

EXAM ADVICE FROM ROCK & POP EXAMINERS

TRINITY
ROCK & POP
2018

TRINITY'S ROCK & POP EXAMINERS GIVE THEIR EXAM ADVICE

Who better to turn to for tips on preparing for a Rock & Pop exam than the people on other side of the marks sheet? Here's some advice from a group of Rock & Pop examiners, designed to give you some ideas of what to think about ahead of an exam.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is at the heart of the Rock & Pop syllabus, so it's not surprising that many of our examiners highlight it as a key thing to think about and work on:

'Think of the exam as a gig with a very small audience and the examination room as your stage. In a gig, you play out to your audience, so play to your examiner. If you plan on using your music in the exam, practice looking up from it when you can. Making eye contact with your examiner can feel daunting, but try directing your gaze just above their head. This gives your audience the feeling that you are playing just for them - which in this case, you are!' **Kate Proudlove**

'I believe that the audience has as much right to be considered in a performance as the performer, and in the exam situation, as unusual as it might seem, you have an audience of one.' **JJ Wheeler**

'I'm always excited when a candidate has really prepared the dynamics and articulation markings well and clearly understands why they are there, as using the musical details accurately enhances meaning and shows us that you know how to influence the expression of the mood and style. They give inflection, interpretation and personality to the music, making the music your own.' **Sally Martin Brown**

'I often use movement when I'm teaching or preparing for a performance - it can be very freeing! When no one is watching, put on the demo track for one of your exam songs and prepare to rock! Imagine you've just walked on stage and there are 20,000 people screaming your name. Let the music flow through you and air drum, sing into a hairbrush or bust out your best dance moves. Next time you come to practice the song, take your mind back to how it felt when you let yourself move.' **Kate Proudlove**

'Whatever you do in music and however you choose to do it, there is one word that sums up a truly great musician for me: commitment. Commit to the style, commit to the hours of practice necessary to control your instrument, commit to learning the history of the music, commit to listening to a wide range of genres and then use all of this knowledge to commit to the performance.' **JJ Wheeler**

COMMUNICATION

'Communication and style' is one of the three musical components being assessed in a Rock & Pop exam, and is something that some examiners pulled out as worth giving some thought to:

'We are looking forward to being entertained and communicated with through your performance, so really make it your goal to communicate your feeling and understanding of your chosen songs and their style.' **Sally Martin Brown**

'In the 'communication and style' category we are looking at the performance as a whole - confidence, expression, character, stylistic ad-libs and improvised sections - as well as a sense that candidates are musically engaged. Easy!' **Kate Proudlove**

'Spend time checking out the original songs you are learning, or other songs by the same artist. You might want to discover where that artist came from or who their influences were, in order to gain perspective. Try to work out what each song is about and convey that message as best you can.' **JJ Wheeler**

PRODUCER'S NOTES

Check out our printable handouts which look at songs on the Rock & Pop 2018 syllabus, including notes on the artist, genre, production, composition and much more. trinityrock.com/practice-room

'Think about what you want to communicate when you perform. Some songs have a very clear narrative, while the meaning of others can be more ambiguous. You could write your own back-story to give yourself a clear idea of the mood and character of the song. Try including details such as location and what the characters look like. The more vivid the images that you conjure up are, the easier it will be to communicate the mood when you perform.' **Kate Proudlove**

'There is a wide selection of pieces with the own choice option too (Song 2), so it's great to see students really enjoying their songs. We can really tell when you like a song, as the intensity to communicate it and lose yourself in the enjoyment of playing it is easy to hear and see.' **Sally Martin Brown**

SESSION SKILLS

Here, the examiners give some tips on preparing for each of the session skills, improvising and playback:

'I would recommend students to research the styles used in the Rock & Pop improvisations - just putting in 'blues guitar' or 'reggae drums' into YouTube will bring up a wealth of material that you can use to practise with and learn from. As a teacher I recommend my students to think of the session skills almost like a fourth song: think about the amount of preparation you put into the songs and dedicate the same amount of time to the session skills!' **Matt Fisher**

'For playback, always look at the dynamics and articulation details in the 30 seconds prep time before the practice with the track. These can be missed and form part of the marks. Make sure you know to play AFTER the track example, not on top of it. Above all, keep going if you make an error as synchronisation is one of the areas marked.' **Sally Martin Brown**

'Something I have noticed recently is how the improvising task has really helped to develop an approach. Now I am seeing candidates really think about the sound they are going to use to bring out the style, the techniques associated with that genre and how a part can be developed each time it recurs through a song, so that it is not just the same thing repeated.' **Matt Fisher**

'For improvisation, remember that there are marks for variation and development. Use the Trinity Rock & Pop website, the session skills books and the vast number of examples on the Rock & Pop YouTube channel to get ideas. You can extend the range used on repeats and develop melodic and rhythmic ideas. Always observe the solo break if there is one, as it's a chance to show off like you would in a gig if in a band. Imagine you are interacting with the players on the track and try to enjoy yourself!' **Sally Martin Brown**

THE ROCK & POP WEBSITE

Visit our website at trinityrock.com to find out all you need to know about preparing for a Rock & Pop exam. You'll find information about the great songs you can choose from, our exam structure and mark scheme, how to enter for an exam and much more. You'll also find hundreds of support resources including videos and articles.

MAKING MISTAKES

All musicians make mistakes. What's important is the way you connect with music and your overall performance and so looking past mistakes is key, as our examiners will tell you:

'I would encourage those of you who find yourselves making errors in a song or the session skills to maintain focus, not prejudge your errors, and above all, to keep going! We can't evaluate silence, so however frustrated you feel when making a mistake, keep focused on the music and try to maintain your concentration. All musicians at all levels have made musical mistakes across their musical careers, but it's the recovery of a performance that demonstrates a good ear and a self-confidence in committing yourself to continue no matter what.' **Sally Martin Brown**

'I would much rather see somebody commit to the music (even taking risks, if it adds to the performance) and make mistakes, than a rendition which lacks the required energy.' **JJ Wheeler**

JUST BEFORE THE EXAM

Here, Sally Martin Brown provides suggestions of what to keep in mind on the day of an exam:

- ⚡ Don't be late! Set out with enough time to arrive 15 minutes before your exam time. Being late can make you more nervous, which is not a good mind-set before an exam.
- ⚡ Tune your instrument before you come in to the exam room! If you are not confident in this, you may want to bring someone with you to help you check before the exam. If something happens to your tuning during the exam, the examiner does have recorded tuning notes that you can use to retune the string(s).
- ⚡ Have your cables, amp etc. ready, and set up swiftly. You may have someone come in with you to help up to Grade 5. At the lower grades in particular, check that you know where the volume is on the amp if it's different from your one at home. At the higher grades where you may have a long piece, perhaps use two music stands with an extended copy of the music, so you don't have to page turn.
- ⚡ If you are a singer, prepare your voice before you come in. You may bring a bottle of water in with you. Check the mic stand height and know how to change the two common types of mic stand - the straight and the angled kind. A mic you are not used to can affect your sound, so really listen to the sound check to see if you want to change the mic or track volume. Some songs go from *pp* to *ff* so remember this when listening to the balance.
- ⚡ If sitting a keyboards exam, check the stool height, volume control and settings. You may need to adjust the keyboard volume against the backing track for a good balance.
- ⚡ For drums, always check the layout and get used to trying different kits before your exam, so a slightly different one doesn't faze you. You should play the kit to match the acoustic of the exam room, so bear this in mind when balancing your playing with the track in the sound check.

DEALING WITH NERVES

And last but not least, those dreaded nerves. They are however a natural part of taking an exam. Here are a few things that Ross Brennan suggests you can do to help control your nerves:

Deep breathing: Just a few long and slow deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth can put you at ease and slow your racing mind by providing your brain with more oxygen.

Eat a banana: Bananas are a musician's friend in combatting anxiety. Eating one half an hour or so before an exam can really help calm you down.

Think positive: Conjuring a happy memory or past experience is an effective way to distract the nervous part of your mind and can help in regaining focus on the task ahead.

Enjoy! Rather than thinking about a particularly tricky passage or section of the exam, if you allow yourself to enjoy every moment of your performance, your playing will communicate better with an audience, or in this case, the examiner.

ACCESS ALL AREAS...

These quotes have been taken from our **Meet the Examiners** articles. To find out more about the examiners and their experiences, and read more of their advice, visit the **Rock & Pop Practice Room**.

You'll also find a range of other support articles, videos and resources including:

- ⚡ **Producer's Notes:** Printable handouts which look at songs on the Rock & Pop 2018 syllabus.
- ⚡ **Rock & Pop Sessions:** Performances of Rock & Pop 2018 songs by the professionals.
- ⚡ **Demo videos:** Videos looking at specific skills and techniques.
- ⚡ **Improvisation articles:** Articles looking at how to approach improvising in different styles and genres, with example videos.

Visit trinityrock.com/practice-room

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