

## MUSIC TRIPOS PART II EXAMINER REPORTS 2017

### Paper 1: Analysis Portfolio

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
16	4	8	3	1		
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>18.75</i>	<i>6.25</i>		

As the statistics suggest, it is possible to do very well and really quite badly in this paper. The more successful projects tended to be those which proceeded from a clearly defined theoretical basis, and blended theory and analysis in a balanced way. At the top end there was some genuinely original and exciting work; at the other, there was evidence both of poor choice of approach and of rushed completion. It is very important that candidates manage their time well for this paper: a good working plan is to aim to have the first project complete at least in draft by the end of the Christmas Vacation, allowing the Lent Term for sustained work on the second project while thoughts about the first continue to mature. It is also worth reminding candidates that projects, and especially selected repertoire, need to be carefully geared to the relatively short 4000-word limit for each essay.

### Paper 2: Portfolio of Compositions

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
17	9	8				
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>47</i>				

This was a very strong year for Composition at Part II, with an unusually high number of students attaining Firsts. The very best compositions showed a real flair for combining timbres, unusual registration and chord spacing, and linear movement, all in pursuit of a clearly-defined poetic goal. Interestingly, it was the word-settings that stood out the most in this respect.

Against this, there were one or two pieces which were let down by their presentation (e.g. lack of prelims, symbols that were not properly explained or defined, insufficient specification of how electronics was to be handled/set up, etc). However, overall these portfolios were clearly the work of a very talented group of students, and they should be commended for the quality and imagination evident in their work.

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### Paper 3: Notation and Source Studies Portfolio

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

As in previous years, some excellent work on display here – challenging subjects, dealt with in a detailed, analytical fashion. With only one exception, a strong year.

### Paper 4: Advanced Performance

#### *Option A: Recitals*

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
25	15	9	1	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

This was an exceptional year for performance. The technical accomplishment of many recitals was excellent. The examiners heard intelligent, well-informed, well-constructed programmes, often performed with a depth of understanding and mature approaches to the music-making, resulting in convincing, often very moving performances.

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### *Option B: Choral performance*

In order to succeed in this paper, candidates should be able to sing with sensitivity and good technique as well as negotiating the various tests. The quality both of voice and preparation was very varied here; it is not acceptable, for instance, to go wrong in a piece which has been distributed many days in advance.

### Paper 5: Dissertation

With only two exceptions – one outstanding, one dismal - these were solid efforts. One quality which raises a 2.1 to a 1<sup>st</sup> class project is the organisation of material; in several cases, arguments were presented in somewhat arbitrary and incoherent order.

### Paper 6: Advanced Tonal Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
27	10	16	1			
<i>Percentage</i>	37	59	4			

In general the submissions this year were strong across all categories/genres. The largest number happened to be C20th tonal works this year, including two of the three strongest submissions. These were also the most compositionally ambitious, not just parroting their given composer models but convincing us as inventive (and often 'progressive') compositions in their own rights. Several issues arose during marking which students should be aware of: first, that their composition should be of an appropriate length (one piece in particular was at least double the length appropriate to its composer/genre). Second, students should be wary of borrowing specific musical details from their models. Without amounting to plagiarism, one portfolio had too many close resemblances to specific works it was emulating (melodic, rhythmic and harmonic details, often in combination), which resulted in it being marked down. As last year, in the majority of cases candidates' marks were lower for the exam component, preventing first-class portfolios from achieving overall firsts in several cases. While this was not true across the board, this nonetheless suggests that many candidates could usefully devote more time to canon/song accompaniment practice during the year. In the exam, the best songs used 'era-appropriate' harmony, several being a little too Schubertian for this late C19th song; only a few used advanced chromatic harmony confidently and successfully. The best canons made dramatic use of register and occasional rests

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– even in the bass part – to delineate structure and vary texture. Harmonically, the strongest canons found a balance between adventurous and more stable harmony; repetitive use of primary chords tended to result in lacklustre answers.

### Paper 7: Fugue

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
10	3	7	0	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

#### **Marker 1:**

In general, the fugues demonstrated a good balance between thematic and episodic material, competent harmony, and evidence of planning in the pitch of entries, their key, and their distribution between the voices. The better fugues displayed stronger and more conjunct voice leading, episodes that clearly derived from the exposition material, and some contrapuntal ingenuity in the use of inversion and/or stretto. The weaker ones exhibited a lack of skill in the control of modulations (episodes that were either ‘stuck’ harmonically –before a sudden, last minute lurch to the new key – or which spiralled wildly sharp/flat), awkward voice-leading, and difficulty with the 4th voice when writing 4-part harmony (some students resorting to the use of rests). It was pleasing that some students wrote their fugues in open score: the resulting clarity of line and sensitivity to voice-leading that this encourages was evident. Students are reminded that the harmonic rhythm should generally not be faster than the denominator of the time signature, i.e. crotchets in 4/4 or minims in 4/2.

#### **Marker 2:**

Much impressive work was in evidence here, though the problems were a mixture of local grammatical ones and more long-term structural issues. Some fugues were a bit short and did not contain enough middle entries, and others failed to gather any sense of climax at the end with the return of the tonic. It must also be remembered that fugal devices should only be included if they are appropriate to the subject in question and can be made to work successfully. A greater use of false entries (easy in all subjects) would have helped some answers gain in sophistication.

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### Paper 8: Advanced Keyboard Skills

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
9	3	5	1	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>55.6</i>	<i>11.1</i>			

#### **Marker 1:**

Candidates should think carefully about tempo for the 'unseen' tests, so that they choose a speed that will help secure them the most marks. In the song accompaniment there were a number of mistakes even though the music was not particularly difficult, so speed of learning may be an issue here. The Figured Bass was generally well done with some good ornamentation, though care must be taken to follow the singer's breathing.

#### **Marker 2:**

This was a well devised paper with some individual tests posing challenges and others rather more straightforward. All in all, the six disciplines gave the most talented students plenty of opportunity to shine while not stretching the weaker candidates to breaking point.

The best results tended to come in the prepared tests. The song accompaniments were generally well negotiated, though not many really took account of all the detailed markings in the score, thereby sacrificing a degree of subtlety. The early Italian figured bass realisation allowed lots scope for invention, though several students arguably over-egged the pudding.

The weakest tests were probably the orchestral score and C clefs. The latter requires consistent practice throughout the year – something that not all candidates seemed to have observed. In the harmonisation test, there was a general tendency to reflect every melodic nuance in the harmonisation; in many cases, however, this was not necessary, and less would have been more. Transposition ranged from exceptionally strong to rather halting.

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### Paper 10: Monteverdi in Mantua and Venice

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
29	3	17	9	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>10.3%</i>	<i>58.6%</i>	<i>31.00%</i>			

Overall, the candidature performed well in this examination. While the majority chose to answer questions relating to the social, cultural, and historical contexts of Monteverdi and his compositions (questions 1, 4, and 6), some opted to answer questions that were more heavily biased towards stylistic considerations. These candidates were more easily able to display their knowledge of musical language, which often worked to their advantage. Nonetheless, most drew on a wide range of historical explanation in their answers.

### Paper 11: Rossini's Italian Operas

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
8	0	7	1	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>87.5</i>	<i>12.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

A decent, though altogether slightly disappointing set of scripts.

There was much evidence of study – on the upper end some of it went beyond the recommended bibliography. But there was also some naïve reasoning and much awkward writing, and on the whole a higher number of technical errors than one would like to see after an entire course at Part II level.

Occasionally the handwriting was borderline decipherable.

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### Paper 12: Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* in Context

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
31	8	22	1	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

#### **Marker 1:**

The general level of answers was high, with very few individual essays falling lower than a 2:1, and with a significant percentage getting firsts. Clearly, most students had worked hard and were able to tackle a wide range of topics with confidence. In fact, it was pleasing to see the diversity of responses within individual questions.

All the questions received between 12 and 21 answers – a suitably Brahmsian symmetry – though 2a was much more popular than 2b. Only Question 3 posed problems for the examiners. A significant number of students chose to ignore the word ‘early’ in ‘early Baroque’. Of course, periodisation can be a matter of dispute, but in this case it was difficult not to mark down, at least to some degree, answers that focussed on J S Bach or Handel (or even François Couperin).

A few additional points:

- 1) Many essays had engaging introductions. However, the number of essays that concluded with an otiose recitation of what had just been said was depressingly large. This examiner at least was looking for a more sophisticated approach to essay-writing at Part II – one that showed flair rather than stolid worthiness.
- 2) Candidates should beware of assuming that the texts set by Brahms automatically reflect his views on life, religion or philosophy. Some approached this issue with admirable circumspection; others seemed rather too ready to assume direct equivalences.
- 3) Also, quite a few essays were pulled down by reliance on out-dated or incomplete secondary literature. Part II seminars are normally based on the latest research, some of which may not be in print. Unfortunately, some of this material was absent from individual essays. It wasn't clear whether the problem sprang from misplaced trust in printed sources or from the failure to attend particular seminars. Whatever the reason, it often resulted in a partial account.

Overall, however, an impressive set of scripts!

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### Marker 2:

Responses to this paper were generally of a high standard, with a pleasing combination of historical and music-analytical detail, often coupled to citations of secondary literature. It is testimony to the appealing breadth of the course that all six questions were attempted; the most frequently attempted were (1), (3), (4) and (5a-b). These offered scope for motivic analysis (both explicitly and as part of chorale excavation), theological speculation (Protestantism, Lutheranism, and within this shades of pietism, atheism, and even materialism), historiographical reflection, and some hermeneutic readings.

The strongest responses were accurate in their factual and analytical observations, they demonstrated a wider awareness of contemporary works (including beyond Brahms), and sought to weave relevant details in service to an overarching argument. Many papers carried strong details but lacked a developed argument. Weaker responses typically contained inaccurate citation or factual errors, they were occasionally off-topic, and demonstrated no reading beyond points raised in lectures.

The frequent citation of German titles and biblical text was pleasing; though inaccuracies occasionally marred the value of using the original language.

Surprisingly few papers sought to critique MacDonald's (1) co-option of the agenda of absolute music historically, and its purifying agenda vis-à-vis national politics.

Citation of secondary literature was general a strong aspect of the papers; the very best papers also cited primary sources on historicism and national identity.

### Paper 14: Musical Countercultures of the 1960s

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	7	23	3	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>21.2</i>	<i>69.7</i>	<i>9.1</i>			

### Marker 1:

Answers in general showed a very good grasp of the issues raised by the course. Exceptional answers made original, critically informed arguments whereas weaker answers tended to reproduce material from lectures.



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### Marker 2:

This paper was highly stimulating. The topic was rich and challenging, and there was plenty of evidence of passionate student engagement with differing ideologies of music and music making in the U.S. in the 1960s. The best essays questioned received categories ('the blues', 'folk music', 'free jazz', 'the avant-garde', 'experimentalism', 'minimalism' etc.) in a fine-grained way, exploring them as discursively constituted and contested categories up to, during, and beyond the 1960s. Weaker answers accepted such terms as historical givens that required elucidation through reproducing conventional examples. Even among more fluent answers, there was a certain patchiness in knowledge of the music being discussed: those who had evidently spent time familiarising themselves with the music under discussion avoided error and were able to construct arguments more freely. A second area that was handled with a varying degree of success was the relation of countercultures in the U.S. to what were often earlier developments in Europe. The best answers gestured out to the European context without insisting on it as a model for U.S. developments; weaker essays either ignored European developments entirely or assumed a mapping of similarly titled movements. A final point to register is that there was a surprising lack of theorisation of the term 'counterculture' itself across the range of answers – the work of Paul Gilroy, in particular, might have featured more highly.

### Paper 15: Music, Nationalism and Politics in Spain

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
36	5	27	4			
<i>Percentage</i>						

Overall, I was very pleased with the exam papers for this course. Generally, students demonstrated a very good understanding of and engagement with the course material and literature. This was a reading-heavy course with a lot of unfamiliar content, so some students did extremely well to deliver such well-informed and accurate essays. Indeed, some answers were top-rate, exhibiting critical engagement with the literature, originality and flair. I was also impressed that some students looked beyond the course material, searching for their own musical examples and/or relevant theoretical frameworks. Other answers, however, went off target and did not directly address the question – always make sure to read the question carefully. I would also encourage students to carefully structure their answers, as in some scripts it was very difficult to follow the argument. Remember that a solid and concise introduction can help provide a 'road map' for the rest of the essay. Overall though, I was very impressed with the level of this group. Well done!

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### Paper 16: Introduction to Music and Philosophy

#### **Marker 1:**

This was a solid set of scripts, with some outstanding answers. Where there was inconsistency, this was often within a single exam paper, with one or two excellent essays let down by a single answer of lesser quality.

Given the potential breadth of the topic, the course was structured closely around a core set of readings introducing students to key debates in the field. On the evidence available, most students had revised these texts well, giving them a solid grasp of key themes and a ready stock of texts for citation. The best answers engaged with these texts, but also showed substantial evidence of broader reading around key topics. Almost all answers included at least some critical response to the scholarship they cited. These responses varied in quality but were generally thoughtful and cogent. The best answers weaved such responses into a clear and compelling overarching argument.

A number of answers (often those single answers that dragged down an otherwise good script) failed properly to address the question. Q2, for example, asked whether the arousal of emotions is the purpose of music; too many answers discussed the arousal of emotions in music but failed to address sufficiently the question of *purpose*. Similarly, the quotation in Q4 claimed for music the ability both to establish and to destroy morality, but too many answers focused only on music's potential ability to establish morality. Overall, however, there were some impressive answers to each of the questions on both sections of the paper.

### Paper 17: Exploring Music Psychology

No of students taking paper	1	II.1	II.2	III	Pass	Fail
	4	6	3	0	0	0
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

It's a privilege to be able to read these scripts and see how far students have travelled in this field. It's particularly heartening to see the range of topics covered in the experimental design question.

Some handwriting in the scripts was very difficult (and sometimes impossible) to read. This makes it very hard to mark the papers. We suggest practicing timed handwritten essays regularly during the year to ensure that students are comfortable writing legibly in exam conditions.

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

The second marker was particularly impressed with the quality of the work.