

THEORY OF MUSIC (NEW SYLLABUS)

Report on the May 2008 Examinations

Grade 1

Generally candidates responded well to all sections of this paper with Section 1 providing a secure start for most candidates. Section 3 was not particularly well answered by some candidates. The following points should be noted:

- Observe all the details in Section 2: scale or arpeggio? Direction - up or down? Brackets for semitones should ideally be written as shown in the workbook.
- Section 3 was disappointing with many candidates failing to correct the position of the tempo indication and changing the minim rest to two crotchet rests. Please note that candidates are not expected to re-write the music in their own way but simply to correct errors - in this example the position of the bass clef, the tempo indication, the rests in bar 1 and the beaming in bar 2
- In Section 4 most candidates wrote a mathematically correct answer. Higher marks are awarded where the response makes some reference to the given phrase and has a good feeling of conclusion.
- Overall section 5 was well answered with candidates understanding the meaning of 'ostinato'. Candidates need to understand precisely the meaning of musical language such as ostinato, sequence.
- Section 6 also raised some issues of language with the word 'register' not being understood.
- All questions are ultimately about the sound produced by the notation, so when asked to comment on the dynamic markings the correct answer is a description of the sound (in this case getting louder every two bars) and not the fact that the dynamic markings are written under the stave.

Grade 2

Most candidates were successful with Sections 1 and 2 but need to take greater care with the detail in later sections. The following points should be noted:

- In Section 3 the spelling of 'Allegretto' and the positioning of *pp* were often not noted as errors.
- The direction of stems is an issue in a number of questions, but needs particular care in the transposition required in Section 5.
- The more imaginative arrangements of the notes of the triad in Section 6 gain higher marks. As in all musical theory being able to hear the sound of the written score is a crucial aspect of developing a musical response.

- Section 7 was mostly well answered except for the final question in which candidates were invited to 'describe the shape of this tune'. This is not an easy task, but it might help if candidates asked some basic question : phrase lengths, direction of the melody (rising, falling), step-wise or interval movement. This is the type of question that can and should be practised with all music that candidates are learning.

Grade 3

Harmonic awareness through the simple use of chords is a significant feature of this grade and most candidates seem to understand the basic principals though not always the detail. The following points should be noted:

- In Section 5 and 6 almost all candidates used the correct notes for the chords. The spacing between the parts in Section 5 should observe accepted guidelines whilst in Section 6 the melodic line should have an acceptable shape and rhythm. Repeating notes may be one way of achieving a smooth and shapely tune.
- D# was often omitted in the dominant chord in E minor (Section 6). In general keeping the response simple will give better results.
- Occasionally in Section 1 the question is asked as a negative (e.g. 1.8). This needs particular care.
- Section 7 essentially tests the ability to hear and sometimes describe the notated sound, and many candidates did this well. But there were some problems with the musical vocabulary notably: syncopation, cadence. It is important to understand these musical terms.
- As in an earlier grade, describing the dynamic markings (7.10) is a matter of describing the sounds that the dynamic markings imply, not the markings themselves.

Grade 4

At this grade there would appear to be much greater security with the basic rudiments of tonality and key structure, thus Sections 1 and 2 were generally well answered giving a very positive start to the examination. The following points should be noted:

- In Section 3 the majority of candidates corrected four of the five mistakes. The inaccurate metronome mark was either entered uncorrected or completely omitted. It is encouraging to see candidates successfully splitting the syllables of words to match the melody.
- Sections 5 and 6 develop skills established in the previous grade. Generally the chords asked for in Section 5 were well handled with just occasional poor spacing.
- The responses to Section 6 were a little more variable. The question asks only for 'some unaccented passing notes' – observing this and keeping the melody simple usually proves successful. Many inserted other kinds of

passing notes creating a too complex melody. In the third bar the seventh of the chord was not always used.

- Section 7 is in part a test of the ability to understand the technical language of music and apply it. Here the phrases 'harmonic rhythm' and 'compound interval' created problems for a number of candidates.
- With regard to preparation for this examination, all the questions in Section 7 could be asked of any piece that the candidate happens to be studying.

Grade 5

Sections 1 and 2.1 provided a secure start for most candidates, thereafter the responses were more variable. This would suggest that where candidates need to be able to hear the sound then there is a wider range of responses. The following points should be noted:

- Section 2.2 has a lot of detail in the instructions - it all matters. Many candidates struggled with the pattern, omitted bar lines or had errors in writing stems.
- Matching word stress to musical accent is the basic key to setting words to music (Section 3). There were some good efforts with the main problem coming in lines 3 and 4 with the change of stress pattern in the final line.
- Section 6 is a very tightly structured question with the bass line and chords given. Most candidates supplied the right notes but very few had a feeling for the overall musical shape of the melodic line. In general a simple melodic line will be more effective than a more complicated one.
- Some of the issues surrounding previous Section 7 type questions are still evident at this grade, particularly a tendency to describe the graphic (written) image rather than the sound (e.g. 7.3 7.4 7.5)