

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

### Paper 1: Music and Musicology Today

#### *Written examination*

No reports provided

#### *(i) Performance*

| No of students taking paper | 1  | II.1 | II.2 | III | Pass | Fail |
|-----------------------------|----|------|------|-----|------|------|
| 35                          | 7  | 23   | 5    |     |      |      |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | 20 | 66   | 14   |     |      |      |

#### **Marker 1:**

The overall standard of recitals and presentation was very good with some performances being outstanding. Please take every opportunity to discuss your recital programme in advance, to participate in classes and workshops and to perform it before the exam.

#### **Marker 1:**

This year, I attended and marked all the Part IA recitals, in addition to some recitals for other year-groups. The overall standard was high, with relatively few candidates in the 2:2 bracket (or lower). At the top end, there were some extremely stylish performances marked by technical assurance and interpretive insight. However, even the weaker candidates had clearly engaged with the requirements of the paper. In fact, the presentation of recitals has improved dramatically in recent years, and there are now very few candidates who seem totally unaware of expectations. That said, some clearly aren't taking full advantage of the coaching sessions and informal advice offered by the Director of Performance – often to their considerable disadvantage.

#### *(ii) Composition*

| No of students taking paper | 1     | II.1  | II.2  | III | Pass | Fail |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|
| 24                          | 3     | 16    | 5     | 0   | 0    | 0    |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | 12.5% | 66.7% | 20.8% |     |      |      |

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

### Marker 1:

This was an interesting selection of submissions, displaying a wide range of ideas of what constitutes viable composition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The large number of II.1 marks reflects a generally high standard of craft, with mostly very clear presentation, though perhaps also with a somewhat conventional approach. Some of the very best submissions showed real individuality and the beginnings of a truly personal voice. The weaker pieces suffered from both a rather anonymous character and deficiencies in technique. However, it was very gratifying to see so many candidates willing to attempt this option.

### Marker 2:

The compositions submitted demonstrated a refreshing variety of perspectives and approaches. There were two outstanding pieces, one of which exhibited a tremendous level of technical assurance at the service of some very ambitious ideas. However, for the most part and despite the general stylistic spread, the overall impression tended to be one of conservatism. I would strongly encourage our composers to be more adventurous and dare to try new ideas out rather than using pre-existing idioms.

### *(iii) Extended Essay*

No reports provided

## Paper 2: Music History 1

| No of students taking paper | 1           | II.1        | II.2        | III        | Pass | Fail |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------|------|
|                             | 13          | 34          | 16          | 3          |      |      |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>19.7</i> | <i>52.5</i> | <i>24.3</i> | <i>4.5</i> |      |      |

### Marker 1:

Looking at the percentages of firsts here, this is a slightly disappointing set of results; though there were examples of very fine work amongst them.

Of the Medieval answers, the analysis looked too often to be the default option for candidates who were confident in other areas – and there were many mediocre attempts. The best answers here gave both detailed readings and a sense of how these contributed to larger, structural design in the chants.

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

In the Renaissance section, many were drawn to the question on Byrd, even when they had nothing to say about Byrd's English music. I still long for an essay on Palestrina which does not feel obliged to mention the Missa Papae Marcelli legend.

### Paper 3: Music History 2

| No of students taking paper | 1           | II.1        | II.2        | III        | Pass | Fail |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------|------|
| 67                          | 11          | 46          | 9           | 1          |      |      |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>16.4</i> | <i>68.7</i> | <i>13.4</i> | <i>1.5</i> |      |      |

#### **Marker 1:**

As is often the case in these big historical surveys, the best answers were those that addressed the question with care and specificity, but also incorporated breadth where necessary. In q.2, for example, many answers restricted themselves to Schubert despite the invitation to consider the poetic in nineteenth-century Lieder in general. Q.5a proved the most problematic question for working out how to narrow the question within the exam format, and answers to 5b tended to be too limited to grand opera. On the other hand, various people ignored the word 'symphonist' in the quote of q.4. Various answers to q.3 required a more detailed discussion of what the controversies of programme music actually were. There were some notably excellent answers to q.1b, and to 6b.

#### **Marker 2:**

On the whole, this was a pleasing set of scripts, with few very weak answers, and a majority of well-written essays that demonstrated a good grasp of what is a very broad and potentially daunting course. It was particularly satisfying to see how many candidates made detailed reference to musical works outside of the set repertoire, particularly for questions on the symphony (question 4), programme music (question 3), and late nineteenth-century opera (question 6b). These, together with question 2 on Lieder, were also the most popular questions, and generally generated competent answers.

The strongest answers engaged closely with the question asked, and supported their arguments – some of which were strikingly original – with detailed musical examples, and evidence of wide reading around the subject. A number of candidates lost marks by failing to address part (or in some cases all) of the question. This was the case, for example, with question 3: a small number of candidates gave very detailed accounts of their chosen examples of programme music, but did not consider these works in light of the controversies associated with the genre; in other words, these answers were good on musical detail, but demonstrated little or no engagement with the surrounding discourse, which was the focus of the question. It seemed occasionally as though pre-prepared essays were being used to answer a slightly different question: it cannot be emphasised enough how important it is to answer the question being asked. This was by far the most common reason for essays being marked down.

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

Issues also arose with question 5a on nationalism. This was a popular question (answered by over a third of the candidates), but it was also the question upon which the most candidates came unstuck, partly through, once again, a failure to address all elements of the question, and partly through a misinterpretation of the quotation.

### Paper 4: Introduction to Music Analysis

| No of students taking paper | 1    | II.1  | II.2  | III | Pass | Fail |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|
| 67                          | 6    | 41    | 20    |     |      |      |
| Percentage                  | 8.95 | 61.19 | 29.85 |     |      |      |

#### Marker 1:

In Question 1, candidates preferred to analyse the Fugue rather than the Prelude. In the case of the former, too few noted the disparity between the time signature and the proposed French Overture 'topic'; and many answers failed to achieve a good balance between consideration of form *and* expression. There were many good formal accounts of the fugue, though some aspects got short shrift: the closural character of the head-motive (compare the final cadence of the Prelude!), for example, and the fact that the first episode employs the rigorous invertible counterpoint that the exposition(s) eschew.

Question 2: many candidates seemed unfamiliar with the notion of sonata form without development, and struggled to explain the formal structure of the movement. There were some fine and sensitive accounts of the metrical issues present almost from the outset. Very few candidates grasped the relationship of the final bar to bar 1, beat 3, first quaver.

#### Marker 2:

##### Section A: Set work (Prelude & Fugue in F#, WTC II)

More than half the candidates chose to answer the first question, and opted for the fugue. This produced a wide range of answers, with the best managing to identify notable features of the materials, relate these to the structural handling and expressive resources of the fugue, and additionally describe and account for instances of large-scale symmetry and reworking of materials. As elsewhere in the paper, the weaker answers opted for overly descriptive, bar-by-bar accounts, or seemed unable to progress beyond the identification of the features of the work that mark it out as a fugue. A few candidates mistakenly referred to a tonal answer. Question 1 in relation to the prelude was also a popular choice, though a number of candidates tied themselves in knots attempting to make the work fit a standard binary or even sonata form reading; the best answers recognised the ritornello-like recurring materials and used these in dialogue with more generalised tonal procedures to account for the form of the piece. Many candidates answering question 1 in relation to either the prelude or the fugue neglected the side of the question referring to expression, or treated it only superficially.

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

Both question 2 and question 3 were designed to expose candidates' knowledge of the stylistic and idiomatic backgrounds to Bach's works. Question 3 yielded some of the stronger answers, though not all seemed to understand what was meant by 'character fugue'; answers to question 2 were similarly held back if candidates struggled to identify any of the other 'styles and manners' in evidence alongside the obvious nods towards the French Overture. In cases where the resulting essays fell back heavily on matters of structure, the candidates in question would have been better off selecting question 1.

### Section B: Unseen (Mozart, K. 458, slow movement)

An alarmingly high number of candidates seemed unfamiliar with the likely structural procedures of a late eighteenth-century slow movement, either failing to identify this as a sonata-form movement without development ('slow-movement sonata form', or in Hepokoski & Darcy's terminology, 'Type 1' sonata) or proposing such a reading only to reject it for spurious reasons later on. Equally worrying was the inability of many candidates to parse the exposition convincingly according to its thematic and functional elements; many candidates mistook the beginning of the transition for a second subject, and then tied themselves in knots trying to explain the unusual tonal qualities of this structure, rather than looking instead for a more conventional layout. These weaknesses affected answers to all three questions, but were particularly obvious in question 1. The reference to sophisticated phraseology in question 2 polarised respondents, from those who proposed unlikely phrasing seemingly without any reference to the cadence patterns of the music, to the one or two candidates who not only correctly described the unusual phrase structure of both the opening and the secondary materials, but were also able to explain its origins and offer coherent remarks about its implications for Mozart's procedure later in the movement (especially at the recapitulation and the beginning of the coda). Many candidates seemed unsure how to define a phrase, and few possessed adequate specialist terminology with which to describe its motivic, metrical and cadential features. Question 3 was perhaps surprisingly popular, with some answers lapsing into banal description; the most successful answers were those which engaged directly with the terms of the question, either to offer counter-observations or more generally to argue for a more specific and technically oriented mode of analysis.

## Paper 5: Tonal Skills I

### **General comments**

As ever, proofreading could have been better: missing accidentals were rife. A large number of the takeaway string quartets misspelled accidentals in a way that suggested some confusion of such theoretical staples as diminished sevenths and augmented sixths. A worrying number of exam scripts included swathes of blank bars, which suggests that more attention needs to be given by candidates to exam strategy. A few especially frustrating answers wasted time on notating repeated semiquaver patterns only to find that they had run out of time to complete the task.

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

### Counterpoint Exam

| No of students taking paper | 1*       | 1         | II.1      | II.2      | III      | Pass     | Fail     |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                             | 0        | 15        | 32        | 15        | 4        | 0        | 0        |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>0</i> | <i>23</i> | <i>48</i> | <i>23</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>0</i> | <i>0</i> |

#### Marker 1:

**(Palestrina & Song)** Several candidates were unable to complete one or both of these questions, so timed practice is important. In the song, candidates should remember that a kind of short-hand is acceptable if time is running out, so that the examiners can give credit to a sketched out bass line with chord indications. Some candidates failed to vary the piano texture. In the Palestrina the main weaknesses were errors of dissonance and parallel 5ths and 8ves; candidates should remember that the diminished triad should only be used in 1<sup>st</sup> inversion.

#### Marker 2:

The overall quality of scripts in this discipline was, in general, very similar to the previous year, and it was pleasing to see that amongst those students who gained a 2.1 or above, the proportion of those who achieved first-class marks were retained. The majority of candidates succeeded in finding points of imitation and in writing reasonably sound counterpoint, fluent melodic lines and appropriate setting of text; amongst these were some more individual and stylistically confident examples. The principle concerns with numerous scripts remain similar to those of previous years, namely the regular appearance of serious grammatical errors, inappropriate treatment of dissonance and problematic harmonic/modal progressions. A significant number of papers also utilised the diminished triad in either root or second-inversion, rather than the appropriate first-inversion. Some papers also contained rather weak conclusions to musical lines, but it was good to see that this issue and that of inappropriate note-lengths occurred rather less than has been the case in recent years. Unfortunately, the final cadence once again proved a challenge for a number of candidates, despite this issue having been raised several times during the lecture course and revision sessions. Likewise, quite a few scripts revealed significant issues in using the Tenor clef (C4).

### Harmony Exam

| No of students taking paper | 1         | II.1      | II.2      | III      | Pass     | Fail     |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                             | 12        | 39        | 14        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>18</i> | <i>59</i> | <i>21</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>0</i> | <i>0</i> |

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

The song by Weber selected for the exam presented candidates with a relatively straightforward tonal structure with no wildly chromatic or remote modulations to deal with. It was striking, therefore, that a considerable number of answers failed to identify the cadence in the mediant (b.8-9), attempting instead to harmonise it in the dominant or even the tonic. Another issue that caused problems for some was the quantity of dissonant melodic decoration in the vocal part: many shied away from treating melodic notes as accented dissonances such as appoggiaturas (despite the precedent of the opening bars in which the full texture was supplied) or inferred a modulatory implication from chromatic decoration.

### *Fugue takeaway paper*

| No of students taking paper | 1         | II.1      | II.2      | III      | Pass     | Fail     |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                             | 21        | 37        | 8         | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>32</i> | <i>56</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>0</i> | <i>0</i> | <i>0</i> |

**Marker 1:**  
**(Quartet/Variations/Ground bass & Fugal exposition).** The quartet question was answered well by many, though the key confused some candidates. The best continuations showed the candidates developing the opening material well and presenting a good balance of keys overall, as well as good sense of style. Most candidates worked hard to vary the harmony in the Variations and Ground Bass, though in the former, candidates should remember that any particular pattern needs to be introduced with care to produce elegant and satisfying movement, and in the latter, they should not forget to check the part-writing for unwanted parallels. The fugal expositions were on the whole well handled, though some candidates presented a rather minimal solution whilst others wrote much more than was needed. Credit is given for stylish codetta writing, and candidates should remember that normally new voices should enter in an adjacent part to those already entered.

**Marker 2:**  
Once again, this question revealed some very pleasing results from a good number of students and amongst these were some particularly successful attempts to write stylish, expressive and natural contrapuntal lines. Indeed, it was good to see yet further improvement in the overall standard this year, including another increase in the number of first-class marks awarded compared to the previous year and the disappearance of any third-class marks. The majority of scripts demonstrated a sound understanding of writing correct tonal answers, though in a few cases the writing of invertible counter-subjects remained more challenging. Consecutive fifths/octaves and inappropriate 6/4 chords were evident in a number of scripts, despite much emphasis being placed on their avoidance in the lecture course. Students are, once again, strongly advised to consider these grammatical issues carefully at the point of writing, and also to check their work thoroughly, most particularly in the context of this examination for which plentiful time is allowed.

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

### Paper 6: Tonal Skills II

#### *Aural Skills*

| No of students taking paper | 1            | II.1        | II.2         | III          | Pass        | Fail         |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 66                          | 8            | 13          | 18           | 16           | 4           | 7            |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>12.12</i> | <i>19.7</i> | <i>27.27</i> | <i>24.24</i> | <i>6.06</i> | <i>10.61</i> |

#### **Marker 1:**

The overall marks demonstrate a lower standard deviation than in most recent years, with fewer outstanding results (both at the top and bottom). A lower number of first-class results was compensated by a higher overall number of passes.

The first two questions were answered well, with a high number of students (14 in each question) gaining over 80 here. As usual, the worst-answered parts of the exam were the vocal polyphony (question 3) and the mistake-spotting (question 5). This is despite the Gombert excerpt in question 3 being deemed an easier exercise than those set in previous years. Many candidates did not even attempt anything in the altus and tenor parts (which combined were worth more than half the marks in this question). This can be put down to C clefs not being learnt as well as they should be.

In general, there was nowhere near enough attention to detail demonstrated. For example, a total of only 13 candidates out of 66 were able to notate correctly the final bar of question 2 (keyboard counterpoint). An entire third of candidates left completely blank the first two bars in the cantus part in question 3, despite these being two bars of rests. Some were also unable to identify the cantus entry as being a 'real answer' to the altus (printed). A final example, and most disappointing of all, is that just eight candidates correctly identified that all four instruments were playing octave E flats at the end of question 4 (quartet), although of these eight, only one managed to notate the correct number of beats and rests in the bar. Although none of these examples hold a great number of marks, the cumulative effect of candidates losing these marks is noticeable in the statistics.



## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

### *Practical Skills*

| No of students taking paper | 1          | II.1       | II.2       | III       | Pass      | Fail      |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 66                          | 7          | 39         | 17         | 3         | 0         | 0         |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>11%</i> | <i>59%</i> | <i>26%</i> | <i>4%</i> | <i>0%</i> | <i>0%</i> |

#### **Marker 1:**

A number of candidates displayed a creditable grasp of the basic skills of transposition, score-reading and figured-bass, although the vast majority failed to maintain a basic pulse in the transposition and score-reading exercises, regardless of the tempo they set for themselves at the outset. Practising with a metronome would aid candidates in their preparation throughout the year. The harmonisation exercise, which was challenging, yielded few realisations that went beyond basic diatonic chords in root position and opportunities for chromaticism were largely missed by all but the most advanced candidates. Candidates could have given greater consideration to the use of inversions and exercised more care over the shape of the bass line. A number of candidates played the piano excessively loudly, sometimes drowning out the examiner playing the melody in the figured-bass exercise.

#### **Marker 2:**

A greater proportion of candidates scored in the 2.i and 2.ii categories compared to previous years, with fewer outliers at either extreme. As in the past, it was regrettable that many candidates neglected very basic things such as key signatures and note values, and it was also common for candidates to set speeds that were either very slow or unrealistically fast; the marks are awarded on the basis of an all-round musical performance as well as merely getting the notes right. In the figured bass and harmonisation tests, more attention to voice-leading and decoration of inner parts would be welcome from the more able candidates; the few who displayed this were rewarded. Candidates opting for a solo instrument in the figured bass test should be sure to give this test the same harmonic diligence as would be expected from a keyboard student. Candidates opting for the jazz option should immerse themselves in recordings in order to better grasp the 'feel' of the genre.

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2016

### *Harmony takeaway paper*

| No of students taking paper | 1         | II.1      | II.2     | III      | Pass     | Fail     |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                             | 16        | 46        | 4        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| <i>Percentage</i>           | <i>24</i> | <i>70</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>0</i> | <i>0</i> | <i>0</i> |

There was a particularly uneven spread of answers this year: Ground bass – 13; Piano Variations – 7; String Quartet – 46. There was some excellent work in both the ground bass and string quartet categories, but, unusually, none of the piano variations received a first class mark this year.

#### Ground Bass Variations

Most candidates approached this task with good, stylistically aware intentions regarding rhythmic activity and textural interest. Weaker answers struggled to control the part writing or lost track of a sense of the overall musical direction, often as a result of a lack of cadential articulation. The best demonstrated an ability to plan an effective range of reharmonisations and to generate a cumulative effect over the whole set.

#### Piano Variations

The stronger of these made use of some good textural ideas, which showed familiarity with the piano writing of Mozart, Beethoven and/or Schubert and established a clear character and topical focus for each variation. Weaker answers failed to achieve much textural interest or contrast of character between variations, and some migrated between late-18<sup>th</sup> century and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century styles, occasionally within the same variation. Several answers came unstuck in adapting the harmonic structure of the theme in the minor-mode variation.

#### String Quartet

Many of these demonstrated stylistic awareness, textural imagination and a resourceful approach to thematic development. Generally, tonal structure was appropriately handled, although a few were either overambitious in the rate and remoteness of modulation, while rather more erred on the side of caution, becoming stuck on the tonic or dominant. A considerable number of answers extended the A section to 16 bars, which sometimes (although by no means universally) limited the scope for development of material in the B section. Candidates should be aware that a large quantity of literal or near repetition of material, while not necessarily unstylistic, limits how much they can 'show off' what they can do.