ASSESSMENT REPORT

MSM315115 MUSIC

AURAL AND THEORY

CRITERIA 5 AND 6

Overall candidates seemed well prepared for the aural/theory paper. As last year, there were several candidates who wrote their answers in pen rather than pencil. It is important for candidates to know that pencil is required to be used for all answers involving music notation and is clearly articulated in the candidate instructions on the front cover of the exam paper. In some questions there is not room on the stave for ‘second attempts’ so candidates who used pen were at a disadvantage.

Question 1: This question was very well answered with a clear understanding of the terms.

Question 2: There were mixed responses here. Candidates need to be mindful of listening through all layers of the music and take note of harmonic rhythm as well as pulse. Determining the difference between duple and quadruple is difficult and an area to focus on.

Question 3: This was generally well answered.

Question 4: Overall this was well answered.

Question 5: This was deceptively challenging and caught out quite a large number of candidates. Perhaps better preparation in the reading time may have helped. Remarkably few had used tools to help themselves such as annotating beat markings or writing-in counting.

Question 6: This question was poorly answered. Quite a number of candidates missed the anacrusis and, therefore, displaced the rhythm. It was quite common for candidates to miss out barlines at the end of staves. Dotted rhythms seemed to cause problems for many candidates—both the dotted crotchet and the dotted quaver.

Question 7: Quite a large number of candidates didn’t mark the correct exemplar. Again, the lack of annotations on the papers indicated that candidates may benefit from spending more of the reading time exploring the differences between the melodic lines in preparation for hearing it.

Question 8: Most candidates got a least half of this correct. Some candidates did not understand that the tie in the provided rhythmic elements meant that this would be the same pitch.

Question 9: A large proportion of candidates got this incorrect.

Question 10: Composing a rhythm for lyrics seemed a little stronger than in 2018. Some candidates didn’t manage to match the natural stress or flow of the words to their rhythm. It was pleasing to see the majority of candidates place in a time signature, but unfortunately there were a few candidates whose time signature did not suit the poem.
Question 11: Responses were varied here. Many candidates forgot to take into account the key signature, while others didn’t take into account the bass line.

Question 12: Note grouping was generally secure. There were candidates who omitted the time signatures from their answer.

Question 13: Many candidates struggled to accurately describe the time signature. It was common to name the metre instead. There were many errors with intervals and chords through ignoring the key signature, accidentals and changes in clef. Many candidates found appropriate compositional devices, but it was very common to slip up on providing a description of the device. Instead, candidates often wrote where it was without explaining what it was. Most candidates marked their devices on the score, but frequently this was rather general and vague. Score writing in the transposition question was consistently good with excellent alignment. Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of transposition.

Question 14: A large portion of candidates managed to use compositional devices and label them, however, there were very few answers which had musical credibility. It was common for there to be a lack of understanding of tonality and to fill up the staves with rambling bars of notes. The question was about writing a musical melody and, in so doing, use two compositional devices to musically support this melody. Due to the anacrusis and the incomplete bar at the end of the first stave, most papers had at least one bar with the incorrect number of beats.

PRACTICAL

CRITERIA 7 AND 8

There were 93 candidates who completed their performance exams for MSM315115 in 2019. It was very common for candidates to omit writing their TASC ID on their proforma. Candidates are identified by number, not name, so this is vital information. Apart from this, the candidates generally presented themselves well by being organised, punctual and performance-ready prior to the exam time. There were some candidates who did not use the 2019 proforma from the TASC website. These candidates missed out on seeing the checklist which is on the current proforma and contains important reminders regarding exam requirements. Candidates should use the proforma supplied by TASC on their website, not one created by their school. It is also important that teachers read the current external assessment guidelines for the up-to-date information on other aspects of the exam, such as how many copies of scores and proforma are required.

Keeping as close as possible to schedule can be very difficult and the examiners certainly appreciated the staff in schools ensuring all was set up ready for the exams with appropriate desks, power supply and some welcome refreshments for the traveling examiners. Again, the support from staff in ensuring their contemporaneous candidates were set-up with a minimum of fuss was helpful.

Despite clearly articulating this in last year’s report, there is still a significant problem with the timing of exams. A significant number of exams were incorrectly timed with some running under time. Candidates and teachers are again reminded that in MSM315115 it is the CANDIDATE’S performance time which should be tallied. Introductions, interludes and solos by other accompanists/band members where the candidate is not playing should NOT be counted towards the exam performance time. This does not mean that such features of the music should be omitted from the exam performance, they simply should not be counted in the time tally. Indeed, bars of rest are
extremely important to both the integrity of the music and to the performer of some instruments, particularly brass players who need to rest the embouchure.

There was an improvement in contemporary candidates’ articulating of what they were performing according to the score on their proforma, but there were still some candidates who forgot to do this.

It was notable that many candidates struggled with the triplet rhythm in their performances.

It is important that all candidates ensure that their music is up to standard for the course. Contemporary guitarists and drummers should be mindful when choosing music to perform in their exam that playing chords or a repetitive pattern for the entire piece does not show versatility, musicianship, musical development, soloistic understanding and rigor. Likewise, vocalists need to be careful that they do not include too many songs in their program which are in strophic form with numerous verses. Further, when using backing tracks it may be necessary to edit them to remove unnecessary repeats.

It was pleasing to see many candidates tune their instrument regularly throughout their performance.

**COMPOSITION/IMPROVISATION**

**CRITERIA 9 & 10**

In 2019, I3 candidates chose to be assessed under Criteria 9 and 10, four as an improviser and nine as composition folios. Teachers and candidates are reminded that an improvisation performance is a worthy consideration, particularly for contemporary candidates who may be more comfortable with improvisation, rather than playing accurately to a score. Refer to the current assessment guidelines for information on the expectations. It is worth a reminder that the statement of intent does not need to be a lengthy document. Short, succinct dot points are more useful in an improvisation exam as they can be quickly read and form the basis of a short conversation with the examiners where they can be more fully explained if necessary.

**Improvisation:**

There were four improvisation candidates this year, and instruments included bass guitar, saxophone, piano and synthesisers. It was exciting to see an eclectic mix of styles some of which included Jazz, Contemporary Pop/Film music and Dub Step/New Wave. All candidates displayed an understanding of their style both through their playing and their context statements. When asked to clarify and give further meaning to the context statements, all candidates could verbally articulate and perform appropriate responses. The examiners appreciated statements that were concise but in dot point form. Reading before a candidate’s performance (which gave meaning to each separate improvisation performance) was much quicker and resulted in less waiting time for the candidate between pieces. The more successful candidates also listed in their context statements the musicians who influenced them as improvisers. Overall, the examiners felt the performances could contain greater developmental exploration. The experimentation of ideas (rhythmic, melodic and harmonic) was one area requiring greater work and the second area was exploring each instrument’s notational range and idiosyncrasies (for example, note growls, pitch bending, flutter tongue effects, experimenting with the sostenuto pedal and guitar effects pedals).
Composition Folios:
Overall, the folios evidenced much better harmonic understanding than in the past; accurate analysis; coherence between harmony, melodies and voice-leading.

Notation was better edited. This was especially true of the folios from those involved in the notation-rigorous Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (TSO) program. It appears that carried over to the rest of their folios. The most common proofreading weaknesses were for rests, slurs, and enharmonic notation.

Story-based structures tend to result in compositions that are made up of too many poorly-connected ideas. Ironically, these structures often don’t have a compelling energy or emotional shape. If it’s not presented as a soundtrack (with the story narrated or presented visually), the music must make sense on its own. Perhaps composing a suite of miniatures would be a better approach than trying to make many convincing transitions.

With a few exceptions, candidates’ transitions and (especially) endings could have been prepared better. A greater sense of anticipation needed to be created before changes occurred.

Context statements were quite variable. Some did not address the composition process at all and only described inspiration/intent, perhaps with analysis. Generally good description and correlation of compositional device usage. It was appreciated that some candidates discussed problems encountered during the process or ones reflected upon afterwards, providing evidence of learning occurring. A fabulous range of listening was reported.

It is recommended that context statements should describe the audio presented. Some did, and that makes assessment much clearer. Issues to discuss within the statement:

- Was the performance live, multi-tracked, compiled from multiple takes, computer-generated, or combination?
- If not played by the instruments in the score, discuss why and how the differences affect the composition.
- If the performers made significant errors, those discrepancies should be discussed. Professional or student performers may make a difference. (The TSO players can make anything sound good. That can also be misleading.)
- Multi-tracked and computer-generated audio don’t reflect balance issues encountered in live, ‘concert’ performance.
- It appeared that one piece achieved the notated dynamics by means of mixing. They would have been difficult to perform live. Commentary would have been helpful.

SOLUTIONS FOR 2019 PAPER

2019 answers
MSM315115.doc