

Section C – Stylistic Development (musical responses)

A few preliminaries

If you have been familiar with one or more of the previous syllabuses for AMusTCL there are three very important changes for 2009.

- Section C is no longer optional; every candidate **must** answer this section (as well as the other two sections).
- Section C has a greatly expanded range of choices.
- Section C no longer has prescribed works which, if not studied, make it impossible for candidates to succeed in this section.

Much of the work done by music students in conservatoires and universities is based on printed scores and other written materials. Although some attention is usually paid to aural development, this vital aspect of musical development is often a poor relation compared with development of practical skills, harmony and other written skills, analysis and historical knowledge. The maxim of being able to hear inwardly any music we see in print and being able to write down any music we hear performed is often just that: a maxim and regarded as a council of perfection which few will achieve!

Section C is an opportunity for you to study music aurally rather than visually. We cannot prevent future candidates from making use of printed scores of material they study in preparation for this section of the exam, but we do ensure that questions are designed so that no benefit will accrue from having used such printed material.

It takes a long period of time to study harmony so that you can write a stylish piece of piano music in the idiom of the early 19th century. It takes a long time to get to know a work such as the *Symphony of Psalms* well enough to answer questions about it in an exam such as AMusTCL. Do not be surprised, therefore, that it will take time and effort to gain knowledge suitable and sufficient to cope with the questions in Section C.

Getting started

Look carefully at the syllabus and, guided by your teacher, decide which **one** of the four options you will prepare and devote all your energy on that one option. Under no circumstances should you expect to be able to make your choice of question in the exam room after reading through the paper.

Having made your choice, start learning the music listed in the syllabus. On page 10 of the syllabus you will see that in the examination there will be limits on the amount of music you must refer to in your answer. However, your studies must be much wider so as to have a reasonable repertoire of examples on which to draw, according to the particular emphasis of the question on the paper set for the session when you take your exam. Suppose you were answering a question on Option 3 – Film Scores, about the way music can heighten the sense of fear in the mind of a character. The sound track of *The Return of the Pink Panther* might offer you less useful material for your discussion than some of the others films listed.

If you had prepared only a couple of films, one of which was the Pink Panther film, the examiners might find your discussion limited and your mark would then be correspondingly low.

The main thrust of your study needs to be the music. It would be very easy to allow yourself to be distracted by peripheral matters and allow these to become the major part of your work, becoming in turn the larger part of your answer in the exam. If your exam answer is not predominantly about musical matters it will be unsuccessful.

Listen to music listed in your chosen option so you become intimately acquainted with it. I make no apology for repeating here that a good way to measure your knowledge is how adequately you can imagine what comes next after any given point¹. Choose items that are well contrasted so that you begin to accumulate a diversity of material to use as examples in your discussion of the music.

Options 3 and 4 have close links with stories. If you decide to prepare one of these two options you will need to know the plot of each film or musical you study. However, your work should concentrate on how the music relates to the stories, the characters and the situations. 'What happens in the music?' is a good question to ask yourself as you begin to study a new sound track or musical. When you have answered this question ask yourself *how* the music creates the effects it does. This will take you into the usual areas of musical study such as harmony, counterpoint, instrumentation, use of rhythm, texture and timbre. Don't overlook the uses made of silence!

If you choose Option 2 there may be background information about a particular album which helps us understand the music. As always, begin your study by gaining acquaintance with the music and only when you know it well start to branch out into possible related material. Such matters as the relationship between musical detail and the words to which the music is fitted may repay extensive study, just as they might with Option 4.

Option 1 is rather different from the other three because it deals with music that has been deliberately altered. Issues such as how an arrangement differs from a transcription may lead you into interesting musico-philosophical discussions. Make sure that you don't lose sight of the music! A fruitful area to investigate might be the way in which Bach adapted Vivaldi's music to become the four Organ Concerti. However, the option requires you to study examples of other people's transcriptions of Bach, not Bach's transcriptions of other people's music. Here, as elsewhere, be sure to keep your sights clearly fixed on the essential core of the study. Add breadth only when you are already well grounded in that core material.

The exam

There will be one question on each of the four options in Section C. If you have followed the advice given earlier you won't fall into the trap of choosing badly or of answering too many questions.

¹ A helpful parallel is to think of learning to perform a piece from memory; can you pick up from any point in the piece and continue without faltering?

Questions for this section will be more open ended than for Section B in order to allow you to use the material you have studied in your answer. This should not be taken as an invitation to sloppiness. On the contrary, as great rigour is required in Section C as in the other two sections. If your answer isn't packed with well argued discussion of how music have studied relates to the particular aspect selected in the question the mark awarded will be low.

The following 'do's and don't's' may help.

Do discuss musical detail.

Don't tell the story.

Do state clearly where the music comes from.

Don't make generalisations.

Do make one point in each paragraph.

Don't waffle.

Do have a point of view.

Don't get off the subject.

Do develop your argument.

Don't suddenly state, 'so therefore . . .' out of the blue.

Do keep checking that you're answering the question.

Don't write memorised notes.

As always, answers which follow all these 'do's' are likely to gain high marks. Work on which examiners need to write comments chosen from the don't list is likely to gain low marks.

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