TRINITY GUILDHALL

THEORY EXAMINATION: MAY 2010

REPORT

General Comments

The following ten points apply to more than one grade and in some cases
to all grades:

- o Presentation and neatness in writing matter. For example, notes must be
  clearly in the correct position without any doubt as to their meaning.

- o Candidate must know the difference between Chord Symbols and Roman
  Numerals, and where these are placed.

- o Music has its own vocabulary. It is important to learn the language and
  meaning; for example, terms such as tempo, ostinato.

- o If a question asks 'what does this sign mean?' it is not sufficient to say what it
  is, you must also say what the effect of the sign is.

- o Correct spelling of English and Italian terms adds to clarity of meaning.

- o The time signature is only required on the first stave of a multi-stave piece of
  music.

- o Candidates are reminded not to check more than one box in multiple-choice
  questions.

- o Where an extract ends naturally in the middle of a stave it is acceptable to put
  the double bar there and not at the end of the line.

- o The study and analysis of 'real music', and preferably music that candidates
  are themselves performing, is an essential support for theory work.

- o Where more extended written answers are required (higher grades)
  candidates should aim for concise writing that covers the necessary points.

Grade 1.

Section 1 (multiple choice) created few problems for most candidates.
Section 5 (ostinato) was also widely successful, although a few candidates provided
a sequence rather than an ostinato.

Candidates should remember to insert the correct key signature in Section 2. There
were a number of examples of wrongly placed key signatures and key signatures
omitted. Do not forget to mark where the semitones are in the scales.

Section 3 continues to cause many candidates problems. It is a twofold exercise: firstly, to circle the five notational errors in the given example; and secondly, to rewrite the exercise with those five errors corrected. Some candidates failed to circle the errors. In this example many didn't notice the incorrect minim rest in bar 2. Some candidates wrote new music – it must be stressed that it is only necessary to correct the existing music. That which is correct in the given example must be transcribed accurately along with the correction of the five errors – some candidates omitted to transcribe correct double bar line.

Section 4 is the main 'creative' question in this paper and is a foundation for future development in later papers. Answering the given rhythm requires candidates to 'use' the given phrase and create a convincing ending. Simply copying the given phrase is not 'using' it. Using it means taking elements of it to create a phrase that is clearly rhythmically related to the given phrase. A convincing ending is most likely to have a note of some length – in this case a minim or dotted minim.

Section 6 was generally well answered but locating the scale created some problems, as did the meaning of 'tempo'.

Grade 2

Section 1 was consistently well answered except for 1.7 where the language construction requires extra care.

Section 2.2 (writing a broken chord) was poorly answered. Some candidates wrote a scale, others wrote the wrong notes for an E minor tonic triad, whilst others did not write the correct pattern. Overall a disappointing response to this question.

Section 3 in this paper is an extension of a similar question at Grade 1 and attracts similar comments from examiners. Very few candidates noted all five mistakes and corrected them accurately. The most overlooked mistakes were the crotchet to quaver tie (becoming a dotted crotchet) and the grouping of the six quavers in the third bar. Correction of the spelling of *Vivace* often introduced further errors.

The empty stave after the given opening (in Section 4) should be used before moving onto the second stave where a time signature is not necessary.

Section 5 (transposition) and Section 6 (tonic triad tune) were both consistently well answered.

Section 7.2 A chord symbol is a letter (in this case F) and is placed, as the question indicates, above the stave. Candidates need to be aware of the different ways of naming a chord and the conventional language for those ways.

Grade 3

In Section 2 many candidates did not write in the accidentals in the D melodic minor scale. This is always necessary where a scale is written without a time signature and bar lines. Part 2 of this section was generally better answered although some candidates omitted the key signature of Bb Major

Section 3 continues, with increasing difficulty, the type of question found in previous grades. There is some evidence that at this grade candidates are beginning to handle more competently the task of circling errors and writing a corrected version of the extract.

Sections 4, 5 and 6 were generally well answered. Poor spacing of parts is the main issue with writing chords for SATB voices. There are a number of possible 'correct' answers but the principles are the same: the interval between bass and tenor can be more than an octave; the interval between tenor and alto and between alto and soprano should not be more than an octave and ideally should be less than an octave. In Section 6 a bass line that moves largely in contrary motion to the given melody will be the most successful.

Section 7 was normally well answered although the detail was sometimes ignored. In 7.3 there is a precise description for the placing of the Roman numeral: 'below the first crotchet beat' – some candidates ignored both 'below' and the 'first crotchet beat'.

Grade 4

Section 1 was generally well answered although some candidates did not understand the meaning of *senza* (Section 1.4)

In Section 2.1 most candidates had the correct notes but there was some confusion over accidentals needed for a melodic minor scale. Section 2.2 has quite a complex rubric and needs every detail following to achieve the correct answer.

It was disappointing, after the general improvement at Grade 3, to find some of the bad habits at Grades 1 and 2 creeping back in at this grade: not circling mistakes and not accurately transcribing that which is already correct.

Transposition (Section 4) continues to be relatively successful. In this particular example a number of candidates prefixed the final note with a natural instead of the required sharp - the leading note of G minor – this would suggest that the transposition is done as a mechanical process rather than thinking in the new key.

There were some well-crafted answers to section 6. Where errors did occur they largely centred on misunderstanding the rhythmic patterns for 6/8 and writing in patterns more appropriate for 3/4. There is also a less than secure understanding of unaccented passing notes.

The concept of harmonic rhythm (Section 7.3) is rarely appreciated yet is a crucial aspect of composition. If the harmony changes in a regular pattern, then the frequency of that change (the harmonic rhythm) can be expressed by the distance between the changes (every crotchet, every minim, every dotted minim, and so forth). The changes may also be irregular, or not moving at all –static.

Grade 5

Much of this paper was well answered by most candidates. But there are two sections that still cause concern – sections 3 and 6.

Section 3 – the setting of words to a rhythm is not an easy task because it demands a skill in another discipline before the musical rhythm is considered.   This other discipline is appreciating the position of stress in the English language. It would be wise to do a lot of preparatory work in this area before attempting to add musical rhythm. This could be done through examining simple song texts in English and noting how the strong and weak beats work.   The adding of a rhythm should be relatively straightforward once the first skill has been mastered.

Section 6 –The first part of this question – using notes from the chords to write a tune – is usually well done. The problem arises with the second part of the question – 'decorate your tune'. 'Decorate', in this context, does not mean trills, turns, acciaccaturas; neither does it mean rhythmic patterns (triplets, semiquavers) not in keeping with the original.   The best rule would be to *keep it simple*.   The occasional passing note, auxiliary note or another note of the prevailing chord should be more than adequate.

Other issues to note: Section 1.5: very few candidates were aware of *niente* as a word not referring to tempo. Section 5.1: the leading note in G# minor needs a double sharp (x).   Section 7.3 – Harmonic rhythm was referred to in the previous grade in some detail – it is still a problem at this grade. Please see the detailed comments under Grade 4.

Grade 6

Most of this paper was well answered. Section 4, (writing harmonic sequence), 5 (transferring to closed score) and 6 (labelling chords) – were generally well done. The more creative task of melody writing (Section 3) was much less successful, with many examples of rather aimless melodies and unsatisfactory endings.   Using the optional 'start' guarantees a shapely first phrase and something on which to build and develop. That 'building and 'developing' should be focused on both repetition of material – perhaps with modification – and contrasting ideas. The contrasting ideas should still be linked in some way to the initial idea.   Analysis of simple songs would be beneficial in observing how such songs are constructed.

In melody writing candidates should not forget to add phrasing and dynamics – the latter can often help to define the structure of the melody.

Examiners draw attention to sections 7.5 and 7.9 noting that sequence and imitation are frequently not understood as musical concepts.

Grade 7

Melody writing (Section 3) was very variable in quality. Some answers tended to wander aimlessly, and include notes outside the flute range – going below middle C. Please see the extended comment on melody writing in Grade 6 and the general comment about the need to see and analyse melodies of songs in the candidates' performing repertoire, and elsewhere.

In Section 1 the *Tierce de Picardie* was not known by a significant number of candidates. Where a question asks why is something important (Section 1.10) it is necessary to address the question 'why'. In this case many said what orchestration was but not why it is important.

Few were able to satisfactorily account for the instability of the diminished 7th chord (Section 1.9) and in Section 6 there were some incorrectly named chords – usually a result of not noting the inversion of the D chord.

Comparing two passages (Section 7.9) was clearly difficult for many candidates. In this instance candidates were asked to focus on texture. It is advisable firstly to be able to describe the two sections; once that is done it should be possible to comment on the differences and similarities. Being able to describe/analyse in language what is happening in a sound world is not easy and something that needs to be developed over a period of time.

Grade 8

Section 3 was well answered.

Section 2 (melody writing) was very variable – some examples appeared almost random and with strange rhythmic constructions. As in previous grades there was often a lack of phrasing and dynamics.

Section 4 (harmonising a phrase from a Bach Chorale melody) again had a varied response. The most successful answers are those that correctly see the chords for the cadence points and the chords that lead naturally into the cadence. This accounts for six of the fifteen chords. A further five chords come under the category of familiar progressions, e.g. passing 6/4. Once the harmony is in place some awareness of how Bach might have decorated this progression will help to achieve a stylistic answer. As in most musical construction: if in any doubt – keep it simple.

Section 5.8 and 5.9 asks candidates to 'compare'. This was not well done – see the notes on this with Grade 7. Candidates are asked in 5.10 to 'describe' – as this is a music examination the description should be of the sound implied by the notation and not the notation as such.   This needs practice and it is practice that can be incorporated into practical music training.