

Title of lecture: PT IA (Paper 6) AURAL**Response from: Louisa Denby (June 2018)**

Barely 25% of the class responded to the lecture questionnaire. Most of the students who did respond expressed concern that the examination paper is too hard and does not seem to be all that relevant to situations they might encounter in life as a musician. A third of respondents (i.e. two students) cited the singing elements as 'embarrassing' and not helpful in the long-term. All students said how helpful they found doing past paper questions.

Regarding the comments on the complexity and relevance of the examination, I would entirely agree that it is too difficult – to the point of causing almost total despondence in some students. The skills tested and the way in which they are tested (i.e. almost entirely memory-based tasks) are very one-sided; more variation in testing and recording mechanisms could give a more accurate reflection of a student's ability/progress.

I am aware that my 'ratings' are slightly lower than those of my teaching partner. The bulk of my teaching took place at the start of the Michaelmas term, and involved much remedial work on theory, as well as lots of activities to build general musicianship and improve aural skills, all of which feed into and off each other. More exam-focused work took place later in Michaelmas, and in Lent. Frankly there was no point in looking at past questions early on, when the students lacked much basic theoretical knowledge and skills essential to any musician, and when they were also hugely lacking in confidence.

It alarms and saddens me that any musician should feel that singing is unhelpful and 'awkward,' when music is primarily an aural phenomenon, and having a personal sense of pitch is essential to any aural work. Part of this may of course be reflective of the state of music teaching in schools, and of attitudes in the world at large.

Understandably at the time of the lecture questionnaire the examination was looming large on students' horizons, but again it concerns me that all the respondents felt there should be more focus on exam questions throughout the year/implied that they felt the general aural work was not as helpful; this goes against the ethos of the Cambridge Tripos, as far as I have always understood it, and is perhaps indicative of the level of anxiety the students (particularly those in the lowest aural set) feel regarding the examination, and therefore how much they feel they need to focus on exam-specific skills, rather than the subject of aural as a whole and its wider applications.