PRACTICAL MUSICIANSHP (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 $\frac{2}{4}$ 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)