

PRACTICAL MUSICIANSHIP *(Subject Code: 42)*

Musicianship is a broad concept that covers a complex range of musical abilities. For the purposes of this syllabus, it is loosely defined as the ability to ‘think in sound’. This occurs when a musician is able to produce music which they perceive internally and in the imagination, whether through playing by ear, singing, reading from notation, or through improvisation.

ABRSM’s Practical Musicianship exams give students opportunities to develop their ability to ‘think in sound’ and perform spontaneously. While the other graded exams focus on aspects of performance that are prepared in detail in advance, here the playing (or singing) is in response to immediate challenges and stimuli, presented both aurally and via notation.

Grade by grade, the Practical Musicianship exams cover some of the key skills for the rounded musician:

- the ability to internalize music and to reproduce it
- interpreting written music with a minimum of preparation
- exploring the possibilities inherent in a short motif
- the ability to detect differences between what is heard and what is written

In developing their musicianship skills, students will be gaining the understandings as well as the expressive and interpretative skills needed to master the musical language of the repertoire they are learning.

Grade 5 as a prerequisite

A pass at Grade 5 or above in Practical Musicianship (or in Theory of Music or any solo Jazz subject) must be obtained before candidates can enter for Grades 6, 7 or 8 Practical exams. We believe that a thorough understanding of the elements of music is essential for a full and satisfying performance at these higher grades.

Instruments

Practical Musicianship exams are open to singers as well as instrumentalists performing on any instrument(s) included in the current range of subjects featured in ABRSM’s syllabuses. Singing candidates will be expected to play certain parts of the exam on an instrument (either the piano provided or any other instrument of their choice).

In the exam

Approximately one minute of preparation time is allowed for the following tests:

- singing/playing at sight
- improvising (from Grade 4)
- transposing at sight
- realizing a figured bass

For any test that requires a sung response, pitch rather than vocal quality is the object. The examiner will be happy to adapt to the vocal range of the candidate, whose responses may be sung to any vowel (or consonant followed by a vowel), hummed or whistled (and at a different octave, if appropriate).

Marking scheme

The examiner will award an overall grading, rather than a mark, on the following basis:

- A Pass with Distinction
- B Pass with Merit
- C Pass
- F Failure to reach the standard required to pass

Specimen tests

Examples of the tests are given in *Specimen Tests: Practical Musicianship* and *Musicianship in Practice*, available for purchase from music retailers and from www.abrsm.org/publications.

New syllabus

A new Musicianship syllabus is planned, and may be introduced before the expiry of this syllabus booklet. For updates, see www.abrsm.org/exams.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 1

- A** To tap, as an echo, the rhythm-pattern of two two-bar phrases in simple time played by the examiner. The echoes should follow each phrase in strict time without an intervening pause.
- B** To sing, as an echo, two two-bar phrases in simple time played by the examiner. The echoes should follow each phrase in strict time without an intervening pause.
- C** To play from memory, on an instrument chosen by the candidate, a two-bar melody played twice by the examiner. The key-chord will first be sounded and the starting note appropriate to the candidate's instrument will be named.
- D** To sing at sight a four-bar melody in $\frac{2}{4}$ time to a simple accompaniment played by the examiner. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- E** To improvise with voice or instrument, at the choice of the candidate, a two-bar answering phrase to a two-bar phrase played by the examiner. The key-chord and the starting note appropriate to the candidate's voice or chosen instrument will first be sounded and named. The answering phrase should follow in strict time after the examiner has played the opening phrase. A second attempt will be allowed.
- F** To recognize, from the printed score, the three or four changes made to pitch and note values in a melody played twice by the examiner. The candidate will be required to point to and explain the differences. The key-chord will be sounded before the melody is played.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 2

- A** To sing, as an echo, two two-bar phrases in simple time played by the examiner, whilst continuously tapping a repeated rhythm pattern (i.e. an ostinato) previously indicated by the examiner. The echoes should follow each phrase in strict time without an intervening pause.
- B** To play from memory, on an instrument chosen by the candidate, a two-bar melody played twice by the examiner. The key-chord will first be sounded and the starting note appropriate to the candidate's instrument will be named.
- C** To sing at sight a four-bar melody in $\frac{2}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ time to a simple accompaniment played by the examiner. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.

(continued overleaf)

Practical Musicianship GRADE 2

- D** To improvise with voice or instrument, at the choice of the candidate, a two-bar answering phrase to a two-bar phrase played by the examiner. The key-chord and the starting note appropriate to the candidate's voice or chosen instrument will first be sounded and named. The answering phrase should follow in strict time after the examiner has played the opening phrase. A second attempt will be allowed.
- E** To recognize, from the printed score, the three or four changes made to pitch and note values in a melody played twice by the examiner. The candidate will be required to point to and explain the differences. The key-chord will be sounded before the melody is played.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 3

- A** To sing, as an echo, two two-bar phrases in simple time played by the examiner, whilst continuously tapping a repeated rhythm pattern (i.e. an ostinato) previously indicated by the examiner. The echoes should follow each phrase in strict time without an intervening pause.
- B** To play from memory, on an instrument chosen by the candidate, a two-bar melody played twice by the examiner. The key-chord will first be sounded and the starting note appropriate to the candidate's instrument will be named.
- C** To sing at sight a four-bar melody in $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ time to an accompaniment played by the examiner. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- D** To improvise with voice or instrument, at the choice of the candidate, a four-bar answering phrase to a four-bar phrase played by the examiner. The key-chord and the starting note appropriate to the candidate's voice or chosen instrument will first be sounded and named. The answering phrase should follow in strict time after the examiner has played the opening phrase. A second attempt will be allowed.
- E** To recognize, from the printed score, the four changes made to pitch, note and rest values and dynamics in a melody played twice by the examiner. The candidate will be required to point to and explain the differences. The key-chord will be sounded before the melody is played.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 4

- A** To sing and play from memory a four-bar melody in $\frac{2}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named. The examiner will play the melody twice and the candidate will be required to sing the melody from memory. The examiner will then play the melody a third time and the candidate will be required to play the melody on an instrument of his/her choice. The examiner will choose a key and pitch suitable for the instrument.
- B** To sing at sight the lower part of a two-part passage of two bars' length while the examiner plays the upper part. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- C** To sing at sight a short melody in $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ time to an accompaniment played by the examiner. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- D** To improvise with voice or instrument, at the choice of the candidate, an extension to the given opening of a short melody over a simple accompaniment played by the examiner. The implied harmonic scheme will be confined to chords of the tonic and dominant. The candidate will be given a part showing the melody in different keys and with different clefs to accommodate the full range of instruments. A second attempt will be allowed. Keyboard candidates should be prepared to play an octave higher than written.
- E** To recognize, from the printed score, the four changes (which may include pitch, rhythm, dynamics and tempo) in a short piano piece played twice by the examiner. Changes to notes and rhythm will be confined to the melodic line. The candidate will be required to point to and explain the differences.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 5

- A** To sing and play from memory a four-bar melody in $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ time. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named. The examiner will play the melody twice and the candidate will be required to sing the melody from memory. The examiner will then play the melody a third time and the candidate will be required to play the melody on an instrument of his/her choice. The examiner will choose a key and pitch suitable for the instrument.
- B** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 transpose at sight on the chosen instrument a four-bar melody up or down a tone or semitone. A key suitable for the candidate's instrument will be given.
- or**
- 2 sing at sight the lower part of a four-bar phrase while the examiner plays the upper part. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- C** To sing or play at sight, at the choice of the candidate, a short melody including the realization of dynamics, simple ornamentation (except when the test is sung) and the more common marks of expression. Candidates will be allowed a preliminary attempt before being assessed. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded if the test is sung, and words will be provided (but need not be used).
- D** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 improvise with voice or instrument, at the choice of the candidate, an extension to a melody over an accompaniment played by the examiner. The implied harmonic scheme will be confined to chords of the tonic, dominant, subdominant and supertonic of major keys of not more than two sharps or two flats. The candidate will be given a part showing the melody in different keys and with different clefs to accommodate the full range of instruments. A second attempt will be allowed. Keyboard candidates should be prepared to play an octave higher than written.
- or**
- 2 improvise at the keyboard an accompaniment to a given melody which will be annotated with chord symbols. The harmonic scheme will be within the limitations stated in test D1 above. A suggested (but optional) opening will be provided. The examiner will play the melody, if requested to do so, while the candidate plays the accompaniment, or the candidate may incorporate the melody in the accompaniment. Candidates will be given credit for the effective use of inversions of the chords. A second attempt will be allowed.
- E** To perform a short free improvisation based on a given motif or interval chosen by the examiner. The examiner will look for imaginative use of the given material, effective use of the voice or instrument and a sense of structure.
- F** To recognize, from the printed score, the five changes (which may include pitch, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, articulation and phrasing) in a short piano piece played twice by the examiner. Changes to notes and rhythm will be confined to the melodic line. The candidate will be required to point to and explain the differences.

- A** To sing and play from memory a short melody. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named. The examiner will play the melody twice and the candidate will be required to sing the melody from memory. The examiner will then play the melody a third time and the candidate will be required to play the melody on an instrument of his/her choice. The examiner will choose a key and pitch suitable for the instrument.
- B** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 transpose at sight on the chosen instrument a melody (no longer than eight bars) up or down a tone or semitone. A key suitable for the candidate's instrument will be given.
- or**
- 2 sing at sight the lower part of a passage (no longer than eight bars) while the examiner plays the upper part. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- C** To sing or play at sight, at the choice of the candidate, a melody including the realization of dynamics, simple ornamentation (except when the test is sung) and the more common marks of expression. Candidates will be allowed a preliminary attempt before being assessed. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded if the test is sung, and words will be provided (but need not be used).
- D** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 improvise with voice or instrument, at the choice of the candidate, an extension to a melody over an accompaniment played by the examiner. The implied harmonic scheme will be confined to chords of the tonic, dominant, subdominant, supertonic and dominant seventh of major keys of not more than two sharps or two flats. The candidate will be given a part showing the melody in different keys and with different clefs to accommodate the full range of instruments. A second attempt will be allowed. Keyboard candidates should be prepared to play an octave higher than written.
- or**
- 2 improvise at the keyboard an accompaniment to a given melody which will be annotated with chord symbols. The harmonic scheme will be within the limitations stated in test D1 above. A suggested (but optional) opening will be provided. The examiner will play the melody, if requested to do so, while the candidate plays the accompaniment, or the candidate may incorporate the melody in the accompaniment. Candidates will be given credit for the effective use of inversions of the chords. A second attempt will be allowed.
- E** To perform a short free improvisation based on a given motif, interval or texture (e.g. flutter-tonguing, tremolo, glissando, vocalization or the use of a specific chord cluster for keyboard players) chosen by the examiner. The examiner will look for imaginative use of the given material, effective use of the voice or instrument and a sense of structure.
- F** To recognize, from the printed score, the five changes (which may include pitch, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, articulation and phrasing) in a short piano piece played twice by the examiner. The candidate will be required to point to and explain the differences.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 7

- A** To sing and play from memory a short melody. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named. The examiner will play the melody twice (the first time in harmonized form, then the melody only) and the candidate will be required to sing the melody from memory. The examiner will then play the test a third time and the candidate will be required to play the melody on an instrument of his/her choice. The examiner will choose a key and pitch suitable for the instrument. Candidates who choose to play the piano for this test will be expected to play the melody with the harmonies in outline.
- B** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 transpose at sight on the chosen instrument a melody (no longer than eight bars) up or down any interval up to and including a minor third. A key suitable for the candidate's instrument will be given.
- or**
- 2 sing at sight the middle or lower part of a passage of three-part harmony (no longer than 12 bars) while the examiner plays the other two parts. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- C** To sing or play at sight, at the choice of the candidate, a passage of music including the realization of dynamics, ornamentation (except when the test is sung), marks of expression, articulation and phrasing. Candidates will be allowed a preliminary attempt before being assessed. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded if the test is sung, and words will be provided (but need not be used). The examiner will accompany singers and instrumentalists (other than keyboard players, guitarists and harpists) for the performance.
- D** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 continue a given two-bar melodic opening, which will be in late 17th- or early 18th-century style, to make eight bars in all. The candidate may opt to sing or play this test. If the test is sung, a key suitable for the candidate's voice will be chosen.
- or**
- 2 realize a short figured bass passage at the keyboard. Chords will be limited to $\frac{5}{3}$ $\frac{6}{3}$ $\frac{6}{4}$ and $\frac{7}{5}$ in any major or minor key up to and including two sharps or two flats.
- E** To perform a short free improvisation based on a given poem using voice or instrument. Candidates whose first language is not English may choose to base their improvisation on a given reproduction of a painting. The improvisation should last no longer than two minutes, and will be assessed for its relevance to the mood of the poem (or painting) and for its musical structure. Candidates who opt to sing this test may choose whether or not to use the words.
- F** To answer basic questions about an extract from a score (provided by the examiner) of a chamber work written between 1700 and 1850 for no more than four players. Questions may refer to keys, harmonic framework, instrumentation, style and structure.

Practical Musicianship GRADE 8

- A** To sing and play from memory a short melody. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named. The examiner will play the melody twice (the first time in harmonized form, then the melody only) and the candidate will be required to sing the melody from memory. The examiner will then play the test a third time and the candidate will be required to play the melody on an instrument of his/her choice. The examiner will choose a key and pitch suitable for the instrument. Candidates who choose to play the piano for this test will be expected to play the melody with the harmonies in outline.
- B** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 transpose at sight on the chosen instrument a melody (no longer than eight bars) up or down any interval up to and including a major third. A key suitable for the candidate's instrument will be given.
- or**
- 2 sing at sight the middle or lower part of a passage of a three-part motet while the examiner plays the other two parts. The C (alto) clef may be used. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded and named, and the pulse indicated.
- C** To sing or play at sight, at the choice of the candidate, a passage of music including the realization of dynamics, ornamentation (except when the test is sung), marks of expression, articulation and phrasing. Candidates will be allowed a preliminary attempt before being assessed. The key-chord and starting note will first be sounded if the test is sung, and words will be provided (but need not be used). The examiner will accompany singers and instrumentalists (other than keyboard players, guitarists and harpists) for the performance.
- D** The candidate may choose to:
- 1 continue a given two-bar melodic opening to make eight bars in all. The candidate may opt to sing or play this test. If the test is sung, a key suitable for the candidate's voice will be chosen.
- or**
- 2 realize a short figured bass passage at the keyboard. Chords will be limited to $\begin{matrix} 5 & 6 & 6 & 7 & 6 & 6 \\ 3 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 5 & 4 \end{matrix}$ and $\begin{matrix} 6 & 4 \\ 3 & 3 & 3 & 2 \end{matrix}$ in any major or minor key up to and including two sharps or two flats.
- E** To perform a short free improvisation based on a given poem using voice or instrument. Candidates whose first language is not English may choose to base their improvisation on a given reproduction of a painting. The improvisation should last no longer than two minutes, and will be assessed for its relevance to the mood of the poem (or painting) and for its musical structure. Candidates who opt to sing this test may choose whether or not to use the words.
- F** To answer basic questions about an extract from a score (provided by the examiner) of a work for voice and instruments. Questions may refer to keys, harmonic framework, style, structure and aspects of the use of the voice or instruments.