

Assessment Report

Scholarship, 2008

Music

COMMENTARY

The level of candidates' responses in 2008 was pleasing and it was clear that many of them were very well prepared.

Significant points that candidates should take into consideration are as follows:

- in the written examination, responding to questions using unseen scores is a little bit like detective work; candidates need to search the score for “evidence” that will support their response to the question; they need to read and respond to the whole question and carefully select the score extract that will be used for this response
- there was poor or limited use of annotation of scores in the Resource Booklet to support the written argument, even though the criteria clearly in the standard state that this is part of a “complete answer”; scores should be annotated in order to reinforce the written text, appropriate musical terminology should be included and, importantly, the responses to questions should be structured in ways that make the argument coherent - for example, several candidates chose to respond to a question on structure but failed to annotate the score to support their response
- time management is also important; frequently candidates gave extensive answers to the first question attempted, but followed this with a very brief answer to the second; mapping out the basic structure and key features of responses to both questions first (before answering begins in earnest) is a useful strategy - that way, when fatigue sets in, candidates still have their original fresh thinking and draft framework to prompt them and to work with
- evidence of performances and compositions should be meticulously checked prior to submitting the portfolio; the extract component asks for one minute per extract, not one minute in total; minimal valid evaluation only can be gained from hearing a single final chord as evidence (as happened in some cases)
- some performance candidates submitted a thorough analysis of their main performance work, but this skill did not appear to be transferred to their analysis in the written examination; some work in differing analytical contexts may be of benefit to these candidates
- it is recommended that candidates from the same school who are submitting a musicology portfolio do not use of the same work for analysis; it is also unwise to submit previously annotated scores for this portfolio; candidates need to produce evidence of what they are capable of and not what previous candidates have indicated; musicology portfolios should also include a bibliography
- two significant errors occurred in candidates' responses as a result of either a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge; the first error relates to Question 3 and the request to show the “use of variation technique”, which a significant proportion of candidates took to mean simply “variety”, and they overlooked the basic techniques of theme and variation; that said, several candidates made very good use of the big band score in response to this question; the second error, which was less prevalent, was the mistaking of the fingering in the Bach Two-Part Invention for figured bass, which made for some pretty adventurous harmonic progressions.

The best performing candidates most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- ability to establish and develop a perceptive, coherent and articulate argument in response to a specific question and which made good use of appropriate musical terminology and thinking
- ability to annotate the selected scores in the Resource Booklet to illustrate points made in the Answer Booklet

- ability to structure their responses; many of these candidates included pages where a draft outline of the response had been given extensive consideration; whether on paper or in their heads, they clearly reflected on how the question was to be answered before they commenced writing their response
- selection of a relevant score to support their response to a particular question
- submission, as evidence of critical reflection, of a portfolio in which the reflective statement covered their thinking, either as a performer, composer or musicologist, over a period of time, and that documented any problems solved, comparable works either listened to or studied, and which also identified what the candidate perceived as shortcomings in their performance, composition, score analysis
- submission of evidence that was complete and had been checked; several DVDs and CDs were unplayable simply because formatting had not been finalised and had not been checked prior to submission.

Candidates who did NOT achieve scholarship lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above, and in addition they:

- responded either through a long meandering essay that never really got to the essence of the question or submitted answers that were brief and only covered one or two points
- submitted DVDs and CDs that had not been finalised or edited; markers occasionally had to trawl through 20 minutes of unrelated performances by non-candidates, often at other levels, in order to get to the appropriate evidence; in a high stakes examination such as this, the portfolio should be meticulously presented following rigorous checking
- did not select the most relevant scores to support their answers; this was very evident in Question 3 where “variation technique” was often mistaken to mean variety, or in Question 8 where the most obvious scores that related to “death” were ignored in favour of those whose relationship was somewhat tenuous.