and love songs, though there were some questionable interpretations of both of these.

Question 26 – Area of study 3 (Music for media): ‘Melodic lines are less important than sonority (timbre)’.

This question offered an opinion to be engaged with and produced a good range of answers on both sides of the argument as well as some that took a nuanced view and steered a course in between. Hermann’s ‘Psycho’ score was a frequently cited example of sonority taking priority, while the use of leitmotifs - such as those for Jack Sparrow in ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ or Ellie in ‘Up’ - was often mentioned in support of the claims of melody.

Question 27 - Area of study 4 (Music for theatre): How harmony and melody enhance the dramatic situation of songs.

This question produced a very broad range of examples across all of the named composers, though the dark and dissonant harmonies of ‘Lonely Room’ from ‘Oklahoma’ and ‘The Ballade of Sweeney Todd’ were frequently encountered. Responses were often lengthy and detailed; sometimes they did not stay focused on the elements of melody and harmony and thus became somewhat diffuse.

Question 28 - Area of study 5 (Jazz): How artists have challenged or gone beyond what was considered typical of their time.

In general, students handled this question confidently; all of the named artists were referred to, which is encouraging, as all of them were clearly pioneers at some stage of their career. Responses which really answered the question convincingly were those which were clear about what the ‘typical jazz style of their time’ was in order to provide a foil for the chosen artists’ innovations.

Question 29 - Area of study 6 (Contemporary traditional music): ‘Explore the significance of choices of mode, scale or key’.

Although chosen only by a small number of students, this was a well answered question, often with an excellent and relevant use of examples, especially from Anoushka Shankar and Toumani Diabaté.

Question 30 - Area of study 7 (Art music since 1910): Innovation in either music for orchestra/large ensemble or small ensemble/solo.

This was also one of the better attempted questions, with much evidence of a strong understanding of compositional styles and techniques. All of the named composers were referenced, though Messiaen was a particular favourite, understandably, given his clearly categorised and systematic exploitation of innovative harmonic and rhythmic ideas. Essays were sometimes weakened by students forgetting to stick to one type of music (for orchestra/large ensemble or solo/small ensemble).

Presentation of scripts

All of the points which follow are taken directly from the Report on the 2023 Examination, but they are still valid.

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

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

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

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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