



Music

GCSE

Music

Exemplar Candidate Answer
(Full mark)

B351

February 2016

QUESTION 1

Context: Explain the purpose of the piece, why your instrument is used in it, and the role that your instrument plays in the piece.

Performance techniques: Describe the techniques that you used to perform/realise the piece, commenting if you can on their effect on the music.

Performance evaluation: Describe how the performance went, mentioning any particular strengths and areas that could have been improved.

Composition brief: Write a brief for a composition, drawing on what you have learned from the study of your piece.

Instrument: Keyboard

Piece: Yesterday

Context

'Yesterday' by The Beatles was composed in 1965 by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. The piece is usually performed at concerts, often by a Beatles tribute band nowadays.

It was originally written as a piece for voice and acoustic guitar. This arrangement is for the Keyboard. It is well suited to the Keyboard as you can play the melody easily.

Performance techniques

I am playing on an electric Keyboard, so the notes will always be in tune. In order to articulate the notes on my instrument, I have to change the way I hit the keys. The melody of 'Yesterday' is in a legato style, so I have to play each note as long as possible when moving from key to key to create the smooth effect. This is called legato fingering.

My instrument is also touch sensitive, which means that I have to judge how hard to press the keys in order to phrase the tune musically. About 20 seconds into the piece, the music is marked forte, so I pressed the notes harder here.

I used the settings of the Keyboard to choose a sound that suited the piece. This makes the piece interesting to listen to, especially as I was able to change the sound on the second verse. I also played this piece with a background style. This makes the piece more entertaining as it adds to the number of instruments playing at one time. It was important to choose a backing style that suited the mood of the song.

The backing music on the Keyboard is linked to the chords played by the left hand. I used the single finger chord setting for my performance – this meant that I only had to press one or two notes to create the full chord sound.

Performance evaluation

My piece mostly went well. I made one small error towards the end of the piece though. This was due to me being nervous and under pressure as I was recording and didn't want to make a mistake. I also noticed a slight rhythm change when playing bar two. This was partly because I listened to a different version of the piece.

I was pleased with my choice of settings as they really suited the style of the piece. The melody was played on a Clarinet sound in the first verse. In the second verse, I used the 'Dual' function to add some strings over the top. The backing rhythm was a medium tempo 'Pop Ballad 2' setting which gave a backing like the original Beatles track. I was also able to successfully use the 'Intro' and 'Ending' functions to start and end the piece properly with a good style.

I was pleased with my legato fingering – this made the melody clear, and I could also hear the change in dynamic when I played the louder section. I was also pleased with the notes that I played staccato – this added variety and helped to keep the melody interesting. Playing staccato notes was not difficult for me as all I had to do was to tap the note quickly and not hold it on.

Overall I played in a way that the original composer would like, as I was able to express the melody in a clear way that sounded nice and original. I was pleased with my performance, as I was able to continue when I made my mistake and the end product was a piece that sounded good.

Composition brief

My composition will be based on the style and structure of 'Yesterday'. I am going to write a legato style melody over a set of chords. The chords will be played as single finger using a style similar to the 'Pop Ballad 2' setting. There will also be an Intro and Ending using the Keyboard setting. I will choose a setting for the melody that has an interesting sustain sound so that the melody feels smooth.

I will have a contrasting section that uses staccato notes for variety. The main section will be in a major key, but I might try to use a minor key for the second section to provide more contrast.

COMMENTARY

Please note that there is no requirement to use the Commentary template provided in Appendix B of the specification. A word document set out under clear headings for each paragraph is preferable.

This is an example of a commentary worth full marks. In this commentary, the bulk of the relevant musical detail to justify this is found in Sections 2 and 3. However, it should be noted that the lack of an adequate context paragraph (section 1) or a Composition brief (Section 4) would be sufficient to prevent an otherwise excellent Commentary from accessing the top band of marks.

Context

This 'Context' paragraph gives a brief insight into the origins of the piece performed, and indicates that it is being performed as an arrangement for Keyboard, rather than in its original form.

There is often not a lot of information that can be written in this paragraph – the purpose is to enable the candidate to look at the background to the piece of music being performed. Extensive detail, for example about the composer's life and other compositions or recordings, is not required.

Performance techniques

The 'Performing Techniques' paragraph is an important one, focussed on the instrument specific technique required to perform the piece. Candidates should identify and describe at least three instrument specific techniques that relate to the successful performance of the piece. This can include references to musical elements, such as dynamics and articulation for example, but should then go on to identify how changes of dynamic, or specific articulations, are achieved on the instrument within the context of the piece performed. For example in the use of dynamics, a vocalist and wind/brass player can refer to breath control, whilst a string player might refer to the degree of bow speed and pressure.

In this response, the candidate identifies and describes the following Keyboard specific techniques in effective detail, therefore justifying the mark criteria statement 'the subtleties of a range of performing techniques are described'.

- Legato fingering (articulation).
- Touch sensitivity (dynamics).
- Keyboard auto accompaniment settings. (Texture and timbre).

Performance evaluation

The 'Performance Evaluation' should be an honest reflection on the quality of the performance. In a top band response the writing shows 'musical understanding' through the use of appropriate technical vocabulary linked to accurate statements about the standard of the performance.

This evaluation shows musical understanding by:

- Identifying and explaining the small error made towards the end of the piece, and also appropriately justifying a difference in the rhythm of bar 2 from the printed score.
- Appropriately explaining and justifying the chosen Keyboard settings in the context of the style of the piece performed. Attention is also drawn to the application of the Intro and Ending function.
- Reflecting on the effective use of the legato fingering technique (which is contrasted with the use of staccato articulation). The effect of the touch sensitive technique to create a forte section is also indicated.

Composition brief

The 'Composition Brief' top band criteria require the candidate to make 'musical decisions' about which performing techniques will be used in the composition for their instrument. The intended effect of these chosen performing techniques should be identified.

It is important to note that the eventual accurate application of the brief does not form any part of the assessment of the B351 composition. The brief is a starting point that enables the candidate to reflect on how they can begin to write an effective and successful piece for their instrument based on the performing techniques they have identified in the performance of their solo piece.

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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