

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

MUSIC

J536

For first teaching in 2016

J536/05 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 5 series overview

Some excellent answers were seen throughout this paper, clearly the result of very good practice within the classroom. Many candidates were clearly able to access questions to all the areas of study and some musically detailed responses were seen. More able candidates, in particular, were able to write clearly and concisely about the music that they heard. They were able to describe the music in the extracts that they listened to rather than writing in more vague terms about general features of the genres. Middle ability candidates, likewise, were able to answer with considerable success in a good proportion of the paper.

There was improvement in the use of written English for Questions 3 and 6 (e) with far fewer bullet point responses or tables. There were still some candidates who lacked direction in their answers but overall many more answers were written in a successful style.

As in previous years, there were candidates who demonstrated a lack of understanding of key musical terms such as tonality in Question 2 (a), ornament in Question 5 (b), cadence in Question 5 (c), key in Question 7 (b) and glissando in Questions 7 (c) and 7 (e).

There were also many candidates who were unable to recognise basic orchestral instruments. This appears to be an ongoing issue, especially with middle and lower ability candidates. There will always be a number of questions that require instrumental recognition and so this is something that should be focused on as a matter of course.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had clearly revised the specific areas of study well • were able to recognise instrumental timbres • had a good understanding of what was required for each type of question • focused their answers on the music heard within the examination rather than relying on the knowledge that they had of the various genres • had an excellent understanding of musical vocabulary • read the questions carefully and then wrote concise answers directly related to the question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not appear to have revised the topics thoroughly enough • were unable to recognise the various different instrumental timbres • gave learnt, expected answers rather than listening to the actual music to determine relevant answers • did not understand general musical vocabulary • left answers blank • repeated themselves when specifically told not to in a question or within a prose answer • did not read the questions carefully enough.

Question 1 (a)

1 This question is based on Area of Study 2 – The Concerto Through Time.

You will hear this extract played **three** times.

(a) Name the solo instrument. **[1]**

The most common answer was the correct one of 'trumpet'. However, (French) horn was a very popular incorrect answer and many other orchestral instruments were also seen.

Instrument recognition

As has been stated in previous reports regular practice listening to the timbre that different orchestral instruments can display is vital to success in this type of question. The trumpet has a very distinct sonority and should be quite recognisable with regular practice. Comparative recognition is also important in order for candidates to recognise, for example, the difference between the trumpet and the French Horn, or the violin and the cello or the clarinet and the oboe.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Underline the correct term for the first four notes played by the solo instrument.

Arpeggio Chromatic scale Major scale Raga **[1]**

All answers were seen but the correct one of 'arpeggio' was seen more than the others. Practice with both terminology and interval recognition is vital if candidates are to be able to differentiate between melodic shapes such as these.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe how the orchestra accompanies the solo instrument in this extract.

.....
.....
.....
.....
..... **[4]**

The question this year focused on giving details of the orchestral accompaniment rather than how the solo instrument and orchestra worked together. A number of responses contained information such as 'the trumpet plays the melody and the orchestra accompany' which was not creditworthy.

Features of an orchestral accompaniment



The term call and response was seen frequently within candidate answers. Firstly, this term is not really appropriate for this type of music, question and answer would be preferred for this genre, and secondly, in this particular extract there was no question and answer between the solo instrument and the orchestra. Candidates appeared to use these terms as learnt information rather than listening to the extract for the features that were actually present.

Around a quarter of candidates did not gain any marks for this question. With this area of study the styles of orchestral accompaniment are a key aspect for study and so a good deal of time needs to be spent within the classroom listening to and reflecting on the various styles and features within specific musical examples.

Some good answers were seen and the most popular correct answers to describe the orchestral accompaniment were: 'quietly', 'changes dynamics with the soloist', 'quavers', 'chords' and 'staccato'. There were also those candidates who wrote successfully about the orchestral passage 'without the soloist'.

Question 1 (d) (i)

(d) (i) Name the period of composition for this extract.

..... [1]

About half of the candidates gained a mark for the correct answer of 'Classical'. However both Baroque and Romantic were seen frequently.

Question 1 (d) (ii)

(ii) Give **three** reasons for your answer.

1

2

3

[3]

While a good number of candidates tended to give features that were generally associated with the answer that they gave to part (i), it was quite possible to gain marks here even if the answer to (d) (i) was incorrect. Many candidates tended to use their memory for key features of the period that they had chosen, rather than using their aural skills to identify things they could actually hear in the music. Some candidates wrote about terraced dynamics, lots of brass, large orchestra or virtuosic playing which were not present in or true of this extract.

There were also a significant number of negative answers to this question such as: 'there was no harpsichord'. While this was true of this extract answers are required to state what is heard within the music rather than what is not. Generally negative answers are not accepted in this paper.

Other unsuccessful answers were often vague, for example a bigger orchestra or a smaller orchestra, neither of which states the actual size of the orchestra. Throughout the life of this specification and indeed previous ones 'medium sized' orchestra has been given for Classical music.

The most popular correct answers were 'ornamentation', 'crescendo and/or diminuendo' and 'balanced phrasing' as seen in exemplar 1.

Exemplar 1

- 1 *Balanced phrasing*
- 2 *Gradual dynamic variation*
- 3 *Medium sized orchestra*

Exemplar 1 is an excellent concise response that gained full marks. The candidate had no doubt learnt some possible answers for this type of question but they then listened and gave the ones that applied to this extract.

Question 2 (a)

2 This question is based on Area of Study 4 – Film Music.

You will hear this extract played **three** times.

This extract is from a video game. The title of the track is 'Awake'. It is heard at the beginning when a character in the game wakes up and starts their journey.

(a) What is the tonality of the first chord? **[1]**

The majority of candidates were able to recognise that the tonality of the chord was 'minor'. There were candidates who clearly did not understand the word tonality and so wrote inappropriate words such as fast or low.

Question 2 (b) (i)

(b) (i) The extract starts with a long held note from which a melody emerges.

Tick the box next to the correct melodic shape that is heard.









[1]

Over a third of candidates were able to identify the correct shape here. The most popular incorrect answer was the first one with candidates not being able to hear the intervals between the first three notes.

Question 2 (b) (ii)

(ii) Name the instrument that plays this melody. [1]

Once again, a lack of ability to recognise instrumental timbres meant that only a third of candidates gained the mark for the correct answer of '(French) horn'. Many other instruments were seen some of which were heard in the extract but were not playing the melody, as well as instruments not present in the extract at all.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Describe the way the percussion is used to help portray the scene.

.....
.....
..... [2]

The marks for this part question were fairly evenly distributed showing a good level of differentiation. About a third of candidates gained 2 marks for answers such as 'timpani', 'roll' or 'wind chimes', 'glissando'. Approximately another third, gained 1 mark for the recognition of an instrument or for giving the vague answer of drum, a specific drum is required in an answer such as this, followed by 'low' or 'quiet' or 'roll'. Candidates who gained no marks often wrote very vague statements about the effect the percussion had on the character within the video game and how it showed him waking up, or phrases such as: it created a dreamy effect, none of which was credit worthy.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Give **three** features of the music that help to portray the scene. Do **not** repeat answers given above.

1
2
3 [3]

A good proportion of candidates were able to write concise answers referring to the nature of the music as: 'slow', 'legato', having 'long notes or chords', being 'piano', all of which were all credit worthy. Some referred to the 'mellow' or 'warm' timbre of the music which was also given.

There were candidates who repeated answers such as 'minor' from earlier which was not able to gain credit and those who spent more time writing about the story than the music and so gained limited credit.

While it is quite acceptable to write about the effect of the musical features on the story within area of study 4 questions, in questions of this nature it is not necessary in order to gain credit. Credit is only given for musical statements rather than how, in this case, the character wakes up and starts their journey.

Exemplar 2

- 1 Sustained, legato notes on strings
- 2 No sense of metre at the start
- 3 Soft dynamics which then crescendo

[3]

Exemplar 2 is an excellent response to this question. 2 marks are given in the first line for 'sustained notes' and 'legato notes', 1 mark in the second line for 'no sense of metre at the start' and then 1 mark for 'soft'/'crescendo' in the third line.

Exemplar 3

- 1 The violins plays a long accompaniment to show waking up
- 2 The trumpet plays repeated rhythms to show a new day.
- 3 The instruments crescendo to show the start of an important day.

[3]

Exemplar 3 is an example of some vague answers with reference to the story. The references to the story are not wrong but they are not necessary. They take time to write which in turn restricts the time the candidates give to listening to the music and focussing on the responses that are required.

A long accompaniment is a very vague statement that does not focus on any detail of the music.

The trumpet (wrong instrument) plays 'repeated melodies or phrases' not just repeated rhythms.

This response did gain a mark for 'crescendo'.

Some candidates gave quite a lot of contextual information such as where it might be played and how long Indian music often is, etc. which is not wrong but the answer needs to reflect the music rather than the actual context that might be associated with it. The question does mention writing features relevant to the context of the music but this is in reference to things like rhythm, melody, tempo or texture rather than information to do with the time of day that the raga might be linked to for example.

There were also a significant number of candidates who started really well and then appeared to run out of steam, becoming far less focused in their answers or just repeating things that they had already written.

Question 4 (a)

4 This question is based on Area of Study 5 – Conventions of Pop.

You will hear this extract played **three** times.

This extract is from a song by a solo artist from 1990 to the present day.

(a) Suggest the name of an artist who may have performed this song.

..... [1]

Almost all of the candidates gained a mark here, many for the correct answer of Taylor Swift. Others chose singers such as Ariana Grande, Beyonce or Kylie Minogue and were able to gain credit.

Question 4 (b)

(b) Give **three** features of the singing that you hear in this extract. Do **not** refer to technology in your answer.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Misconception



Interpretation and understanding of what is required by the question.

Two thirds of the candidates gained at least 1 mark but less than one third gained the full 3 marks.

Some of this was because answers focused too much on the shape and features of the melody rather than the features of the singing that the question required. Some candidates wrote about the shape of the melody such as the use of descending arpeggios, or that there were short phrases which was not what this question was focused on.

It was the features of her actual singing that was focus of this question and the most popular correct answers were 'low', although many felt she was a soprano or sang in a high range, that she had a 'breathy' timbre, that she sang 'staccato' for a large proportion of the extract and that she sang 'quietly'.

It is important that candidates are taught to interpret questions accurately and so not to fall foul of giving answers that may be true but that do not address the question actually asked.

Question 4 (c)

(c) Give **five** features of the technology used in this extract.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

[5]

This question was answered extremely well by most candidates. Many candidates were able to score full marks here and many others gained 4 out of 5. The most popular correct answers were: 'echo', 'reverb', 'drum machine', 'synthesiser', 'autotune' and 'mixing'. Some candidates repeated answers using a different word for the same feature, for example 'layering' and 'multitracking' and so gained only 1 mark rather than 2.

A number of candidates gave distortion as an answer to this question which was not correct. The music did not contain distortion and the inclusion of the term gives reason to believe that a number of candidates just wrote from a list they had learnt rather than listening to the technology features within this particular extract.

There were a few candidates who did not understand the word technology and so gave some of the features within the music that did not refer in any way to the use of technology such as a tempo or a dynamic.

Question 5 (a)

5 This question is based on Area of Study 2 – The Concerto Through Time.

You will hear this extract played **four** times.

A single staff score of the main melody is printed opposite.

(a) Using the given rhythm, fill in the missing notes in bars 12, 13, 14 and 15.

[7]

Although relatively few full mark answers were seen a good proportion of candidates were able to gain between 3 and 6 marks. As is always the case with this question marks are available for both correct notes and correct shapes. A high proportion of candidates were able to hear that the first note was a Bb, perhaps recognising the descent from the previous bar. Unfortunately not many candidates were able to identify the octave leap between the first 2 notes and so while many gained marks for the rising scale heard from notes 2 to 6, they did not identify the notes themselves correctly. Some candidates gained credit for the shape between the last 2 notes, which were the same, but once again few identified the notes correctly.

Much of the movement in this phrase was stepwise which candidates seemed to find accessible, it was the leaps that caused the most problems. The octave leap has already been stated but also the interval of a third between the 5th and 6th notes proved difficult for many.

While it is good to see neat, precise notation such as in the exemplar below it is not necessary in order to gain marks unless the notes are scribbled out and so impossible to read or far too big to see what notes are actually intended. Notes that are written without stems are not penalised nor are incorrect rhythms. There are still a significant number of candidates writing the notation in pen rather than pencil. A pencil and use of an eraser is far more preferable to a pen and crossing out.

Practice is vital at this type of question in order for candidates to feel confident in writing notation. Specific aural training to recognise intervals and melodic shapes is vital if success is to be achieved. This type of work should be started very early on in the course, initially broken down into small segments, and not be left until much later when limited progress might be made.

Exemplar 4



Exemplar 4 shows a mix of correct notes and shapes. The first note is correct but the interval between that note and the next is incorrect. The notes then go up in step three times giving 3 correct shapes. The interval between the 5th and 6th notes is wrong as is the shape between the 6th and 7th notes. The last three notes have the correct shapes between them. This results in 1 correct note and 5 correct shapes giving a total of 6 correct notes and/or shapes and so a mark of 5 according to the grid in the mark scheme.

Question 5 (b)

(b) Name the ornament that is written out, and played, in bar 25.

..... [1]

As stated in the introduction to this report, the term ‘ornament’ is not generally very well understood. There is nearly always a question that refers to ornaments within the paper and so it is a very important topic to cover. Less than a quarter of candidates gained a mark for this question, the correct answer being ‘turn’. Quite a few looked at the score and saw a triplet printed in bar 25. This was where the ornament occurred but a triplet is not an ornament it is the rhythm played as part of the ‘turn’. Other incorrect answers seen were mordent and trill, while numerous inappropriate words were seen that were nothing to do with ornamentation.

Question 5 (c)

(c) Name the cadence that occurs at the **end** of the extract.

..... [1]

The correct answer of ‘perfect’ was seen in nearly half of the answers. The most popular incorrect answer was plagal which showed that these candidates recognised a completion cadence but not the correct one.

As with part (b) a significant number of candidates did not know what a cadence was and so wrote unsuitable answers such as loud or the name of an instrument.

Question 5 (d)

(d) Give **three** ways in which the soloist creates an expressive performance.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Some lovely answers were seen to this question, particularly from able or middle ability candidates with answers such as 'vibrato', 'rubato', 'legato' and 'glissando' which showed a clear understanding of the requirement of this question.

Some candidates wrote the word tremolo which was not a feature that occurred in this music, they may have meant 'vibrato' but had misremembered the correct term.

Whereas Question 1 (c) focused on the orchestra this question within area of study 2 focused on the solo instrument. Some candidates were able to give some features of the violin as the soloist but not in terms of how it created its expressive performance. Again a clear focus on the question is required in order to be able to answer one such as this successfully.

Question 6 (a)

6 This question is based on Area of Study 3 – Rhythms of the World.

You will hear two extracts of drumming from Area of Study 3.

Extract A followed by Extract B will be heard **four** times.

(a) Underline the style of **Extract A**.

African drumming Bhangra Calypso Samba **[1]**

The vast majority of answers were correct with 'African drumming' being underlined.

Question 6 (b) (i)

(b) (i) Underline the style of **Extract B**.

African drumming Bhangra Calypso Samba **[1]**

Again the majority underlined the correct answer of 'Samba', but other answers were seen. Some mistook this extract for Calypso while others got Extract A and Extract B the wrong way around.

Question 6 (b) (ii)

(ii) Where does the style of **Extract B** originate?

..... [1]

The correct answer of 'Brazil' was seen most often, even if the answer above was incorrect. However there were those who wrote South America which was not precise enough to gain credit.

Question 6 (c)

(c) Name **two** instruments that you can hear in **Extract A**.

1

2

[2]

Few candidates did not gain marks here and many candidates gained full marks for answers such as 'Djembe', 'Dunun' or 'talking drum'. Some candidates did not gain marks by just writing the word drum which is too vague. There are far too many different types of drum for the generic word drum to be accepted in questions like this.

Question 6 (d)

(d) Name **two** instruments that you can hear in **Extract B**.

1

2

[2]

Once again, a very good proportion of candidates gained full marks here, the most popular answers being 'Surdo' and Repinique'.

Question 7 (a)

7 This question is based on Area of Study 5 – Conventions of Pop.

You will hear this extract from a rock anthem played **four** times.

A single stave score of the vocal melody is printed opposite.

Please be aware that the music continues after the written extract finishes.

(a) In the vertical box at the beginning of the extract write the time signature. [1]

Nearly all gave the correct answer of '4/4'. Some wrote 2/4 which was not possible if they used the score to inform their answer. A few wrote just 4 which was not given, far less, however, than in previous years indicating a better understanding of a time signature as opposed to identifying how many beats there are in a bar.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Name the key of this extract. [1]

Many candidates were successful in determining that this extract was in 'C Major'. However more did not appear to realise that a specific key was required and simply wrote major which was not enough.

Question 7 (c)

(c) Circle a bar where you hear a long glissando in the vocal melody. [1]

Well over half of all candidates were able to gain a mark for circling a correct bar or bar number. Bar '6' was the most popular. The most common incorrect bar was bar 17, probably because there were rests for the vocalist in this bar and so candidates thought that it should be filled with something else.

Question 7 (d)

(d) In the box above bar 18 write the name of the instrument that plays **offbeat** hits. [1]

Nearly half of the candidates gained a mark for identifying a correct instrument. 'Bass drum', 'tomtom', 'snare' and 'drum kit' were the correct answers most often seen. High-hat was a popular incorrect answer as was tambourine.

Question 7 (e)

(e) In which bar does the piano play a descending glissando? [1]

The majority of candidates correctly identified bars '21' or '22' as the answer required.

Question 7 (f) (i)

(f) (i) Name the instrument that plays the solo after the written extract is finished.
..... [1]

Very few candidates got this answer wrong.

Question 7 (f) (ii)

(ii) Underline the correct term for what this instrument plays.
Improvisation Ostinato Sequence Walking bass [1]

Most candidates were able to recognise that the electric guitar was using 'improvisation'.

Question 7 (g)

(g) Give **three** features of this extract that are typical of the style. Do **not** repeat answers given above.
1
2
3 [3]

This question was not answered particularly well with less than a quarter gaining full marks. Some very vague answers were seen such as male voices, when more detail was required such as 'high' male or 'solo and backing voices'. There were also answers referring to the lyrics, for example repeated lyrics, which is also not an acceptable answer. These points have been made in previous reports. Candidates should focus on the music and not the words. 'Hook', however, was an acceptable answer as this refers to a specific type of passage found in songs such as this.

Additionally, despite being told not to in the question, quite a lot of candidates repeated answers from earlier in the paper such as electric guitar or glissando.

The majority of correct answers were for 'loud', 'fast', 'syllabic', and 'verse/chorus structure'.

Question 8 (a)

8 This question is based on Area of Study 4 – Film Music.

You will hear this extract played **three** times.

The extract is called 'The Rapids' from the film *Jungle Cruise*. 'Rapids' are a section of a river where the water moves very fast, often over rocks.

(a) The first part of the extract occurs when the boat is travelling on a calm river. Give **three** ways in which the music helps to portray this scene.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Many candidates gained marks here for straightforward answers such as 'piano', 'slow', 'legato', 'low' or 'thin texture'. Able and middle ability candidates were often able to follow the thread of these answers into parts (b) and (c) which was mostly very successful. There were some well written answers that chose specific instruments such as the 'marimba' and were then able to describe the way that instrument played. There were just a few candidates who heard the 'flutter tonguing' of the 'flute'.

As with Question 2 many candidates spent time explaining the story. The best responses focused entirely on musical features whereas lower scoring responses often described the events of the story, the mood or the atmosphere and so lost focus on the music.

Question 8 (b)

(b) The next part of the extract is when the rapids are seen and the boat moves towards them. The river is beginning to flow faster and faster. Give **two** ways in which the music **changes** to reflect this. Do **not** refer to tempo in your answer.

- 1
- 2

[2]

As mentioned above a significant number of successful candidates were able to build on the answers of the first section and hear that the texture got 'thicker', the music got 'higher' and the dynamics got 'louder'. A number of candidates recognised the 'swirling', 'glissando' like nature of the string writing and some heard that the 'harp' or 'voices' had joined.

There were some candidates who did not focus on the changes but who just wrote about things heard in both sections which were not worthy of credit. Once again there were those who just wrote about the water going faster rather than the changes in the music to reflect the story.

Question 8 (c)

- (c) The last part of the extract starts when there is a sudden bang in the music. This is where the boat meets the rapids and is speeding through them.
Give **four** ways in which the music helps to portray this scene.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

[4]

When the bang occurred the music changed and then remained in that vein until the end of the extract. Some candidates seemed to think that the music kept getting faster, or louder, or thicker, or higher, within the section which it did not do. Many candidates however, gained marks for recognising that the music was 'loud(er)', 'fast(er)', 'thick(er)' and 'high(er)' than in the section(s) before.

Some excellent answers were seen that spoke of the 'angular' melody, and the use of 'dissonant' or 'chromatic' harmonies. There were accurate descriptions of what the percussion played and that there was much 'staccato' and/or 'accents'.

As in the other parts to this question some candidates continued to focus on the story rather than the music and so had far less success.

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