AS 2: Composing
Option B: Composition with Technology Task
Written Commentary

Centre Name:		Centre Number:	7	1			
Candidate Name:		Candidate Number:					
Composition Title:	Specimen Assessment Exemplar – Stimulus 1	Composition Length:	2 mins 24 sec				

There is a maximum word limit of **1000 words** for the commentary. You must complete the commentary using this pro forma. You should make reference to examples from the music is Sections 2, 3 and 4.

Section 1: intentions, chosen style and working methods

I composed for string quartet as I play the cello. I familiarised myself with the stimulus, and spent some time choosing chords. I listened to Mozart's String Quartet K. 464 movt.3 and Beethoven's String Quartet No. 14 movt. 4. These inspired me to write in Theme and Variations form, which allowed me to present the stimulus material in full but also to develop the melody, texture and timbre of the music. I worked on each section individually, and after I was happy with each one, I looked at how I could link the material together so that the music flowed seamlessly from one idea to the next.

Section 2: creation, development and organisation of ideas based on a stimulus

My piece opens with a full statement of the stimulus. Violin I plays the melody, whilst the cello provides the bass line and violin II /viola fill out the inner harmonies. The tempo is 110 bpm and the strings play legato.

A two bar transition leads to the first variation, and the timbre changes to pizzicato. To emphasise this change, the accompaniment becomes a quaver oscillating figure, and the texture thins with only one melodic instrument and one accompanying instrument at a time. The melody is passed around the ensemble.

There is a ritardando, with the quartet returning to arco for the second variation. The melody is once again with violin I, but at a higher register, and it is decorated. The accompaniment remains in quavers but contains repeated staccato notes. This tutti variation helps to build intensity.

A pause, and a four bar transition passage is followed by variation three, with a contrasting sinister, sombre mood. The viola takes the melody in a lower register and forte dynamics. The melody uses fragments of the stimulus from bars 3 and 15, and develops/extends the material. This is accompanied by a pedal note on cello, and an ascending scalic quaver ostinato figure in violin II. Violin I does not play in this variation, and the reduced instrumentation helps to thin the texture therefore making the melody stand out clearly.

A final two bar link with a ritardando and pause leads to the last variation, which is a return to the original first 8 bars of the stimulus in violin I along with the original tempo. The accompaniment is legato like the original theme, but this time the harmonies are more complex.

Section 3: harmonic handling

The tonic key is G major with a brief reference to D major. I harmonised the theme using primary chords of G, C and D in root position. At the end of bar 7, I added a passing note in order to create a perfect cadence of IV/V7/I for the second phrase of music. For the final cadence of the theme I used II/V7/I.

The two bar link provides a modulation into variation 1. I used the chords G, E, A7, D – the E chord acts as a pivot to the new dominant key of D major.

The first variation bass line is an oscillating pizzicato quaver figuration using the tonic and dominant of each chord.

There is a tonal shift back into the tonic key of G major for a clear, precise transition between the first and second variations. This is emphasised with an upbeat into the new variation with a repeated quaver tonic G major chord.

The second variation is followed by a four bar transition passage, preparing for the new key of the relative E minor for the third variation. The chords used for this modulation are G, D, B, Em. The B chord acts as a pivot chord.

The new melody for variation 3 is based around bars 3 and 15 of the stimulus, and is accompanied by a pedal note in the cello part using the tonic and dominant notes of E minor – E and B. The violin II is playing an ascending scalic ostinato, based on the first four notes of the scale of E harmonic minor, E, F♯, G, A.

The two bars after the third variation prepare for the return of the tonic key of G major for the final statement of the stimulus, using the chord of VI (Em) as a pivot.

The final statement uses much more complex harmony. The first bar is harmonised using the tonic chord of G (I). Bar 2 uses Am in first inversion (IIb) passing to D (V). Bar 3 returns to Am first inversion (IIb) then C maj 7 (IVM7). The first phrase is completed with an imperfect cadence ending with D (V). The new phrase at bar 5 returns to the tonic G (I) chord, bar 6 then Am first inversion (IIb) and D (V). Bar 7 starts with a chord of Am first inversion (IIb); beat 3 is harmonised using C maj 7 (IVM7) and beat 4 with dominant 7th chord of D as part of the perfect cadence leading to the tonic chord of G major (I) for the close of the second phrase in bar 8.

Section 4: use and control of technological resources including texture and timbre

I used Logic Pro X.

I panned my strings to create an authentic sound, with violin I at 9 o'clock, violin II at 11 o'clock, viola at 1 o'clock and cello at 3 o'clock. This particularly enhanced the impact of variation 1, where the melody was passed around the ensemble.

I used the reverb pre-sets to create the sound of a quartet playing in a room, typical to that of background music at a small function.

I perfected the quality of the arrangement by quantising each of my parts individually and section by section depending on the note values being used, e.g. the oscillating quaver accompaniment of variation 1 was quantised to 1/8.

I corrected wrong notes and note lengths using piano roll, e.g. at the end of the piece I wanted each instrument to finish at precisely the same moment.

I used the velocity tool to enhance the dramatic attack of the viola melody and create a thicker texture in variation 3.

The instruments were balanced using hyperdraw, ensuring that the melody could be clearly heard above the accompaniment parts, e.g. in the theme at the very beginning, violin 1 was set to +4 db whilst the rest of the instruments had negative values.

Tempo list editor was used to set the tempo of each of the variations and also to create accelerandos (e.g. 0"37) and rallentandos (e.g. 1"09) in links between variations. I also used tempo list editor to create pauses (1"33 and 2"06).

I created the timbral effects of legato, staccato and pizzicato by using the software to preset instrument sounds for each section of the music.