

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IA: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Paper 1: Music and Musicology Today

Written examination

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
58	4	46	8	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>6.9</i>	<i>79.3</i>	<i>13.8</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Altogether a decent set of scripts. On the upper end, some well-written, well-informed answers, showing good reasoning and occasional originality.

Otherwise, there was a good dose of usual (too usual) problems: naïve or inconsequential thought; awkwardness in expression (occasionally asyntactic or bordering on the incoherent); some *unacceptably* poor handwriting; and answers that felt like the recycling of pre-prepared material, or at least did not focus on what was explicitly asked in the questions.

Some more specific problems fall in the following main categories:

- a) A tendency to report acritically – in spite of discussion in lectures and supervisions – the ‘lore’ from much recent musicological literature (notably, that all musicology was ‘positivistic’ before the 1980s, and only became critical through the ‘New Musicology’).
- b) A surprising confusion about basic terms: several candidates equated ‘composer’s intentions’ and ‘historically informed performance’; several others equated the opposition ‘externalism’ / ‘internalism’ with the opposition ‘positivism’ / ‘criticism’.
- c) Some answers were too generic: they showed little or no reference to scholarly literature in the field of the question, and in the worst cases could have been improvised by anyone in music who had not taken the course, or studied and discussed the relevant literature.

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(i) Performance

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
27	5	15	7	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

There was a very good standard of recitals this year with some exceptional performances.

(ii) Composition

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
23	4	15	4			
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>17</i>			

The general standard was good this year, with several imaginative pieces which showed real initiative. As always, those works which demonstrated adventurousness and a willingness to take risks proved the most rewarding, even if they did not always completely succeed in what they were attempting.

One felt that almost all of the composers would have benefitted from a greater awareness of current and recent trends in new music, and students are strongly encouraged to listen critically to as much (particularly new) music as possible to help inform their own practice.

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(iii) Extended Essay

No of students taking paper	I	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
8	1	5	2	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>12.5</i>	<i>62.5</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

There was some fine work, decently written. And the submissions clearly showed all candidates' personal engagement with the chosen topics.

Recurring problems were: passages of opaque writing or unfocussed argument; editorial problems (missing or wrong references to page or bar numbers; missing or messy bibliographical references, and the like); cases of over-interpretation of (or ungrounded claims about) the sources, simply in order to insist on the candidate's main point; and some technical inaccuracies in the content.

At least one essay contained passages of prose-like argument in the appendix rather in the main text, where it belongs.

Paper 2: Music History 1

Medieval

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	11	33	12	1		
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>19.3</i>	<i>57.9</i>	<i>21.1</i>	<i>1.7</i>		

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This was a good set of scripts on the whole. It was particularly pleasing to see such a large percentage of the cohort (42 out of 57 or 74%) opting for two Medieval questions, although this may have been due to the combination of topics in the Renaissance portion of the paper. At the top end of the cohort, there were some remarkably informed and creative answers. Within the middle, there was plenty of evidence of good supervision and a receptive attitude to an unfamiliar area for almost all. Those candidates at the lower end showed evidence of rushed preparation. Reflections on specific questions follow below, from which the main points are: (i) candidates should beware of reproducing supervision essays, however good those were; (ii) memorizing lecture slides is no substitute for creating your own revision notes; (iii) in a historical paper, accuracy of reference is highly valued.

The most creative answers were to Question 1, which covered such a wide historical scope that those candidates who took a topic-based approach, albeit informed by key historical developments, fared the best. Question 2a on transmission was taken by many but evidently wrong-footed some who had prepared answers on Gregory, Rome or the Frankish contribution in general. Those who were able to sift the historical evidence to respond to the question about cantors in particular did well, even if this required thinking in different ways in the examination. Those who reproduced lecture slides without showing any evidence of further engagement with the topic or set reading inevitably fared poorly. Question 2b was tackled only by one candidate who did well. It was evident from other answers that some students had prepared essays on words and music in chant – beware: not all topics studied will appear in the exam! Question 3 was also popular, perhaps due to some coherent surveys in the secondary literature. With this said, surprisingly few candidates made full use of practical examples discussed in the lectures. Those who were able accurately to refer to specific cases were well rewarded. Question 4 on Machaut's Mass seems to have been well received as an extension to previous versions of this course. The question produced some very well informed answers and a few excellent surveys of historical and musical evidence. Attempts to skew the question towards 'cyclicality' were not well regarded.

Renaissance

A broad spread of marks, though a disappointing number of first class answers. I suspect candidates were banking on separate Byrd and Palestrina essays, despite the model of last year's paper. In both the Byrd/Palestrina question and the Josquin question, candidates tended to revert to stylistic assessments of a small number of works, rather than engage with the historiographical issues.

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Paper 3: Music History 2

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
58	11	38	8	1		
Percentage	19	65	14	2		

Marker 1:

In general, this was a pleasing set of scripts that demonstrated a solid grasp of the main themes and issues of the course and an enthusiastic engagement with the set repertoire, and beyond. The spread of answers was fairly uneven: the majority of candidates answered questions 1a, 4, and 6.

Question 4 was by far the most popular question (answered by 64%), but it was also the question that elicited the weakest answers. It was clear that candidates chose this question because they wanted to write about nationalism, but in the majority of cases, they failed to engage with the title quotation; instead, candidates tended to fall back on pre-prepared answers concerned more broadly with issues of musical nationalism. A similar problem occurred with question 3a (answered by only 15%): here the majority of candidates identified this question as an opportunity to trot out rehearsed essays on the *lieder* of Schubert and Schumann, overlooking the actual focus of the question on Schubert's predecessors.

Question 6, the second most popular question, was the most consistently well-answered; pleasingly, students drew on a number of operas that lay outside of the set repertoire, including *Carmen*, *Samson et Dalila*, and *Tosca*. Very few candidates answered question 2 (on the use of comedy in opera), but those who did attempt this question generally did so very well.

Among the scripts there were a number of outstanding essays: these approached the chosen questions in creative, often highly original ways, presenting a clearly structured argument, illustrated with detailed references to selected musical works and their historical contexts.

Marker 2:

As a cohort, the essays were generally well written and a number of the candidates demonstrated an impressive recall of musical examples and independent reading. The best responses showed attention to musical detail, a broad literary and historical knowledge and had a clear argument. There was a particularly pleasing range of examples

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in response to the women in opera question, including a number which examined operas not on the lecture list. The nationalism question was the most popular – attempted by about a third of the cohort – but the most poorly answered. Weak responses tended towards a superficial and descriptive whistle-stop tour approach (a paragraph on Dvorak, a paragraph on Russia, a paragraph on Germany, etc) with no clear argument or sense of focus. In the nationalism responses and in a number of the others, candidates did not always engage with the title or quote, or only hinted at it in passing in the introduction or conclusion. The best answers thought carefully about the wording of the title, engaged with it throughout, and avoided regurgitating supervision essays. The importance of careful planning and practice writing in exam conditions must be stressed, as an unfinished essay – even when it had a promising start – can significantly lower a candidate's overall mark.

Paper 4: Introduction to Music Analysis

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	2	37	18			
Percentage	3.5	64.9	31.5			

Most candidates were able to write two complete and reasonably substantial answers. You are reminded that a successful answer will depend significantly upon a correct understanding of the question: thus, good answers to Question 3 required a proper understanding of the conventions of double fugue. Not all candidates answering this question fully grasped the importance of the new melodic idea entering in bar 28, for example.

Of Questions 4–6 (Haydn, Op. 77 no. 2/iii), Question 5, perhaps unsurprisingly, attracted only a very small number of attempts. There were some ambitious and successful responses to Question 6. Too many answers to Question 4 were badly marred by a failure to understand the formal status of bars 1–22 as a complete, closed unit: analyses claiming that bars 1–8 constitute a ‘theme’ or an ‘exposition’ (even worse, that bars 1–4, or 1–2 might be understood as ‘the theme’) were doomed from the outset.

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Paper 5: Tonal Skills I

Counterpoint Exam

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	10	35	10	2	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>17.5</i>	<i>61.5</i>	<i>17.5</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Marker 1:

The overall quality of scripts in this discipline was fairly similar to last year though, of those candidates who achieved a II.1 or above, there were fewer outstanding examples. 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 which dealt well with the part-crossing evident in the given material. The principle concerns with numerous scripts remain similar to those of previous years, namely the regular appearance of unwanted parallel 5ths/Octaves, inappropriate treatment of dissonance and problematic harmonic/modal progressions. Once again, 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 unconvincing word-setting and/or rather weak conclusions to musical lines. Unfortunately, very few candidates spotted the need for the cadential 'Consonant 4th', despite this stylistic feature 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).

Marker 2:

Many candidates were unable to avoid significant problems of parallel movement and dissonance treatment. The final cadence gave problems yet was completely standard in nature.

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Harmony Exam

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	10	29	18	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>17.5</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>31.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

The paper proved to be quite a challenging one, although all candidates were able to complete some of the accompaniment in a way that demonstrated at least some awareness of basic harmonic progressions. The weakest candidates floundered when required to go much beyond root position triadic harmony and a surprising number of papers failed to correctly identify modulations. In particular, shifts to F# major and, subsequently, F# minor, were missed by many, despite the vocal melody's scalic 5 to 1 descent advertising the implied tonality.

Some essentially sound answers were marred by insufficient attention to voice leading, with arpeggiated figurations sometimes masking implied consecutive fifths and octaves. Others that seemed to correctly interpret the harmonic implications of the vocal line in most ways neglected to supply all the appropriate accidentals in the piano part. Nevertheless, there were some very good completions, the best of which showed a strong command of chromatic harmony, overall pacing and voice leading, as well as subtlety in the interaction of piano and voice.

It was a pity that there were quite a few papers, in which significant parts of the task had been left blank, especially, as, in the majority of such cases, the parts that had been completed were of good quality. This suggests that time management in this examination remains an issue that needs more consideration and, preferably, also some practice in advance. Some candidates had, sensibly, provided verbal, Roman numeral and/or figured bass sketches where they had not been able to notate their answer fully.

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Counterpoint takeaway paper

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	10	37	10	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>17.5</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>17.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Marker 1:

This question revealed some decent expositions from a good number of students and amongst these were some particularly successful attempts to write inventive, stylish and expressive contrapuntal lines. That said, a number of scripts this year demonstrated difficulties with the writing of correct 'tonal' answers and, in cases where a 'real' answer was required, a number of candidates either wrote no link-passage at all, or wrote one which failed to steer the harmony appropriately. For this (and other) reasons, a number of scripts also revealed counter-subjects which were not invertible. It was, however, pleasing to note that whilst unwanted consecutive fifths/octaves and inappropriate 6/4 chords were evident in some scripts, such issues were far less common than in recent years.

Marker 2:

Candidates must think carefully about the probable tempo implied by the subject. In several cases the C-S was too fast so that the theme itself became lost. Tonal alterations were not always successfully carried out, though Inversion was generally well handled. Many scripts contain parallels suggesting that checking is not sufficiently rigorous.

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Paper 6: Tonal Skills II

Aural Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	5	13	14	18	2	5
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>8.8</i>	<i>22.8</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>31.6</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>8.8</i>

The statistics this year correlate with a number of attendance problems reported in all three classes and at the exam technique lecture. Consequently, the distribution of marks is rather bottom-heavy, albeit with not too many outliers. Especially noteworthy is the disappointingly small number of first-class marks compared to previous years.

Despite the number of practice melodies available to do in classes and in past papers throughout the year, the melodies were poorly answered. Compared to 2016, in which 32 people scored 70% or above on this question, just eight did in 2017. Rests were generally ignored, and there were some enharmonic problems (e.g. F natural vs. E sharp in the first melody). The time signature of the second melody seems to have thrown a lot of people, with some apparently not even realising that 8/8 meant eight quavers in a bar.

On the contrary, the two-part counterpoint, being a reasonably straightforward question, was well answered. The vocal counterpoint, though, was its usual disappointment, with most candidates struggling to approach 33%, and no-one scoring high than 63%. Some wasted time writing in the text, despite it being clearly stated on the page that this was not necessary. Although there were attempts to think linearly (and where necessary to make an educated guess of the notes), there was not enough harmonic (vertical) thinking. The same was true of the string quartet question. Some people also insisted on writing double-stoppings, despite the rubric –again – saying this was not necessary. The mistake-spotting was reasonably well answered, although there were plenty of instances of mistakes being spotted and then only partially – or incorrectly – corrected.

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Practical Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	10	29	12	6	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Marker 1:

There were a pleasing number of first and upper second-class results this year, albeit within the usual wide-ranging ability for this paper. It is not simply a question of ability, but the obvious effort which some students had put into improving over the year. There was a good deal of fluency in the figured bass question, even if the chords played were not always realised correctly. There were very few outstanding harmonisations of the melody, with rather too many students reverting to a left-hand triad accompaniment, rather than creating a more even spacing across the hands, and often with a rather lax sense of pulse. The score reading was generally well answered. The transposition was also generally reasonable, although with a surprising number of students having problems transposing accidentals into the new key.

Students choosing to play the exercises under tempo need to ensure that they can do so with no errors (or with very few). Another observation refers to pedalling: some students relied too heavily on the sustain pedal, while others' performances would have benefitted from a small amount now and then. In general, there was far too much hesitation. In a small number of cases, owing to a lack of time, candidates had to be stopped and asked to move onto the next exercise.

Marker 2:

Most students appeared to have put a fair amount of effort into this paper this year, and the majority of performances displayed at least moderate fluency throughout the tests. Candidates must treat the exam as a musical performance and not merely as note-testing exercises; in particular, it was disappointing how many candidates failed to stick to a regular pulse. Marks were also available for musical phrasing, pedalling, tone control etc. The few candidates who peppered their figured bass realisations with idiomatic decorations or countermelodies were generously rewarded, as were candidates who went beyond a mere chord-by-chord harmonisation of the melody. The less capable candidates should make absolutely sure not to neglect the basic notational issues such as key signatures and time signatures: doing so gives an extremely bad impression, as does playing the beginning of the score reading test in the wrong octave. Only two candidates opted for the jazz test; both gave relatively strong performances, and future candidates should bear in mind that this question requires extensive listening to the musical language, phrasing and articulation of jazz masters, especially those in a more bebop or 'straight ahead' vein.

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Harmony takeaway paper

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
57	11	40	5	1	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Ground Bass (12)

The weakest answers adopt a 'sudoku' approach, filling in the vertical harmony to form triads with the bass, but with scant regard to line and texture. The best showed clear stylistic awareness in the use of dissonant decoration, motivic development and imitation, as well as resourcefulness in reinterpreting the bass.

Piano Variations (11)

A few weaker answers failed to vary the given theme very much beyond the addition of a few passing notes and an *Alberti* bass. Several otherwise good answers came unstuck in the *minore* variation, in which the original harmonic structure needed to be adapted to the harmonic structure of the minor mode in order to function successfully. At the top end, there was some wonderfully inventive and accomplished work, which showed clear familiarity with the piano writing of Mozart, Beethoven or Schubert, not least in making full use of the keyboard's compass.

String Quartet (34)

Most candidates coped well with extending the given material and providing a clear overall structure, although a few failed to articulate a binary form through the use of a double bar. Some candidates, who submitted competent work, but at the shorter end of the 24- to 40-bar range, made too much use of repetition, both literal and sequential, to be able to demonstrate sufficient invention and variety for a higher mark. The best answers developed the material in inventive ways, sometimes exploring its imitative potential, and found ways to encompass a range of chromatic harmonic vocabulary.