

General Musicianship Questions

Each Rockschooll grade exam ends with five questions asked by the examiner. The examiner will ask you these questions using a piece played by you as a starting point. In Grades 1-6, you will be asked questions in two main areas: (i) music notation and (ii) knowledge of the bass (including amplification). Grades 7 & 8 will include a third category of question concerning history and style.

Here are some sample questions that are typically asked by Rockschooll's examiners grade by grade, along with sample answers typically given to examiners by candidates. As a general rule, in Grades 1-3, examiners will ask candidates four questions on the music notation and one instrument question. In Grades 4-6 the instrument knowledge questions may also cover bass amplification and effects. In Grades 7 & 8 you can expect questions to cover all three categories of notation, style and instrument knowledge. Please note that these are indicative questions and that some questions may be asked in more than one grade.

Grade 1

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Fake Tortoise', page 4.

Q: What does 4/4 mean?

A: Four quarter (crotchet) notes in a bar

Q: How many beats is the first note worth?

A: Two beats

Q: What is the pitch of the first note?

A: E

Q: What is the difference between a major and a minor chord?

A: A major chord sounds 'happy' and a minor chord sounds 'sad' OR

A: A major chord has a major third and a minor chord has a minor third

Instrumental question:

Q: Where is/are the nut/pick-ups/neck/frets/controls on your bass?

Q: What are the open notes of the bass?

A: The notes are E, A, D & G

Grade 2

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'M & C's Tune', page 6.

Q: what do the two flats at the beginning of the piece mean?

A: It is the key signature

Q: What does '*f*' mean?

A: Loud

Q: What value is the rest in the first bar?

A: Quarter (crotchet) note rest

Q: What do these signs mean in bars 5 and 8?

A: Repeat marks

Q: How many beats does the note in bar two of the final line last for?

A: Four beats

Instrument question:

Q: Can you name two bass makes for me?

A: Fender and Gibson

Grade 3

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Pipeline', pages 10-11.

Q: What do the two sets of symbols at the beginning of the first bar refer to?

A: The bass clef and the key signature

Q: What do 'p' and 'f' mean?

A: Quiet and loud (*piano* and *forte*)

Q: What does the mark over the second beat in bar 1, line 2 mean?

A: It is a hammer on or slur marking

Q: What does the dot above a note mean?

A: Play the note short or *staccato*

Instrument question:

Q: What do the volume and tone controls do?

A: The volume makes the sound louder or softer and the tone control makes the sound have more treble or more bass, depending on the setting

Grade 4

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Let it Go', pages 12-13.

Q: What does the symbol underneath the note in bar 1 mean?

A: This is an accent marking

Q: What do the markings '*sfz*' mean?

A: Suddenly loud and then quieter, like an accent

Q: What does a line connecting two notes signify?

A: These are tied notes. You play the first note and hold it on for the value of the second note as well

Q: Explain what you do at the D.C. al Coda marking?

A: At this point you return to the beginning and play until you see the Coda sign and then skip to the Coda

Instrument question:

Q: Should you want to get distortion from the amp, how would you go about it?

A: Turn down the volume, turn up the gain

Grade 5

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'All Funked Up', pages 10-11.

Q: What do 'T' and 'P' in bar 3 mean?

A: Thumb (Slap) and Pop

Q: What is the key signature of this piece?

A: Three sharps: F#, C#, G#: A major or F# minor

Q: How is an F# minor 7th chord constructed?

A: F#, A, C# and E

Q: What do you do when you see a notehead is in the form of a cross?

A: The note is muted

Instrument question:

Q: How would you tune your bass without using a tuner?

A: Tune to the fifth fret or use harmonics

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Grade 6

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Funkus Regulus', pages 7-9.

Q: This piece has two time signatures, 4/4 and 7/8. What does this mean?

A: Four quarter (crotchet) notes to a bar and seven eighth (quaver) notes to a bar

Q: What are the values of the notes and rests on beats 3 & 4 of bar 1 in line 2?

A: A sixteenth note rest, dotted eighth note tied to a sixteenth note, sixteenth note rest and an eighth note

Q: What are the pitch names of the first two notes?

A: B and D#

Q: How is a G major 7th chord constructed?

A: The notes are: G, B, D and F#

Instrument question:

Q: What are the main technical differences between playing a fretted and fretless bass?

A: On a fretted bass, the frets divide the fingerboard into semitone divisions. Fretless basses have a distinct sound because the absence of frets means the strings are pressed down directly onto the fretboard wood. This a particular sound akin to that of a double bass. The fretless bass also allows players to use expressive techniques such as glissando, vibrato and microtonal intonations.

Grade 7

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Chew Boom', pages 10-12.

Q: How are notes with diamond-shaped heads played?

A: As harmonics

Q: What types of harmonics are being used in line 3? And how do you play these?

A: Natural harmonics

Q: The key signature has two sharps. What mixolydian mode has the same two sharps?

A: The mode is A mixolydian

Q: What are the notes of the mode A mixolydian?

A: A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G and A

Historical question:

Q: Name a famous bassplayer and tell me something about his style:

A: Jaco Pastorius was an American musician and songwriter widely acknowledged as a virtuoso of the fretless bass. His playing style was renowned for dazzling solos and driving groove lines.

Grade 8

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Some You Win', pages 16-17.

Q: How is a minor 9th chord constructed?

A: Root note, minor 3rd, perfect 5th, minor 7th and 9th

Q: Explain the techniques used in bar 2

A: One note is accented (played louder to highlight it), another is muted (the sound is percussive because the finger is not pressing on the finger board fully) and vibrato, which is a rapid oscillation of the string around one note without actually bending it

Q: How is an F# Alt chord made up?

A: F#, A, C natural and E

Q: What are the notes that make up a diminished scale beginning on B?

A: B, C, D, E^b, F, G^b, A^b, A and B

Q: Tell me about jazz-funk as a style

A: Jazz-funk is a sub genre of jazz music characterised by a strong back-beat and electrified sounds. It is mostly an American genre, where it was popular in the 1970s and early 1980s but British bands were also influenced by it as well. Herbie Hancock, Stanley Clarke, The Jazz Funk Collective and Level 42 are examples of artists and bands that working the genre.