

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Paper 1: Historical Studies Topics in 20th and 21st Century Music

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
65	8	48	8	1		
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>12.3</i>	<i>73.8</i>	<i>12.3</i>	<i>1.5</i>		

This was a generally satisfactory performance by the vast majority of candidates, but one that revealed a willingness to follow a number of rather routine lines of argument, and a reluctance to consider works and readings outside those provided in the lectures. The main outlook seemed to be to play it safe, but some of the responses that did venture further afield were somewhat at an angle to the actual questions.

Paper 2: Analysis (19th & 20th Century)

In the Set Work section, the vast majority of candidates answered the first question, with many answers clearly relying on the same (often quoted) sources. The relative paucity of original thought thus meant that candidates who had done some of their own work on the piece stood out, which was always to their advantage. The importance of original thought should not be underestimated; other commentators should be critiqued and/or have their thoughts developed further, rather than simply being regurgitated.

In the 'Analyse figures x – xx' question (a style of question which appears very frequently), candidates should note that their analysis must *contextualise* the passage, showing how it relates both to its immediate surrounds and, moreover, to the piece as a whole. Answers dwelling solely on the passage in question, however promising, are at a disadvantage. In the case of the Tippett, although the passage may have been relatively independent in motivic detail, there was an extremely clear link between its mode of construction and the structuring devices employed throughout the piece, something to which few if any of the answers drew attention.

In both the Set Work and Unseen sections, candidates should be wary of dwelling on 'secondary' parameters such as timbre, dynamics and 'general shape' at the expense of motivic, note-to-note, or harmonic relations. In both sections, answers which dwelled extensively on orchestration/timbre or dynamics/shaping were marked by a vagueness of analytical detail which did them no favours. Although all parameters can of course play into a strong analysis, candidates might be encouraged to use so-called 'secondary' parameters to strengthen their argument rather than forming the basis of it.

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Paper 3: Applied Tonal Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
65	8	52	4	1	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

The average overall agreed mark for the paper was 64.9

Style composition (Average mark: 64.8)

Marker 1:

The panoply of possibilities available in this part of the paper seems to ensure that the vast majority of candidates are able to choose to work in a style that reflects their enthusiasms and experience. There were lots of very good motets this year, a likely reflection of candidates' engagement with Renaissance polyphony in choral contexts and a fruitful extension of IA Counterpoint studies. One of the hardest things to do well appears to be writing for the piano, whether in a solo capacity or as part of an ensemble. There were too many banal and mechanical piano sonatas that relied on stereotyped notions of Classical style rather than clear analytical and performing contact with the repertoire.

Marker 2:

The standard was generally high, with a good grasp of style-specific features.

Specific comments:

- Too many melodies suffered from a lack of rhythmic interest and variety (lots of 'plodding' crotchets); in particular, students are encouraged to enliven their vocal melodies with a carefully chosen melisma (responding to the text) - far too many were entire syllabic.
- In some motets and fugues, the texture was too 'thin' for too much of the time: students are encouraged to maintain at least a 3-part texture and avoid reducing the texture to 1 or 2 voices at the start of each new section or imitative point; students are advised to observe the (limited) extent of two-part writing in the examples they study, and how continuity from section to section is achieved through the careful dovetailing of voices.
- In Classical and Romantic chamber works, some students reduced the piano's role to a mere accompaniment, failing to make use of it as a melodic instrument contributing to the musical conversation.

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Fugue (45 candidates. Average mark: 65.9)

Marker 1:

The general standard of submissions in this category was impressive. Most candidates showed a clear grasp of fugal principles and an ability to plan an effective formal design. Some weaker candidates adopted an excessively formulaic approach, especially to episodic writing. A few struggled to maintain good voice leading, while several otherwise fine pieces of work were marred by proof reading lapses. The best work married technical competence and ambition with a secure feeling for style and expressive purpose.

Marker 2:

Encouragingly, the vast majority of fugues demonstrated a good grasp of the essentials, including a balance between thematic and episodic material, consideration of the pitch of entries, their key, and their distribution between the different voices, and an attempt to build towards a climactic ending. Common weaknesses included the use of two-part texture out of convenience rather than by design, clumsy episodes (many with root position, rhythmically-basic, functional bass parts), over-reliance on movement in 3rd/6ths/10ths (rhythmic homophony) and the familiar errors of parallel movement, 6/4 chords and unprepared dissonances. The better fugues displayed inventive exploration of the possibilities presented by the subject, strong harmony and confident use of dissonance, conjunct and purposeful part-writing, and good continuity from one section to another.

Students are reminded that submitted fugues should be bound.

Orchestration (31 candidates. Average mark: 63.5)

Marker 1:

Most candidates demonstrated that they had acquired a good level of competence in techniques of orchestration and in score layout. A few submissions were clearly rushed and ill considered, in some cases leaving out portions of the set material and/or failing to provide sufficient detail. Some candidates had clearly invested a considerable amount of time and imagination in the invention of additional material, although such additions were frequently eccentric and not entirely suited to the character of the music (a feature often reflected in bizarre approaches to the deployment of percussion). The best work showed a concern for balance, blend and weight as well as clarity of purpose in serving the articulation of the musical form.

Marker 2:

Many students produced very fine orchestrations with idiomatic insight and imaginative flair; the best answers combined both. Most regrettably, even in otherwise good orchestrations, many marks were lost to basic errors. The writing for timpani was particularly problematic, with many unrealistic parts and / or simply the wrong notes (most often F natural instead of F sharp).

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Film Score (11 candidates. Average mark: 63.3)

Marker 1:

The standard of submissions for this part of the paper was a little more polarised than for the others. There were several candidates who presented work that seemed rather hastily put together. In such cases, scores were sometimes sloppily constructed and poorly presented, while repetition or empty space (both potentially effective elements) were used in ways that did not relate to the visual narrative. However, at the top end, there was some excellent work, tightly composed and imaginatively responsive to the film. A wide range of styles was explored, sometimes by one candidate in a single score. Whereas in other parts of the paper this might not be recommended, shifts of style were used effectively by several candidates to bring out contrasts or to make ironic comment at various points in the film.

Marker 2:

I was impressed with the generally high level of achievement across the board. The students engaged well with the task and overcame creative and technical obstacles effectively, and sometimes with style and flair.

Paper 4: Introduction to Performance Studies

Overall Results for the Paper

29 students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
Examination (29)	7	19	3	-	-	-
Recital option (25)	8	15	2	-	-	-
Essay option (4)	1	3	-	-	-	-
Overall	8	21	-	-		
<i>Percentage (overall)</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Exam and essay:

The examination results were generally high at 65.34 on average, while the recital marks tended to be even better, with an average of 68.00. The Essay Option results were nearly as strong at 67.50. All of this added up to an overall average for the course of 66.90, which was the highest of any Part IB paper. The two examiners were impressed by most of the examination scripts, and the fact that c.24% of them were in the first-class band is noteworthy. The considerable amount of 'coaching' offered during the review lecture and the last supervision seems to have paid off. There was an uneven distribution of answers across the paper, with 19 responses to question 2; 16 to question 3; 11 to question 6a; 6 to question 6b; and three each to questions 1 and 5. No candidates attempted question 4. In accordance with this was a notable consistency of reference, example and argument for responses to questions 2 and 3. The best essays sought to explain the wider context for a statement, rather than seeking to reconfigure it; they also attempted to investigate and explain the struggle for authority between score-based and practice-based approaches. The weaker responses dealt locally with personal reflection on performance training, which—while interesting and valid as autoethnographic evidence—too often became a substitute for reference to the literature or for structured argument. No candidates demonstrated firm knowledge of the wider arguments from which 'soundbite' quotations were taken (notably Cook 2013 and Taruskin 1995), which was disappointing. That said, the best responses interwove practical and factual knowledge with philosophical insight to create nuanced discussions that were deserving of first-class marks. Overall, it was clear that thorough preparation had taken place. Some of the recitals received stratospheric marks, and just over 50% of them were in the first-class category. This too is remarkable. Overall, then, the performance of students on this course was extremely commendable, with a high proportion (nearly 30%) receiving a first-class mark, and with a very high overall average.

Recitals:

There was a high standard of recitals with some exceptional performances.

Paper 5: Portfolio of Compositions

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
17	3	11	3	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	17.6	64.7	17.6			

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

While this was a decent set of portfolios, there were disappointingly few pieces of the highest quality, both in terms of ambition or in realisation. Many of the weaker submissions were significantly lacking in awareness of contemporary compositional thinking and current technical procedures, which was a failing made all the more worrying given the provision this year of a new course in compositional technique.

Paper 6: Dissertation

There were a large number of dissertations on topics in popular music. Many of these were highly creative in their approach, seeking to engage with the latest literature in the field and showing an awareness of broad developments in popular music studies. A small number fell were less successful in seeking to transpose wholesale approaches developed in other domains (e.g. literary studies) or for specific repertoires of classical music (e.g. motivic analysis). Others fell back on approaches that are now considered outdated (e.g. many of the analytical approaches in Middleton's *Studying Popular Music*) or were simply unaware of recent studies of relevance to their chosen area or approach. Candidates considering topics in popular music would be well advised to devote as much attention to methodology and the history of the discipline as to their chosen object of study.

Paper 7: Notation

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	4	11	4			
Percentage	21	58	21			

A paper which made a clear demarcation between those who could do it and those who couldn't. The marks in the extracts section more or less mirrored those of the transcriptions. No systemic misunderstandings to report.

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Paper 8: Keyboard Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
12	1	8	3			
Percentage	8.3	66.7	25.0			

Marker 1:

There were some fine performances in individual tests, but also quite a lot of evidence of candidates having failed to prepare adequately. The Figured Bass test was particularly striking in this respect. In some cases, it appears students had made no attempt to read through the solo violin line; how else can one explain minor chords played against straightforward arpeggiations of major triads in the melody line? It's true that the score, a reproduction of an eighteenth-century source, had various errors and inconsistencies, but part of the task of preparing for the test – all the students had more than two days for this – is to identify corrupt passages and to draw the necessary conclusions. It was also disappointing that a significant proportion of the candidates seemed not to listen at all to the violinist. This was often compounded by ignorance about how to handle a harpsichord: to accompany a *piano* passage in chamber music with 8' and 4' stops, as a couple of candidates did, was bizarre in the extreme.

In the Harmonisation test candidates should aim for the large picture; too often, every sharpened note was harmonised as a local leading note, while in reality many would have been better treated as chromatic neighbour notes of one sort or another. The priority in the Vocal Score test has to be the maintenance of a steady pace; several students stopped and started rather too often. Transposition produced some strong responses, though there would have been more if those who raced through the test had adopted a steadier pace, while maintaining something of the *vivace* character. Responses to the String Quartet question ranged from extremely halting to extremely musical.

Marker 2:

The harmonisation question produced some imaginative responses, but mostly showed an inability to present largescale harmonic arguments, focusing too much on individual bars and misinterpreting a number of the chromatic melodic notes. Score Reading produced some good answers, but many omitted the viola part and failed to recognise where parts crossed over. (Perhaps most alarmingly many failed to actually play the correct rhythm of this simple extract). Transposition was successfully managed by some, though a number tried to play this too fast and thus missed out much of the detail. The Vocal Score reading should have produced better results all round – many candidates played incorrect rhythms, and accidentals were frequently missed. Only a few candidates brought to life everything that was presented to them on the page. The Figured Bass exercise showed in most candidates a distinct lack of communication between the harpsichord and the violin – this seemed extremely odd considering that the candidates had had plenty of time to familiarise themselves with the score beforehand. Many struggled to find a pulse in the opening phrase of the *Adagio*, the bass line was often figured with far too

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

many notes, figures were often incorrectly realised, and, at worst, a number of candidates charged on ahead irrespective of the tempo set by the violinist, showing a complete inability to listen and perform as a duo.

Paper 9: Introduction to Ethnomusicology

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	3	12	1			
Percentage						

Overall, there were some very good responses to the questions and many exam papers illustrated a solid understanding of the course material. By and large, the papers were well written and structured. We were also happy with the level of critical engagement with the readings and case studies. However, there were instances in which questions were not directly answered. Always make sure to read the question carefully and plan your answer so that it directly addresses the question. Also make sure to refer to theoretical literature where relevant, especially when discussing key theoretical concepts within ethnomusicology and cognate fields.

Paper 10: Elective History 1

(i) Purcell and the English Imagination

The scripts contained a good variety of detail and comment, though the lack of 'right and wrong' on many issues in relation to Purcell caused difficulty for some candidates. Some candidates failed to engage sufficiently with the issues raised, or did not balance their questions carefully. Planning is important so that both halves of a two-part question, for example, are given due weight. In general, discussion of reception history was rather better treated than the tricky issues surrounding the music of Purcell and his contemporaries. Better knowledge of Italian music pre-Corelli would be helpful.

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

(ii) Jewish Liturgical Music, 1800-present

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
2		1	1			
<i>Percentage</i>		50	50			

Overall, students learned the facts of the course well. There was good memory of specific names, functions, and liturgical features. However, much more work remains to be done on the art of structuring and arranging facts into a coherent narrative argument that makes use of cause and effect.

Paper 11: Elective History 2

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
14	3	10	1			
<i>Percentage</i>	21	71	7			

(i) Winterreise

In terms of the compulsory first question, students generally did a good job of discussing poetry and music in interaction. Discussion of the harmonic movement in the cycle was less good, however, with some students identifying keys reached but not using the tonal trajectory of the song as a way to discuss Schubert's reading of Müller's text. Question 2 was popular, and the best answers considered the fact that for the most part we as listeners only experience the external world through the wanderer's own subjective impressions. Those attempting Question 3 tended to stray from the performance practice of Schubert's time into later traditions. Not many people attempted Question 4, and the strongest answers gave a variety of musical examples to back up their points. The risk with both the final pair of questions was that the quotation tended to disappear behind generalities.

Overall, it was a shame that more students did not engage with some of the readings for the course in more detail in the exam. That said, the best answers demonstrated not only a detailed knowledge of score and contexts, but also a degree of creative interpretation in discussing possible meanings of the cycle.

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

(ii) Carmen in Context

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
23	3	18	2			
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>8</i>			

The standard was generally good, and the majority of scripts demonstrated an enthusiastic engagement with the work and the surrounding literature.

There was a fairly even spread of answers across the questions, with the exception of question 5b, which was only answered by 2 candidates. Question 6b, on modern stage and screen adaptations, elicited some of the best answers, with candidates drawing, in some cases with great insight and imagination, on a wide range of examples not touched on in the lectures.

The weaker answers tended to be marred by basic factual errors, poor essay structure, a lack of detailed reference to the opera, and a failure to address the specific question being asked.

Paper 12: Music and Science

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	3	12	2	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

Several answers showed a good grasp of fundamentals in music and science, good use of examples, references and diagrams.

Care to articulate clearly the basic information was sometimes missing (e.g. what is timbre in acoustical terms etc.) that would have been the foundation for more complex ideas in the essays. This meant that the more complex ideas seemed unfounded.

MUSIC TRIPOS PART IB: EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2017

Clarity of writing was, in some cases, not high. Some sentences did not quite make sense and there was odd use of terminology. In addition, unnecessary clauses were common. At a more basic level, some handwriting in the scripts was very difficult (and sometimes impossible) to read. This makes it very hard to mark the papers.

It may be that some of these problems were associated with students being faced with writing essays by hand and under exam conditions; having to plan sentences and paragraphs in advance of putting pen to paper. For both of these reasons, we suggest practicing timed handwritten essays regularly during the year to ensure that students are comfortable writing coherently and legibly in exam conditions.

A few answers, though they included a lot of information, did not answer the question asked.