

PIANO – Level 4

Overview

Candidates are free to choose their piano repertoire from any popular genre*. RSL recognises that some contemporary piano music would not necessarily stretch candidates' techniques to the required Level 4. Therefore, in addition to pre-existing works/styles which meet the criteria in original form, candidates are encouraged to arrange, compose, transcribe or embellish pre existing material to bring up to a level equating to Level 4, in accordance with the criteria set out below.

* Popular genres would in general terms exclude any works that were predominantly classical in approach. There are of course some popular works which draw on classical influence. These would still be regarded as fit for purpose in the popular genre, and therefore suitable for presentation in the RSL diplomas.

All repertoire presented needs to be fully notated.

As a guide, here are some examples of the types of free choice repertoire candidates can prepare. These are by no means exhaustive.

- Piano arrangements of pre-composed Rock or Pop pieces, encompassing the below criteria.
- A notated transcription of a solo Jazz piano concert recording.
- Compositions written by the candidate, either incorporated within a programme of existing works, or a series of compositions comprising a full original programme, incorporating thematic unity and a cohesion with the criteria stipulated below.
- Piano reductions of Film scores, or Musical Theatre.
- Reharmonisation arrangements i.e. taking a series of pop tunes and arranging for Jazz piano.

Candidates are also advised to research Grade 8 pieces/free choice piece criteria on which to graduate to Level 4 content. Presentation of Grade 8 material at Level 4 is acceptable but would not be sufficient in content unless enhanced.

For additional context, it is worth noting Level 4 equates in standard to the first year of a Music Performance Degree course.

Repertoire Components

There are three components to the performance criteria at Level 4. They are all compulsory.

Advanced Technical Criteria

Candidates are required to perform for **11-15 minutes** in order to demonstrate the advanced technical skills and requirements below. Any number of pieces can be performed so long they remain within this time range. The skills do not need to be demonstrated in each piece, so long as they are demonstrated overall.

Advanced Development Criteria

Candidates are required to perform two additional pieces, each **3-5 minutes long**, to include extended line development for a *minimum of 24 bars* within each piece.

Advanced Solo Criteria

Candidates are required to perform one further piece, **3-5 minutes long**, to include a solo for a *minimum of 24 bars*.

Criteria Requirements

The following requirements are compulsory when compiling a Level 4 Piano programme:

- 1) Numerous varied, mixed and an obviously diverse range of subdivisions incorporating regular syncopation and complex rhythmic values. These will comprise a combination of derivatives such as duplet, triplet, quadruplet, quintuplet, sextuplet, groupings up to 1/32 notes, all with associated rests.
- 2) Predominance of simple, compound and a minimum of three odd time signatures.
- 3) Numerous varied diatonic chords and voicings, up to 9ths, from modes of the major, natural, melodic and harmonic minor scales.
- 4) Clear demonstration of melodic knowledge and understanding, using scales and modes in application and relating to the harmony as stipulated above.

Within this compulsory framework, candidates must demonstrate and include *where stylistically appropriate* a predominance of the following elements:

General

- Right hand and left hand fingering patterns
- Legato fingering
- Dexterity and independence of right and left hands
- Gradation/control of tone and dynamics, of articulation and phrasing.
- Sustain pedalling, una corda pedalling, sostenuto pedalling, half pedaling.
- Cross hand techniques
- Contrapuntal rhythms between right and left hands
- Control over intervallic leaps
- Fine control over rhythmic feel, straight, degrees of swing and rubato time.
- Wide dynamic range: ppp-fff, including numerous changes over the programme.

Accompaniment

- Ostinato bass, walking bass or similar
- Arpeggiation
- Stride accompaniment patterns
- Syncopated bass lines and bass/chord patterns
- Full chords, spread chords and a comprehensive understanding of suitable voicings

Lead

- Rapid repeated note fingering
- Trills, 'slip' notes, stylistically appropriate ornamentation
- Lead lines or melodies with/without incorporation of supportive chord tones
- Melodic content played in octaves, quartile harmony
- Arpeggiation
- Intervallic fingering
- Advanced uses of chord voicing, inversions, open voicing, voicing chords across two hands.

Focus on a small number of criteria or a single technique would be acceptable in a single piece, but obvious demonstration of a wide combination of the criteria shown is required over the course of the whole programme.

Additional techniques/devices would also be acceptable, but need to be in addition to the above.

Backing Track and Performing Unaccompanied

Technical

Candidates must perform the technical pieces to a backing track.

Own accompaniment/unaccompanied or a cappella pieces would be acceptable instead of the backing track, up to five minutes maximum.

Development

Candidates must perform both development pieces, including the development part itself within the pieces, to a backing track.

Solo

Candidates must perform the solo piece to a backing track.

The solo part itself within the piece may be unaccompanied.

Development and Soloing

- The development and solo parts need to incorporate a predominance of the Advanced Technical content above.
- The remainder of the piece does not need to be Level 4. This maximises the repertoire choice/theme possibilities, and offers the opportunity for contrast/space on which to develop, shape and intensify the personalised content. All such content can be prepared in advance, but needs to be individually constructed.
- The development and solo parts would need to be in keeping with the style of the pieces chosen and will require heightened rhythmic awareness, absolute accuracy and a very high degree of appropriate/stylistic communication of any simpler material.
- Candidates are free to choose where to play the development and solo parts. However, in all cases, it needs to be a continuous number of bars, not a number of smaller bars, which in total add up to the stipulated total number.
- Both the development and solo parts are expected to comprise a demonstration of harmony, melody, phrasing, using appropriate advanced scales, modes, arpeggios, rhythms, groupings, appropriate expression and ornamental devices.
- For the development section the role is to develop as an accompanist e.g. bass line development, whereas during the solo section the role is that of the soloist e.g. lyrical, melodic phrases.

Tempo

There are no tempo requirements stipulated. Decisions related to speed need to ensure stylistic and musical appropriateness in achieving the criteria above at Level 4.