

## Report on AMusTCL for November 2013

The overall standard for this session continued that in recent previous sessions with 38% of candidates gaining a pass. This includes one distinction. A further 23% gained marks between 50 and 59 while only 6% were awarded a mark of 30 or less.

Percentages of candidates who attempted each question were as follows:

Section	Question number	Percentage of Candidates
A	1	85
	2	86
	3	10
	4	62
	5	39
B	6	95
	7	16
C	8	20
	9	22
	10	39
	11	15

Percentages of candidates who obtained a pass on particular questions varied greatly. The extremes were 94% who passed on the Orchestration question and 10% who passed on the 19th century pianoforte question. While it is very disappointing to see such poor results for the writing for piano, this has always been the case, despite numerous attempts through these reports to help future candidates prepare more successfully.

Another very weak area is in Section B where only one quarter of the candidates who answered on Schubert submitted work that gained a pass mark. Of the much smaller number of candidates who answered on Stravinsky 38% gained a pass mark for their work. These figures mean that three of every five candidates who wrote on Stravinsky submitted work that was below pass standard. Put in similar terms, from every 12 candidates who wrote on Schubert 9 submitted work below the standard required to pass.

This suggests that preparation for Section B has many inadequacies – especially regarding the Schubert symphony. Extensive advice has been given in previous reports but it seems necessary to repeat that the work required for Section B is no less demanding than for Section A where, apart from the pianoforte question already mentioned, the pass rates for each question are considerably higher.

Whatever works may be set either now or in the future it is essential that candidates know the music intimately as a result of extensive study of the score coupled with repeated listening to a good quality recording. If a candidate cannot readily supply all the following information then s/he is not yet ready to enter for this examination.

- List all the instruments (including those which are silent during particular movements or extended sections of the music)
- Sing/play all the principal themes and say which instrument(s) and/or voice(s) perform them
- Know the overall structure of the music and of its component parts
- Know the tonal basis, tempo and pulse of each section/movement
- Know the tonal scheme of each section/movement
- Know at once any chord pointed to by the teacher
- Know the character and style of the music

Students should imagine they have to conduct a performance of the music from memory. If they could not do this they are not yet ready to enter for the examination.

However, there is a further vital stage in a candidate's preparation for Section B. All the information listed above must be known in order to write an informed discussion of some issue which is posed by the question in the exam paper. In the most recent paper this was about the historical style of Schubert's symphony. There is a quotation from Charles Rosen which has the phrase, 'late and loosely organised post-classical style'. If a candidate thinks that the fifth symphony exhibits this style then evidence must be given through reference to the score. This evidence then must be discussed. However, if a candidate thinks this symphony does not exhibit this style then evidence to support this view must be given and discussed.

The question goes on to refer to the relative importance of melodic flow and dramatic structure. A number of essays suggested that because Schubert is noted as a song writer this symphony must have melodic flow. Such vague comments have no place in academic discussion. Only when supported by a series of detailed references to the music of this symphony might it be argued that melodic flow is important. The evidence must come from the music under discussion, not from general hearsay and rumour. This exam confers a professional qualification on those who pass, not the implication that someone has unwittingly absorbed casual gossip.

Considering all candidates, the highest mark awarded for each question was almost invariably a distinction, thereby showing that a significant number of candidates are capable of producing excellent work. Unfortunately, few candidates are able to maintain this high standard throughout the five answers they submit. In all too many cases a mark of 17 for one question is partnered by a mark in single figures for another and the final total is below pass.

In Section A the chorale question was based on Riemenschneider no 165. Many candidates lost marks by having all their music in F major. This in itself revealed a lack of acquaintance with chorale idiom. The given opening was rather florid but very few candidates maintained this characteristic.

Far too many candidates submitted music that was not only elementary in style but also peppered with basic errors such as consecutive 5ths or 8ves, incomplete chords,

unresolved 7ths and either repetitive or awkward part writing. There are 24 crotchet beats requiring candidates to provide three or four parts. It was quite common for there to be errors of the sort already mentioned in over half of the beats.

The orchestration was generally well done but most scripts were spoilt by the omission of necessary accidentals, bowings and other performing instructions. Many errors in transposition caused loss of marks. String parts were generally more secure than the others. Some scores were set out beautifully but others were spoilt by messy presentation: note heads and tails not joined and badly spaced leger lines were commonplace faults. Most candidates wrote their work with a suitable pencil but a few used inappropriate things such as a broad tipped felt pen.

The underlying harmony of the Mendelssohn piano music was rarely grasped, though the use of parallel 3rds was usually adopted from the given opening. Candidates should know that insecure harmonic progressions can never be mitigated by stylistic integrity. First get the harmony secure and only then start to think about style. However, both of these must be taken into account if high marks are to be gained.

The popular song called for considerable care in realisation of the chords and many workings were spoilt by errors in this regard. A surprisingly large number of workings ended in an alien key and some of those which were tonally correct were limp to the point of being a wasted opportunity.

Melodic composition calls for inventive craftsmanship, a sense of shape and also a clear sense of musical purpose which leads to a convincing finish. There continue to be a few candidates who omit to name the instrument for which they are writing. Of those who chose the opening written with a key signature of four flats many gave no indication of tempo, suggesting that had not inwardly heard their music correctly.

Answers in Section B, question 6 (b) – Schubert - are as follows:

1. I – vi – ii7b – V/V7 – I
2. Imitation; (inexact) sequence
3. Broadly the two passages are the same but bars 93 – 97 are transposed up a perfect 5th; a few differences in details whereby  
1st violin in bar 27 moves down but in bar 93 moves up;  
Woodwinds are 4th lower rather than a 5th higher.
4. Perfect in B flat major (relative major)  
Inverted perfect in D major (dominant in prevailing key of trio which is G major).

For question 7 (b) – Stravinsky – the answers are:

1. C minor; E flat major
2. The music should be written an 8ve lower than shown in the score, starting on E flat below the bass stave; bowings should be included
3. G minor (the chord has no 5th)

4. The underlying chord is C (major), especially in the orchestra; the presence of B flat and E flat in the chorus suggests E flat major; in bar 21 chord in V7 in F, the B flat is only in one of the cello parts.

Answers in Section C were frequently weakened by two persistent faults:

- Description (of a story or of the music) rather than discussion of the significance of musical details
- No references whatsoever to material other than the two chosen works

Such work always fails because it does not answer the question or follow the instructions in the syllabus and repeated in each question.

While it may be necessary to refer to an incident in a musical or a film, the questions always require discussion of the significance of the musical contribution – what the contribution is and how it affects the overall impact of what is happening. The question on popular music asked about creativity. Here, too, it was essential to discuss the effect of the details in the music which had been identified as creative.

All too often candidates write about what happens in the music. The examiners need to know what is the effect of what happens.

## **In conclusion**

It is worth repeating that in many scripts there was at least one answer that gained either a secure pass mark or even a distinction, showing that the candidate had undertaken some well guided study. Unfortunately work of this quality was not submitted consistently for all five answers. Hence there was insufficient work of good quality to award enough marks for a pass. Students and their teachers should strive to ensure that before entering for the exam work of at least pass standard is produced regularly on practice questions on all sections of the exam. Then we may hope to see a greater number of candidates achieve their desired goal of becoming an Associate in Music of Trinity College London.

WV Tomkins