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Composing and Arranging

2016 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio of Minor Works

For this assessment type, students are given the opportunity to present a folio of works comprising two, three, or four original compositions and/or arrangements. The combined length of the music presented should be between 6 and 7 minutes, and should investigate a variety of musical styles.

**The more successful folios**

* demonstrated a high level of creativity, understanding of musical structure and style, appropriate instrument usage, and adherence to score conventions
* showed evidence of planning throughout the composing/arranging process
* showed evidence of research through listening to other works in the same or similar style, instrumentation, or voice parts
* in some cases of high-achieving works, were inspired by another piece, and borrowed elements of style and specific composing techniques from that work
* exhibited a solid understanding of varied elements of harmony, melody, rhythm, and texture, and displayed development of these musical elements
* demonstrated strong harmonic awareness, through harmonic extension, variations beyond a 4-chord pattern, well-prepared and executed modulations, and variations to harmonic rhythm
* included carefully edited scores which observed conventional note spellings and rhythmic groupings
* demonstrated usage and understanding of a wide range of compositional techniques
* comprised works that would be playable on real instruments by live musicians, and often on instruments that the student played or was familiar with; on occasion, this was demonstrated by the inclusion of a live recording of the work(s)
* included works for standard ensembles/instrument combinations
* included arrangements where the source material was very simple (e.g. a folk tune, hymn melody, or nursery rhyme) which allowed the student to use and demonstrate their creativity and arranging skills to the highest level
* demonstrated highly competent use of Sibelius notation software (or equivalent).

**The less successful folios**

* included arrangements which contained minimal original musical material — the original source for such arrangements was often a quite complicated piece of music, and came in the form of a detailed score with many musical ideas already present
* showed a limited range of musical styles within the folio
* contained works for unusual combinations of instruments and/or for obscure instruments
* demonstrated a limited understanding of the capabilities of the chosen instruments, and the way in which they would work together in an ensemble
* contained works with unclear, unbalanced, and unplanned structures, with heavy reliance on repeated sections to achieve the 6-minute minimum length
* exhibited a basic understanding of rhythm, melody, and harmony, and contained little or no counter melodic material, melodic variation, or development
* showed a limited understanding of the correct usage of Sibelius to create an appropriately presented score; common errors included the misuse of ties and slurs, the inclusion of dynamics in text font rather than expression font, and incorrect instrument order
* demonstrated an understanding of articulation, dynamics, and performance directions early in the work (e.g. on pages 1 and 2) which were not consistent for the entirety of the work
* contained works which were quite large in scale, but did not show evidence of planning, compositional technique, and care in editing to ensure that they were prepared and presented at a high standard. (It should be noted that the size of the ensemble bears no relevance to the achievement level of the folio. In many instances, students would be better placed writing for a smaller ensemble of known instruments and taking time to present the entire score at a higher level.)

Assessment Type 2: Commentary

This assessment type is a companion to Assessment Type 1: Folio of Minor Works. The commentary should focus on and discuss the musical elements evident within the works of the minor folio.

**The more successful responses**

* articulated a detailed understanding of a wide range of musical elements, including structure, harmony, timbre, texture, rhythm, and style
* focused discussion on the music at all times
* were written with a musically literate reader in mind
* included sophisticated ideas and appropriate, relevant terminology when discussing the works in the folio
* were carefully edited for maximum clarity, and to ensure that the word-limit was used wisely
* supported their statements with musical examples that were clearly labelled, with clefs, instrument names, bar numbers, etc. The inclusion of annotated scores indicating harmonic analysis allowed students to achieve at the highest levels. Musical examples for the score were added to the commentary via the select/copy function in Sibelius.

**The less successful responses**

* used unusual and non-standard terminology when discussing musical elements such as harmony, rhythm, and texture
* described the process of composing/arranging and/or focused on ‘emotional’ choices without examining and analysing the musical features of the work
* made justifications for musical choices that did not make sense or did not add depth to the understanding of the work
* demonstrated some understanding of musical terminology and its use within the folio, but did not cover any other specific composing/arranging techniques; in particular, the overuse of dynamics as a compositional technique (at times, to the near exclusion of all other musical aspects) was observed in less successful responses
* showed a limited understanding of harmony
* either did not incorporate musical examples into the discussion at all, or included musical examples that were screen shots, were too small to read easily, or were irrelevant to the discussion
* made statements about their work which were inconsistent with the score, e.g. discussing a tempo change which was not present in the work.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Major Work

This assessment type consists of two parts:

* Part 1: Major Work — A Composition or an Arrangement
* Part 2: Analysis of the Major Work.

For Part 1 of this assessment type, students are required to submit an original composition or arrangement for small or large ensembles. The minimum length for the work is 3 minutes. Major works are expected to reflect significant detail, scope, and depth.

For Part 2 of this assessment type, students present either an oral or written analysis of their major work. The analysis requires a greater level of depth and musical description, to a maximum of 1000 words or 6 minutes.

The characteristics of successful and less successful responses for this assessment type mirror that in Assessment Type 1: Folio of Minor Works and Assessment Type 2: Commentary. In addition to these characteristics, the following were observed:

**The more successful responses**

* created musically pleasing, well-planned, and structured works that showed effective use of rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, and instrumentation
* demonstrated a high level of musical understanding through appropriate and correct terminology, and detailed analysis of all sections of the work
* comprised a work containing sophisticated musical ideas, which then allowed plenty of scope for the analysis component to examine in detail.

**The less successful responses**

* demonstrated that the student relied heavily on the playback given by Sibelius in making their musical and orchestration choices, which resulted in poor choices being made regarding use of instruments, and which demonstrated a lack of understanding of and research into the chosen instrumentation/ensemble
* misused the term ‘development’ when discussing and analysing the music.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

To assist with the moderation process, it is advisable that when packaging materials, teachers include either (a) each student’s work on an individual disc or USB drive, or (b) two copies of all work from the entire class on separate discs or USB drives.

Teachers are also asked to double-check that audio tracks have been transferred correctly to the disc or USB drive, and will play on a standard laptop. MP3 files are recommended.

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