

THEORY OF MUSIC (NEW SYLLABUS)

Report on the November 2008 Examinations

Grade 1

This paper was in general well answered, with the exception of Section 4. We would urge candidates to pay attention to neatness so that their intention is always clear. The following points should be noted:

In Section 1, part 13, the word 'not' is crucial to getting the correct answer. Take a little extra care with this and similar questions.

In Section 2 observe all the required details. Some candidates wrote scales in the wrong direction, whilst others incorrectly marked the semitones.

Some candidates in Section 3 went straight to the re-write of the given passage, forgetting to circle the mistakes in the original.

Writing an answering phrase to a given rhythm is the most problematic of all the questions. It is possible to write a mathematically correct response but without much musical merit. It is essential that candidates are able to 'hear' the given rhythm and develop a feeling for an appropriate response. Generally a good response will have a strong rhythmic relationship with the original and end with a note that is sufficiently long to give a feeling of conclusion. Practical question and answer exercises would be one way of developing this skill.

Questions 5 and 6 were well answered, but the difference between a Chord Symbol and a Roman Numeral should be clearly understood.

Grade 2

Most candidates were able to accurately write a sequence (Section 4) and transpose down an octave (Section 5).

Section 3 created the most problems for candidates with many not circling the errors and having difficulty in writing out the melody correctly.

Section 6 gets a varied response. The fact that the questions says 'in any register' does not mean that notes can be written in an haphazard manner, because the question also asks for 'a tune'. There is considerable freedom in this question but the end product should be a shapely tune using the tonic triad notes and ending on the tonic.

Section 1 is mostly well answered. The only real problems occurred in 1.4 where a number of candidates ignored the 2/4 time signature in giving a mathematical value to the semibreve rests.

Section 7 again received mostly good answers. Only part 7.8 created problems and some vague responses.. The key word in the question is 'length', so a good answer would note the 4 bar length and the fact that there were two equal length phrases.

Grade 3

As candidates progress to higher grades it is expected that they will become familiar with musical language. In this paper many candidates did not associate the word 'tempo' with speed (Section 1.10) and did not understand the concept of 'syncopation' (Section 7.7)

In Section 3 some candidates did not note the incorrect metronome mark, whilst others omitted all the circling of errors and went straight to the re-writing of the music.

Section was generally well done, but candidates should check the correct position for dots in dotted notes (augmentation dots).

The instructions for Section 6 are very precise. Some candidates used notes outside of those prescribed; but the main fault was producing melodies that lacked shape and a sense of direction. Good shape must consider rhythm as well as pitch.

Grade 4

Presentation was on the whole better at this grade than in the previous examination, but there are still some fundamental errors that, if not corrected, will inhibit progress in some aspects of musical theory.

In Section 3 some of the problems encountered are a continuation from earlier grades, notably not seeing the incorrect metronome mark and occasional examples of ignoring the first part of the question and simply re-writing the passage.

In Section 5 there was some poor spacing of chords, in particularly very low notes for the tenor voice. Chord IV in E minor requires a C#.

Section 6 had the poorest answers in this paper with very few candidates having a secure understanding of the concept of unaccented passing notes. The words 'unaccented' (off the beat) and 'passing' (between two notes in one direction) is a clear description.

In a number of questions candidates need to correctly resolve leading notes.

Most of Section 7 was well answered. The main problem was in justifying, in 7.9, the use of the description *pesante*. This needed reference to the words and the accompaniment.

Grade 5

Discovering the stress pattern in words (Section 3) receives the widest possible response from candidates. For many candidates this is not a natural or instinctive

things to do so clues have to be gathered from available evidence. In this case the given opening shows an alternating weak-strong accent – this should be seen at least as a pointer to the remaining words.

By this grade, transposing is often done very well. In this example, the narrowness of the transposition – a semitone – created problems for some candidates particularly when transposing the notes with accidentals.

It is far better in Section 6 to keep the melody simple and singable. More complex examples are more likely to have errors and be unmusical.

Some of the concepts introduced at this level are not fully understood. Harmonic Rhythm (7.4) is a crucial concept for the candidates' own writing. Making comparisons (7.6 and 7.8) requires a musical response and not just a visual description. 7.6 can really only be satisfactorily answered in terms of the different textures of the passages being compared.

All the above comments refer to aspects of music and notation that can readily be found in the music that candidates are studying in their practical work. It is important to make this linking between practice and theory.