

TRINITY COLLEGE, LONDON

THEORY OF MUSIC GRADE EXAMINATIONS MAY 2007

REPORT

Introduction

There is inevitably a tendency for the same, or at least similar, issues to arise in the theory examinations from year to year, and consequently documented in this report. There is also often a wide range of responses between centres and candidates; so not all comment –positive or negative – is directed at everyone. This report tries to highlight the main points that apply to most candidates. It is not a criticism of one centre or group of candidates but a guide to the areas of musical theory that would appear to need more attention and detailed study. At all stages in the study of musical theory it is essential to relate it to practical music making. To do so helps candidates to appreciate the relevance of musical theory to practical music making and observe how notation appears on the printed page.

General Comments

Read, re-read, and note very carefully the detail in every question: ascending/descending, crotchets/minims, harmonic minor/melodic minor, and so forth.

Sharps/Flats must be carefully focussed in key signatures and when used as accidentals. The size of the sharp/flat/natural should be proportionate to the stave. Note how this is observed in printed music.

Leger lines must be the same distance apart as the lines of the stave and not too long. Again, note how this appears in printed music.

Presentation is important – care should be taken with the horizontal alignment of notes. As much as possible, let notes occupy as much space to their right as their actual length suggests.

GRADE 1

Generally good responses: Questions 1, 2, 5, 6 and 8

Generally poor responses: Questions 3, 4 and 8(d)

In Questions 3 and 4 many candidates were uncertain when to use two crotchet rests and when to use a minim rest.

In Question 4 some candidates re-arranged the order of the notes and rests, despite a warning about this in the instructions.

Candidates frequently omitted the flat accidental in part d of Question 8

The harmonic minor scale (Question 7) needs care in the placing of accidentals. The ascending and descending patterns should not confuse candidates if they remember the degree of the scale needing an accidental rather than the number of note written.

GRADE 2

Generally good responses: Questions 1 6 and 7

Generally poor responses: Questions 4 and 5

Candidates need to take greater care with the direction of stems in Question 2

In Question 3 the number of beats in the anacrusis at the beginning must be matched by the number of beats in the closing bar in order to make a full bar.

A greater awareness of the fundamental difference between simple and compound time signatures would make for more reliable answers in Question 4.

All answers should be unambiguous. In Question 5 it is much clearer to write *Major* and *Minor* in full rather than using just M and m when handwriting might not be clear.

Whilst Question 7 was mostly well answered, some candidates do not right the sharps/flats of the key signature in the right order. There is logic to the system and it needs to be followed.

GRADE 3

Generally good responses: Questions 2b 5 and 7

Generally poor responses: Questions 2a 3 and 4

In Question 1 the bass clef sign must be accurately placed and complete – observe how this is done in printed music.

In Question 2a notes at a different octave both need an accidental – both B flats in the second bar.

The different groupings in simple and compound time (3/4 and 6/8) needs to be clearly understood for success in Questions 3 and 4.

Many candidates omitted the natural sign necessary to create a minor second in Question 6, part b.

GRADE 4

Generally good responses: Questions 1 and 7

Generally poor responses: Questions 4 and 5

Some ongoing problems surfaced in Question 4. - whether to use two crotchet rests or a minim rest. This was an issue at Grade 1 where clear rules and guidelines should be established.

Very few completely correct answers in Question 5 with the diminished interval causing particular problems.

Very few candidates gave an acceptable English meaning of *Giusto* and *Mano Destra (MD)* in Question 9d.

Most candidates in Question 10 get the right shape for the decoration but frequently the ‘mathematics’ is not quite right.

GRADE 5

Generally good responses: Questions 2 5 and 6

Generally poor responses: Questions 3 and 7

Very few candidates gave a musical response to the phrasing in Question 3. To do so it is necessary to ‘hear’ the melody, appreciate its structure, and be aware of the cadence points.

There were many mechanical responses to Question 4 with the answering phrase being an exact copy of the given phrase, even, in a few cases, to filling the last bar with notes. There needs to be some ‘connection’ between the given phrase and the answering phrase – it is often better if this link is rhythmic rather than melodic. A sustained note at the end gives a feeling of conclusion.

Most candidates handled the cadences well in Question 7; but there were many examples of insecure part writing with the horizontal aspect of the added parts not being considered

GRADE 6

Generally good responses: Questions 2 5 and 6

Generally poor responses: Questions 1 3 and 4

Some very awkward melodic writing (Question 1) with poor handling of modulations and a general lack of shape and direction in the writing. A simple well-structured response is all that is required in this question: use the given material, provide a contrasting idea and make the cadence points clear.

The given start of the bass line in Question 2 indicates that candidates must add harmony on the fourth beat – many did not do this.

The use of 1st inversion chords is essential for smooth harmonic sequences and good part writing. Greater attention needs to be given to this and to chord sequencing in general.

GRADE 7

Generally good responses: Questions 3 and 4

Generally poor responses: Questions 1 and 2

The setting of words to music (Question 1) continues to be very problematic for most candidates. The basic requirements are that the natural strong and weak accents of the words match similar stress patterns in the melody, and that the melody as a whole has an acceptable shape and structure.

In Question 2 the harmonic implications are not always understood – yet this is fundamental to effective two-part writing.

Candidates need to write about instruments (Question 5b) in much greater detail. Playing techniques, particularly with string instruments, would add a wider dimension.

GRADE 8

Generally good responses: Question 1

Generally poor responses: Questions 2 3 and 4

The 2-part imitative writing and the double counterpoint potential in Question 2 were not handled securely by many candidates. Modulation – through the harmonic underpinning – needs to be very clear.

The key components of an acceptable answer in Question 3 are secure harmonic progressions and maintaining good style in the piano accompaniment. The latter does not have to be a constant repetition of the given start, but this should be the starting point. Study of simple piano-accompanied melodies is encouraged.

In Question 4a the *Ritornello Principle* was frequently not understood with insufficient detail and confused answers. The responses to the shorter questions in Question 4b were generally better.

Whilst there are some concerns about the quality of responses to Questions 2 and 3, it would appear that more preparation is needed for Question 4. All questions at this grade receive a significant proportion of the total marks and a very inadequate response to one question can seriously affect to overall outcome.

Everyone is reminded that a new syllabus is about to become valid, though there will be a year's overlap for all grades during 2008. New Theory Workbooks are already available up to grade 5.