The ABRSM Syllabus: an analysis of the pieces up to Grade 8 in fifteen orchestral instruments on July 10th 2020

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This document is a summary of the initial findings from a research project into the inclusiveness of the ABRSM syllabus from the Grade 1 though to Grade 8 for 15 instruments (piano, violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn, trumpet, trombone, bass trombone, tuba, harp). For some instruments an Initial Grade has been introduced and these pieces were included in the study. The instruments included are:

Piano – 2021/2022 syllabus
Violin/Viola/Cello/Double bass – 2020-2023 syllabus
Flute/Oboe/Clarinet/Bassoon – 2018-2021 syllabus
Trumpet/Trombone – 2017-2021
French horn/Tuba – 2013-2021
Bass trombone – 2010-2021
Harp – 2019 onwards

Pieces without a named composer (e.g. Trad. Scottish) were not included. The arrangers of pieces labelled 'Trad' were not included. In total, 3166 individual pieces were analysed. The composer of each piece was analysed using the following criteria:

- white / non-white
- Male / female
- African Heritage (AH)

The non-white figure included African Heritage (AH) composers, but AH composers also had their own count in the data. The AH category included any composer with some African, Afro American, or Afro Caribbean heritage including mixed heritage composers

Four analyses relating to white/non-white composers are discussed here:

1. All 3166 pieces from all grades
2. All 1251 pieces from grades 6 to 8 only
3. Pieces by living composers (1126 pieces)
4. Pieces by living composers from grades 6 to 8 only (289 pieces)

The reason for analyses 3 and 4 is to look at how things are today – when it would be fair to expect an inclusive and diverse representation. Analyses 2 and 4 represent pieces that from the more advanced repertoire that might be considered more serious and complex than in the earlier grades.

The Key Findings:

1. White / non-white / AH composers (all pieces)

All 3166 pieces

98.8% of the pieces were composed by white composers

1.2% of the pieces were composed by non-white composers (37 pieces)

Less than 0.4% were composed by African Heritage composers (14 pieces)

All 1251 pieces in Grades 6 to 8

99.4% of the pieces were composed by white composers

0.6% of the pieces were composed by non-white composers (5 pieces)

Less than 0.2% were composed by African Heritage composers (2 pieces)

2. White / non-white / AH composers (living composers only)

All 1126 pieces

98.6% of the pieces were composed by white composers (1110 pieces)

1.4% of the pieces were composed by non-white composers (16 pieces)

Less than 0.1% were composed by African Heritage composers (1 piece)

All 289 pieces in Grades 6 to 8

97.9% of the pieces were composed by white composers (283 pieces)

2.1% of the pieces were composed by non-white composers (6 pieces)

None were composed by African Heritage composers (0 pieces)

3. The 14 pieces by African Heritage Composers

1. Scot Joplin

7 pieces (50% by AH composers) were ragtime pieces by Scott Joplin

2. The other 7 composers were:

Miles Davis

Duke Ellington

Fats Waller

Joe Garland

James P Johnson

Percy Mayfield

Philip Herbert

Of these 7 composers, only Philip Herbert (who has an oboe piece on the Grade 5 syllabus) might be considered primarily as a classical music composer. Superb musicians as the others are, their primary genres were either jazz, big band, rhythm and blues, etc. Music by African Heritage composers then, in the eyes of the ABRSM, is mostly ragtime, or derived from non-classical genres.

One 'Trad' piece *(Trad. Ewe (Ghanaian) Tu tu Gbovi, arr. Chapman Nyaho)* arranged by an African Heritage composer on the Grade 1 Piano syllabus was not included in the analysis (see above).

The following pages contain copies of the data tables in case anyone wishes to examine them further.

Table 1: All pieces from all eras in current ABRSM syllabus for the fifteen instrument surveyed July 2020																		
Total pieces	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percent	mean
Male	197	197	204	203	207	212	209	217	211	178	181	189	54	194	185	2837	89.61%	189.13
Female	58	34	32	34.5	30.5	20	17	10	14	13	10	3	0	1	52	329	10.39%	21.93
White	249	228	234	236	231	230	225	224	224	191	189	191	54	194	229	3129	98.83%	208.60
BME	6	3	2	1	6	2	1	3	1	0	2	1	0	1	8	37	1.17%	2.47
AH	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	3	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	14	0.44%	0.93
Total	255	231	236	237	237	232	226	227	225	191	191	192	54	195	237	3166	100.00%	211.07
Total gr scores	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total		
Male	879	863	908	912	988	978	966	1030	1004	843	853	885	378	888	952	13326.8	92.78%	888.45
Female	186	134	104	107	52.5	78	43	26	33	36	29	11	0	3	195	1037	7.22%	69.13
White	1033	982	1006	1018	1032	1051	1004	1042	1032	879	874	891	378	885	1122	14227.8	99.05%	948.52
BME	32	16	6	1	9	5	5	14	5	0	8	5	0	6	24	136	0.95%	9.07
AH	0	7	5	0	5	5	5	14	5	0	8	5	0	0	0	59	0.41%	3.93
Total	1065	998	1012	1019	1041	1056	1009	1056	1037	879	882	896	378	891	1146	14363.8	100.00%	957.58
Composers	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total		
Male	117	136	121	138	153	124	104	130	116	87	90	99	39	95	73.5	1621.5	90.26%	108.10
Female	43	22.5	17.5	16.5	11	11	7	6	8	3	5	2	0	1	21.5	175	9.74%	11.67
White	155	156	136	154	160	133	110	133	123	90	94	100	39	95	94	1770.5	98.55%	118.03
BME	5	3	2	1	4	2	1	3	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	26	1.45%	1.73
AH	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	3	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	13	0.72%	0.87
Total	160	159	138	155	164	135	111	136	124	90	95	101	39	96	95	1796.5	100.00%	119.77
Total gr 6-8 pc	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total		
Male	74	75	76	80	87	85	85	89	87	75	75	77	54	75	89	1183	94.56%	78.87
Female	15	12	9	8	1	4	2	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	13	68	5.44%	4.53
White	85	85	85	88	88	89	87	90	88	75	76	78	54	74	101	1243	99.36%	82.87
BME	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	8	0.64%	0.53
AH	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0.16%	0.13
Total	89	87	85	88	88	89	87	90	88	75	76	78	54	75	102	1251	100.00%	83.40
Total gr 6-8 gr s	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total		
Male	516	516	535	622	610	584	598	623	608	526	527	534	378	527	636	8340	94.58%	556.00
Female	106	84	61	58	6	30	13	7	7	0	6	8	0	0	92	478	5.42%	31.87
White	594	585	596	680	616	614	611	630	615	526	533	542	378	521	721	8762	99.36%	584.13
BME	28	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	7	56	0.64%	3.73
AH	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	13	0.15%	0.87
Total	622	600	596	680	616	614	611	630	615	526	533	542	378	527	728	8818	100.00%	587.87
																0		
Total gr 6-8 cor	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	vc	total		
Male	55	27	52	62	69	63	58	65	57	43	49	54	39	53	50	796	93.98%	53.07
Female	15	3	8	8	1	4	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	7	51	6.02%	3.40
White	66	30	60	70	70	67	59	66	58	43	50	55	39	52	56	841	99.29%	56.07
BME	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6	0.71%	0.40
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.12%	0.07
Total	70	30	60	70	70	67	59	66	58	43	50	55	39	53	57	847	100.00%	56.47

Table 2: Pieces by living composers in current ABRSM syllabus for the fifteen instrument surveyed July 2020

Total pieces	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percentage	mean
Male	34	31	42	38.5	39.5	72	59	77	54	84	88	98	21	115	31	884	78.51%	58.9
Female	39	24	23	24.5	18.5	19	16	10	14	13	10	2	0	1	27	241	21.40%	16.1
White	67	54	65	63	58	91	75	87	68	97	98	100	21	116	50	1110	98.58%	74.0
BME	6	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	16	1.42%	1.1
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.09%	0.1
Total	73	55	65	63	58	91	76	87	68	97	98	100	21	116	58	1126	100.00%	75.1

Total gr scores	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percentage	mean
Male	111	72.25	109.3	105.8	181	293	203	340	232	325	337	405	146	467	126.5	3453.75	83.96%	230.3
Female	114.5	69.25	50.75	49	31	71	42	26	33	36	29	3	0	3	102.5	660	16.04%	44.0
White	193.5	133.5	160	154.8	212	364	240	366	265	361	366	408	140	470	205	4038.75	98.18%	269.3
BME	32	8	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	69	1.68%	4.6
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.12%	0.3
Total	225.5	141.5	160	154.8	212	364	245	366	265	361	366	408	146	470	229	4113.75	100.00%	274.3

Total composers	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percentage	mean
Male	23	16	19.5	18	31.5	35	21	33	24	28	32	36	13	44	11.5	385.5	77.18%	25.7
Female	26	14.5	10.5	8.5	5	10	6	6	8	3	5	1	0	1	9.5	114	22.82%	7.6
White	44	29.5	30	26.5	36.5	45	26	39	32	31	37	37	13	45	20	491.5	98.40%	32.8
BME	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	1.60%	0.5
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.20%	0.1
Total	49	30.5	30	26.5	36.5	45	27	39	32	31	37	37	13	45	21	499.5	100.00%	33.3

Total gr 6-8 pc	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percentage	mean
Male	8	4	7	7	14	21	14	25	19	23	22	28	21	34	9	256	88.58%	17.1
Female	8	4	3	2	0	3	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	8	33	11.42%	2.2
White	12	7	10	9	14	24	16	26	20	23	23	28	21	34	16	283	97.92%	18.9
BME	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	2.08%	0.4
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.0
Total	16	8	10	9	14	24	16	26	20	23	23	28	21	34	17	289	100.00%	19.3

Total gr 6-8 gr sc	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percentage	mean
Male	56	28	49	50	98	145	97	171	125	156	154	195	146	240	65	1775	88.57%	118.3
Female	54	29	20	13	0	23	13	7	7	0	6	0	0	0	57	229	11.43%	15.3
White	82	49	69	63	98	168	110	178	132	156	160	195	146	240	115	1961	97.85%	130.7
BME	28	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	43	2.15%	2.9
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.0
Total	110	57	69	63	98	168	110	178	132	156	160	195	146	240	122	2004	100.00%	133.6

Total gr 6-8 comp	pno	vln	vla	vc	db	fl	ob	cl	bas	hrn	trp	trb	btrb	tba	hrp	total	percentage	mean
Male	7	4	5	5	12	16	8	14	13	11	11	19	13	24	6	168	86.15%	11.2
Female	8	4	3	2	0	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	27	13.85%	1.8
White	11	7	8	7	12	19	9	15	14	11	12	19	13	24	8	189	96.92%	12.6
BME	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	3.08%	0.4
AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%	0.0
Total	15	8	8	7	12	19	9	15	14	11	12	19	13	24	9	195	100.00%	13.0