

MUSIC TRIPOS PART II EXAMINER REPORTS 2016

Paper 1: Analysis Portfolio

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
20	6	7	6	1	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>35%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>5%</i>		

Marker 1:

There was, as usual, a relatively wide spread of marks on this paper, even if the proportion of firsts was high. The range of topics and analytical approaches were also commendably broad. The best portfolios exhibited a combination of well-chosen topics, firm theoretical foundations, convincing and insightful in-depth analytical investigations and meticulous presentation. Those that failed to achieve at least a 2.1 lacked theoretical and analytical rigour.

Marker 2:

The new submission arrangements in force this year seem to have helped candidates to avoid the pitfall of producing one polished essay and a second, less refined one. As usual, there was a wide range in content (though no repertoire earlier than Handel and Scarlatti was considered) and quality. Candidates are reminded that much hangs on the initial framing and development of projects; careful attention to the Marking Criteria for this paper is recommended.

Paper 2: Portfolio of Compositions

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
13	4	7	2	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>15%</i>			

Marker 1:

This was a slightly disappointing set of portfolios, with some displaying a rather tenuous grasp of what constitutes contemporary compositional thinking. Presentation was generally decent, with some excellent examples, and all the submitted CDs worked this year (for the first time ever). However, there were a number of outstanding submissions which contained real contributions to the musical repertoire.

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Paper 3: Notation and Source Studies Portfolio

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	4	5	1			
<i>Percentage</i>	40%	50%	10%			

Marker 1:

Some really excellent work here, including two of the best portfolios I've ever marked. Several of the best were not in the field of Renaissance and Medieval music, and it is clear that those students do best who come to the course with a subject already formulated about which they are passionate. This is a task which rewards close, enthusiastic engagement.

Marker 2:

There were some absolutely outstanding portfolios submissions this year: some candidates had found ways to use this paper in highly individual ways, with an enormous variety of topics from medieval to 20th century repertoires, and from aesthetic issues to questions of instrumentation. In allowing for this range, it seems that the format of the paper is working well. There is no advice necessary which is specific to this paper: good preparation and original work (whether in transcription or interpretation) always stands out.

Paper 4: Advanced Performance

Option A: Recitals

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
18	9	8	1			
<i>Percentage</i>	50	44	6			

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Marker 1:

The overall standard of recitals and presentation was excellent with some performances being outstanding.

Option B: Choral performance

Marker 1:

There were many skilled singers in this cohort: fine voices, and the ability to adapt their approach to the diverse requirements of the exam. A couple of candidates were singing in awkward parts of their range, and it should be stressed that a high mark results from the *combination* of good ensemble musicianship and vocal control.

Marker 2:

The standard was generally high and students had prepared well. Weaker plainsong performances were rushed, monorhythmic or lacking in inflection: since this test starts the exam, candidates are reminded that to perform well requires a degree of familiarity with the notation that can only come from frequent, regular practice and performance. The notation exercise contained the widest variability of quality: the better candidates had a solid understanding of the notational conventions and were able to identify and correct any errors quickly.

The best performers in the prepared pieces (Byrd and Ben Parry) clearly knew the whole score well and were able to sing predominantly from memory, enabling them to engage throughout with the conductor and other consort singers; weaker candidates suffered from 'tunnel vision', not perceiving how their part related to the others (particularly in the identification of dissonant notes) and having to refer to their copies too much. Sight-reading was generally excellent, the better candidates managing to look up and engage with the other performers and to inflect their lines.

Candidates are reminded that they are expected to bring their own marked-up copies of their editions to the exam, including points to mention to the other consort singers before the first sing-through. The best candidates showed confidence in the follow-up to the first sing-through, with clear ideas about what had worked, what had not, and an openness to the ideas of the other singers.

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Paper 5: Dissertation

Marker 1:

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	5	5	2			
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>41.7</i>	<i>41.7</i>	<i>16.7</i>			

Some outstanding work here, including an extremely impressive piece on the National Curriculum. Unlike in previous years, the sociological/observational studies were this year much more grounded in literature and were consequently more focused.

Paper 6: Advanced Tonal Skills

No of students taking paper		II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	7	12				
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>63</i>				

Marker 1:

In general, the portfolio submissions this year were very strong, making for enjoyable reading/listening. The submissions ranged right across the historical gamut, with strong examples in most categories. The most successful projects tended also to be the most ambitious: a vertiginously virtuosic '4th piano sonata' in Chopin's late style, and a Byrd mass written as though Mary Queen of Scots had become Queen of England, allowing Byrd to write masses in strong contrast to his existing more sober settings. In contrast, portfolios taking a more generic approach (for instance 'in a mid to late C19th German style', or 'inspired by composers w, x, y and z') tended to be less convincing, particularly when stylistic references were not integrated. As last year, the

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importance of the explanatory note was at times underestimated: those notes lacking detail on stylistic aspects and musical models tended to accompany the less successful portfolios.

In the vast majority of cases, candidate's marks were lower for the exam component, preventing first-class portfolios from achieving overall firsts in a number of cases. While there were some strong answers in both the song and canon categories, in general the standard was somewhat lacklustre, suggesting that candidates could usefully devote more time to canon/song accompaniment practice during the year. The best canons had a strong sense of harmonic direction along with clear phrase structures delineated by rests or various kinds of cadence. A number of less successful canons meandered aimlessly, or got bogged down by overcomplicated semiquaver-filled part writing. The best song accompaniments took account of the composer's nationality, rather than simply writing 'generic' late C19th harmony.

Paper 7: Fugue

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
7	1	4	2	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Marker 1: MWE

The total number of candidates this year was relatively small and, given this, I was hoping for a high proportion of strong answers. As it turned out, the scripts as a whole were quite mixed, and though we awarded a relatively high percentage of firsts, there were no real stand-out answers.

Between them, the candidates attempted three of the five subjects on offer. No surprise perhaps that everyone avoided the tonally ambiguous subject by Amy Beach; however, it was disappointing that no-one attempted the Ambroise Thomas subject, and that only one student chose the subject by Gedalge. These, strikingly, were the two modulating subjects, so I was left wondering whether avoiding them was linked to a fear of choosing the wrong answer. Perhaps this topic, which is routinely addressed in Part IA lectures, might be revisited in later years. (Perhaps it was!)

It was also notable that every one of the candidates wrote for keyboard (and, in every case but one, in four voices). This was a shame as this particular format led to several rather clunky, harmonically based approaches, with some loss of the attention to lines that might have been resulted from an open-score format.

There were some attempts to 'dramatise' the conclusion, but not everyone seemed comfortable with handling pedal-points (especially in the minor) –

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something that could obviously be addressed quite easily in supervisions. Another recurrent feature was the use of very predictable episodic material. Candidates should spend more time studying the 'free' material in Book 2 of the 48. Here, we can see tireless efforts by Bach to avoid the routine.

Marker 2:

While most fugues showed a good degree of forethought, planning and overall architecture, some highly competent fugues failed to make use of extremes of register or variation of texture, or included entries that were truly 'redundant' either because they stated the theme in the same voice at the same pitch as a previous entry, or because, in for example a second thematic statement in a pair of middle entries, they brought nothing new to the fugue, but simply repeated exposition material transposed to the major/minor mode; in the latter case, candidates should consider reharmonising the subject (for the second entry at the very least). The percentage of episodic material in some fugues was far too low, indicating an overreliance on the fugue subject for structure and continuity. The weaker fugues displayed carelessness of notation (missing accidentals and key signatures) and poor voice leading and harmony.

Not a single candidate wrote in open score (all chose to write for keyboard): students are encouraged to write in open score during the year, since it can reveal weaknesses in part-writing and planning. Candidates also appeared to avoid the modulating subjects, presumably uncertain over the 'correct' answer: this issue should be tackled early on in the year with help from supervisors, so that choice is not limited in the exam.

Paper 8: Advanced Keyboard Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
9	2	7				
<i>Percentage</i>	22	78				

Marker 1:

Prepared pieces. In the figured bass, several candidates failed to move quickly enough with the singer in the recitative. Candidates should remember to prepare this with someone (or themselves) singing the voice part. The aria was on the whole better performed, though the rapid left-hand passage was rarely well executed. The piano part of the song presented several pianistic challenges and unfortunately few candidates seem at home with these, suggesting that not many were familiar with playing late Romantic piano music.

Unprepared tests. The weaker performances were either too slow or too inaccurate. The gaps in the melody for Harmonisation were often filled in well, but in the comparatively straightforward Orchestral score some unfortunately missed the particular challenge of the Horn parts on the final page. In the transposition test several missed the augmented second in the melody line, or were fooled by the cautionary accidentals.

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Marker 2:

Quite a mixed performance overall. At the top end, there were some extremely good tests though, as one might expect, no-one managed to maintain a totally consistent performance in both prepared and unprepared parts of the paper. In the case of the former, there were some very polished performances, though clearly not everyone had thought carefully enough about what was required. Several attempted to realise the French Baroque cantate – which featured a text about furious monsters and terrible dangers – on a single 8' stop; this was an effect roughly equivalent to playing a barn-storming piano concerto with *una corda* depressed throughout. In similar vein, some dynamics and speed markings in the Alma Mahler song were simply ignored, and the overall character of the music was occasionally misrepresented.

In the harmonisation test, it was remarkable how many played versions of the melody that were incorrect in pitch or rhythm; this surely has to be an absolute priority. When reading C clefs, candidates should aim to find a realistic tempo, one at which the extract could be sung, but not so fast as to be unmanageable. Of the unseens, orchestration was perhaps handled most confidently this year, though some were flummoxed by horns in E – actually, one of the easiest horn crooks, as it can be read as a bass clef (with appropriate adjustments to accidentals).

Paper 9: Parisian Polyphony

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
14	5	8	1	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	36	57		7		

Marker 1:

There was a very uneven quality of answers to the transcription questions across the paper, with one question being done very well, and another not well at all: this is something we shall have to address in the lectures and supervisions. The essays were uniformly impressive.

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Paper 10: Constructing the 'Cantata', from Schütz to J.S.Bach

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
21	5	15	1			
<i>Percentage</i>	24	71	5			

Marker 1:

The best answers showed clear evidence of wide reading and listening and answered the question with relevant detail. Some were let down by failing to include certain lines of argument or bodies of evidence. For example, in the definitions question (1), the writings of both Walther and Mattheson ideally needed to be taken into account, as well the problem of the controversy about secular idioms in church. Similarly, regarding Bach performance, a clear explanation of Bach's description of his *first* choir is essential. However, many answers addressed the questions well and showed a good understanding of how Lutheran church music developed in this period from the various different angles covered by the course.

Marker 2:

On the whole this paper was very well handled: those who were awarded 1sts had read beyond the main lecture course material and/or were able to produce and handle new arguments.

Paper 11: Beethoven: The Late String Quartets

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
19	7	10	2			
<i>Percentage</i>	36.84	52.63	10.52			

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Marker 1:

This was a strong set of scripts on the whole. The best answers, unsurprisingly, married a clear sense of the requirements of the question with a broad knowledge base and command of specific reference. Those brave souls attempting the Adorno questions seemed sometimes not to grasp the full import of the quotations around which the questions were framed. Perhaps most disappointingly answered (and attracting the fewest answers) was Question 6 (b). While questions of performance practice were of course relevant here, candidates were also expected to consider the relevance of manuscript and printed sources, as well as issues of reception.

Paper 12: *Boris Godunov* and Its Contexts

Marker 1:

In general, this was a very strong set of answers, which showed a detailed engagement with both opera and relevant secondary literature. In terms of individual questions, answers to q.1 sometimes struggled to define the idea of 'aria time'; there were some excellent responses to q.2; the consideration of *Pelléas* in q.4 was on various occasions perfunctory; not many people answered q.5a, but a lot of answers to q.5b were good, and various students seemed to enjoy tussling with Stasov in q.6.

Paper 13: The Shadow of Sibelius

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
26	6	20	0	0	0	0
Percentage	23.1%	76.9%				

Marker 1:

This paper was well-managed by all the candidates in the cohort, and there were no poor results. The very best answers showed an engagement with the topics of the course, a good grasp of the many factors through which Sibelius has become a significant influence in more recent musical developments, and an ability to think beyond the confines of the lectures. A number of candidates mentioned a wide range of later composers and their musical thinking that revealed a considerable amount of personal research and diligence. Even the weaker responses showed a good level of understanding of the topics involved, though perhaps were less willing to extend this in more individual ways.

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Marker 2:

There were several impressive responses in this set of exam papers and the overall standard was high. In general, the questions which were answered best were those in Section A (i.e. the question on Sibelius in the context of Finnish nationalism and those centred on Sibelius' own music). The Section B questions (those on Sibelius' legacy) fared less well: answers seemed either to rely on a very small number of sources, or to make spurious claims linking works which belong to entirely different eras and aesthetics. It is very difficult to argue convincingly a direct influence in such cases. One key to answering such questions is a very clear sense of the historical and cultural context into which pieces are written, so that a shrewder assessment of where and how works actually influence one another can be made.

Paper 14: North Indian Classical Music

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
13	5	8				
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>38.5</i>	<i>61.5</i>				

Marker 1:

I enjoyed reading both the transcription and analysis projects and also the exam scripts for this paper. These demonstrated that the students on the course had engaged thoughtfully with North Indian classical music and with issues in current ethnomusicological scholarship.

In the strongest transcription and analysis projects, students were able to use their analyses to contribute usefully to ongoing scholarly debates. The weaker projects were not situated fully in terms of a range of secondary literature, suggesting limited reading. Some of the analytical essays were very poorly structured, with the result that they did not articulate a clear, overall argument.

The exam papers were strong overall. Most of the essays were well-structured and well-grounded in relevant reading. In many cases, however, these essays simply reproduced arguments from the secondary literature; only a few students were able to organise their thoughts into the kinds of sophisticated, original arguments needed to achieve the highest marks.

Marker 2:

I was generally pleased with the quality of these exam papers. There were some sophisticated answers that made good use of the literature, as well as expanding beyond the reading list. However, some papers were limited in their engagement with scholarship and/or did not fully address the question. In

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future, I would also encourage students to consider their handwriting style, as some papers were at a disadvantage due to poor legibility. I would also recommend that students think carefully about the structure of their answers, making sure to spend 5-10mins on planning each answer before writing.

Paper 15: Latin American Music and the Politics of Representation

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
22	4	11	7	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>32%</i>			

Marker 1 & 2:

Overall competent, although many papers did not adequately engage with questions. General reliance on standard examples; the best answers showed evidence of original thought and sustained engagement with theory, however.

Paper 16: The Music Industry in the Digital Age

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
18	7	8	3			
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>44%</i>	<i>16%</i>			

Marker 1:

Impressive work on the whole, exposing critical engagement with the literature and its application to a wealth of interesting examples. The best papers demonstrated skilful use of the literature, mastery of key concepts and an ability to distil complex ideas into a tight argument threaded through the essay. The least successful papers betrayed a lack of familiarity with the literature, confused concepts and often lacked clarity in their argumentation. Papers in the II.1 range exhibited characteristics of both extremes. In particular, whilst many papers displayed extensive reading, all too often description took the place of interpretation.

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Essays were concentrated in the extremes with a third of the submissions attaining first class marks, but nearly half falling into the II.2 range. The best essays displayed good reading habits in that they exhibited confident use of the literature, good referencing routines and a clear, structured writing style. Arguments in this range were clearly set out from the start and carried out through the essay, supported by relevant literature. Descriptive and summative accounts of news media literature were not sufficient: a critical engagement with news items was essential to attaining good marks.

Paper 17: Exploring Music Psychology

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	7	15	3	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>						

Marker 1:

There was quite a range of types of responses. The best essays engage fully with the questions, were well structured throughout, provided discussion of a range of theories or empirical studies where relevant, discussed specific, referenced literature and had a clear argument running throughout. Almost all the answers showed deep commitment to the applied aspects of the subject, driving a high level of engagement with the research literature.