

Free Choice Pieces

Guide to selecting pieces and studies of a suitable standard

singing

The expected technical difficulty of pieces for Free Choice Repertoire will align to the general requirements of the technical elements of the syllabus for each grade. Teachers wishing to select suitable Free Choice pieces should therefore look at our technical requirements for each instrument at each grade to establish whether pieces reflect the range of technical demands demonstrated by the exercises (Sight Singing skills/Vaccai for example). Pieces and studies which are significantly easier (technically) than the technical exercises would not be suitable.

The range of rhythms suitable for each grade can be judged by viewing the 'Reading Skills' on the MTB Exams syllabuses (additional resources pages). Pieces or studies should demonstrate a rhythmic complexity equivalent to the Reading skills for that grade. The rhythms do not necessarily have to be the same but should demonstrate equivalent complexity.

An outline of the appropriate technical and expressive expectations at each grade are listed below. Pieces would not be expected to include all of these but should include a selection of them. For singing, the choice of pieces should offer the candidate the opportunity to display the technical and expressive expectations at each grade. If you are unsure whether your free choice pieces or studies meet our criteria, we recommend that you use our optional Approval Service. This service requires you to provide an image of the music along with the following information: instrument, grade, title, composer and the book in which it is published, if applicable, along with a short description of why you believe it meets the required standard. We are currently offering this service for free.

Level 1 – Grades 1-3

- Grade 1 – Songs with a range of an octave. Minimal leaps. Well supported by the accompaniment.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 2 – Range of 9th. Some leaps. Supported by the accompaniment most of the time. Greater expectation of gradation of tone.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values and dotted notes at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 3 – Range of 10th. mostly Independent of the accompaniment
Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising compound time signatures at a variety of tempi.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be basic and relatively short in length. Singers will be expected to show good breath control. Singers should also display a good basic level of dynamic range. Singers should be able to communicate with the audience using expression and clarity of diction.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is basic expectation of expression at this level. Performances should avoid awkwardness musically such as inappropriate emphasis of notes or breathing which distorts the phrasing or line. The use of some basic dynamic contrast is expected at this level such as piano/forte. More detailed dynamic contrast such as crescendo and diminuendo etc. is appropriate by grade 3 and will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Similarly, performances should display an awareness of articulation and phrasing at this level including such elements as correct legato and breathing in appropriate places. Although performances should show an increasing awareness of articulation moving from grades 1-3 such as the use of staccato, tenuto and accents, more detailed use of these will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

Level 2 – Grades 4-5

- Grade 4– Range of 11th. Completely independent of the accompaniment.
Developing demands on breath control/phrasing

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising dotted quaver rhythms at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 5– Range of 12th. Completely independent of the accompaniment. Greater demands of breath control/phrasing
Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising a variety of semi-quaver patterns at a variety of tempi

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be straightforward and of moderate length. Singers will be expected to display a strong, clear focused sound at all dynamics and clear articulation including paying full attention to the subtlety of articulation including staccato, tenuto and accents for example. They should show the ability to sing fluently and at an appropriate tempo with an established sense of shape and line. Singers should also display a good dynamic range and clarity of articulation. Singers should be able to communicate well with the audience using expression and clarity of diction.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a developing degree of expression at this level. Performances should include use of straightforward dynamic contrast including piano or pianissimo/forte or fortissimo/crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando etc. More detailed dynamic contrast such as staccato accents/semi staccato and a detailed/advanced understanding of phrasing etc. will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. However, performances should display correct articulation and overall phrasing at this level.

Level 3 – Grades 6-8

- Grade 6 Use of different languages. Developing level of technical demands on melisma/vocal control/breath control/expression/register
Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including swung rhythms at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 7– Chromatic passages. High level of technical demands on melisma/vocal control/breath control/expression/register
Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including syncopation, ties and triplets at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 8 - High level of technical demands/skill required in terms of melisma/vocal control/breath control/phrasing/expression/register
Comfortable with complex rhythmic patterns including changing time signatures, irregular time signatures, irregular subdivisions of beats (e.g. quintuplets) at a variety of tempi.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be complex and full length concert items Singers will be expected to display a strong, clear, focused, refined and nuanced sound at all dynamics and in all ranges with a variety of tone colours as appropriate to the demands of the music They should show the ability to sing fluently and at an appropriate tempo with a detailed sense of shape and line. Singers should also display a high level of dynamic range and clarity of articulation.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a wide range of expression at this level. Performances should include use of a full range of dynamic contrast from pianissimo to fortissimo and utilising crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando to enhance the performance and create contrast and interest as appropriate etc. There is an expectation of an understanding of the complex stylistic demands of music such as baroque/jazz etc. Correct/appropriate articulation and phrasing is expected at this level.

Excellent communication with the audience