

# TRINITY GUILDHALL

## Theory Examinations November 2010: Chief Examiner's Report Grades 1 – 8

### General Comments:

The following comments apply to many if not all the grades:

- Every instruction matters – note values, with or without key signature etc.
- Make absolutely certain what clef you are working with.
- Neatness is important – encourage and develop.
- The time signature is only required on the first stave of music.
- The double bar at the end of an exercise should follow the final note rather than always be placed at the end of the stave, even if that means placing it in the middle of the stave.
- When re-writing a passage (transposition or correcting errors) do make sure that all the correct details from the original is accurately transferred
- Rhythmic grouping in compound times (e.g. 6/8) needs some attention – references to music being performed should be helpful in this respect.
- It is important to appreciate and learn the language used to describe musical events: e.g. similar motion (Grade 4)
- Harmonic rhythm is a crucial concept in composition. It is introduced at Grade 4. The evidence so far is that it is poorly understood both as a concept and the language necessary to describe it. Words such as, static, moving, regular, irregular would be appropriate for many situations. This is an area where theory and practice meet and is probably best taught and appreciated in a practical setting.
- On a number of occasions in the grade reports reference is made to integrating theory and practice. Teachers are encouraged to explore how theoretical concepts can be explained and developed in practical music making.

### Grade 1

Section 1 and 5 were well answered

Section 2.2 needs greater care. The key signature was often omitted, and there were some incorrect notes (often writing a 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion of C major).

Section 3 is still causing problems for some candidates, mainly because they do not separate the two activities in this question – circling the five mistakes (the first activity) and then rewriting the excerpt correctly (the second activity).

Section 4 Some poor rhythms including inappropriate attempts at syncopation. The grouping of notes must reflect the time signature and it is usually better to end on a strong beat. It is important that the added bars make some reference to the two-bar given rhythm.

Whilst Section 6 was generally well answered, some candidates were confused with the words *dynamic* (6.9), *tempo* (6.6), and the difference between a scale and an arpeggio (6.4).

## **Grade 2**

Section 1, 4 and 5 were generally well answered.

There were many incomplete patterns in the broken chord required in Section 2, and in some cases bar lines were omitted. The changing shape of the broken chord needs greater care.

Section 3, which builds on the understandings of a similar question at Grade 1, also generates the same problems – particularly forgetting to firstly circle the mistakes.

Some candidates wrote effective tunes in Section 6. Those that didn't often used just notes from the A minor chord rather than the first five degrees of the scale. Some poor melodic shape was also in evidence.

Most parts of Section 7 were well answered but some candidates did not identify the key (7.3) and had difficulty in commenting on the pitch in bars 1 and 4 – Bar 4 is an octave lower than bar 1- would be an appropriate comment.

## **Grade 3**

Sections 1, 4 and 5 were generally well answered, though not without error; note that some candidates in Section 1.4 opted for 6/8 instead of the correct 3/4.

Whilst a few candidates make mistakes with accidentals in melodic minor scales (Section 2.1), many more seem unprepared for the arpeggio pattern required in Section 2.2

Transposition is generally secure with few notational errors (Section 4). Candidates should however take greater care with the direction of stems and phrasing marks.

Most candidates wrote the correct notes – spacing between alto and tenor was not always appropriate for four-part SATB writing. The gap between parts should be less than an octave, except between bass and tenor where a wider gap is often effective.

In Section 6 candidates generally used the correct pitch, but rhythm was often poor and many missed the F#. Consecutive 5ths and 8ves should be avoided. Candidates should aim for a sing-able melody with no awkward leaps.

Much of Section 7 was well answered although the term 'upbeat' was not well understood. Do remember the key signature when working out intervals (7.5)

## **Grade 4**

Section 1, 3 and 5 were generally well answered

Many candidates were confused by the alto clef in Section 2.1 adding, unnecessarily, a natural sign before the descending 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> degrees of the melodic minor scale.

Whilst the transposition required in Section 4 was generally well done, a significant number of candidates sharpened the Bb at the beginning of bar 3 instead of putting a natural sign. This would suggest that the sound of the melody is not being heard.

Generally candidates space the parts well in the chords required in Section 5; but the raised 7<sup>th</sup> was sometimes omitted from the second chord.

Section 6 attracts the widest range of comments from examiners. Candidates that write effective melodies invariably write simple, sing-able melodies that have both shape and a sense of direction. Where problems arise they are invariably connected with a misunderstanding of unaccented passing notes, and, in this example, the need to sharpen the leading note (B natural) in C minor. Keep it simple is the key message for Section 6.

Much of Section 7 is well answered. Some candidates did not note the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> (V7) in the perfect cadence (7.5). The concept of harmonic rhythm is introduced at this grade – it is not well understood by many candidates. This is an area in which links to the music candidates are performing need to be made. It is also necessary to develop the vocabulary to express the various kinds of harmonic rhythm.

## **Grade 5**

Sections 1 and 4 were generally well answered.

Section 2 was mostly good but there were errors with incorrect key signatures, note stems and accidentals. At this grade level it is likely that such errors were careless rather than through a lack of understanding.

The setting of words to a rhythm continues to create problems for many candidates. (Section 3). This has become a perennial theme in theory reports, but needs re-stating: the crucial skill is to align the strong accents in the words with strong accents in the music. After that, the simpler the rhythm, the better. Reference to well known folk songs would provide good examples of word setting.

Section 6 was not generally well answered – with a feeling that much of the approach to this was unstructured. The first priority is to make sure that there are appropriate notes in the melody line to match the bass notes and the given chords – the double symbol (eg Eb/Bb) was not always understood. This puts the 'main

harmony notes in place'. Decoration should then be simple and based on trying to achieve a sing-able melodic line.

Most of Section 7 was well answered but tonal and real sequences (7.8) are not well understood

## **Grade 6**

Sections 4, 5 and 6 were generally well answered, suggesting that candidates are becoming more secure in handling 4-part SATB writing.

Section 1 was more variable. In section 2.2 there were errors in the key signature and the rhythm.

Section 3 is the only genuinely creative part of this examination, and sadly, the least successful. There is often a lack of key/harmonic structure and too much invention of new material rather than developing the original. The key to effective writing is a judicious mix of repetition and contrast – with the contrast being closely related to or developed from the original statement. Once again study melodies in the pieces candidates are playing and note how composers create effective melodies.

Section 7 was well answered with most candidates secure in naming keys and cadences. There were some inaccuracies in 7.4, 7.7 and 7.10.

## **Grade 7**

Sections 1, 2, 4 and 5 were generally well answered.

Section 3 was generally poor with frequently little shape and structure to the melodies. Dynamics often appeared to be added without thought for their function as a support to the melodic pattern. The comments on melody writing in Grade 6 (Section 3) apply equally as this grade level.

The voice leading and spacing in the SATB parts at the end of Section 6 was often poor, but the Roman numerals and chord symbols were usually well done.

Section 7 was generally well answered but the concept of texture (7.4) is not well understood. Responses to 7.5, 7.6 and 7.8 were very variable with the chromatic passing note not well known.

## **Grade 8**

Sections 1 (except for 1.3), 2 and 3 were generally well answered. In Section 1.3 the raised 7<sup>th</sup> was often missing from the dominant chord in B minor.

Section 4 is by some distance the weakest section in this grade. A successful response needs knowledge of basic harmonic sequencing, voice leading and part spacing. Crossing of parts was a common error and opportunities for modulation were missed. As in most four-part harmony writing a logical approach is necessary – usually starting with the cadences, any clear modulations and the approach chord(s) to these points. In this example six of the fifteen chords could be

'pencilled in' at the outset. This jig-saw approach may provide a possible approach. Study of real examples of this style of writing is of course crucial.

Most of Section 5 was reasonably well answered but candidates struggle to find appropriate language when asked to compare passages (5.3, 5.5). It might help if candidates tried to compare the *sound* of the passages rather than the written notation. Again this is an activity that can and should be integrated into practical work.