



2013 Music Style and Composition GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2013 Music Style and Composition examination consisted of two sections worth a total of 100 marks. Both sections were compulsory. The format of the examination followed the guidelines published in the examination specifications. The style of the questions was consistent with the published sample assessment material.

In Section A of the examination most students demonstrated a range of effective strategies for aurally analysing music. The best students were able to use relevant music terminology to identify and describe the action of the elements of music and compositional devices in the excerpts presented. Less capable students again relied on metaphor and tended to make general assertions about what they were hearing, rather than focusing on specific aspects of the excerpts. Some students struggled to effectively distinguish between elements of music. For example, when describing rhythm they listed features that are properly the domain of melody; when describing structure, some students instead spoke about texture. While the elements of music do overlap, and are, in reality, an attempt to capture various dimensions of a piece of music, they are overtly defined in the study design for Music Style and Composition. As such, students who did not focus their answers on the particular issues highlighted by a question could not score highly in that question.

In Section B of the examination, many students demonstrated a good knowledge of the contextual issues that underpinned their chosen works, as well as detailed information related to the operation of compositional devices and elements of music. Some students struggled to properly describe how a work was representative of a music style. A number of students contextualised style in terms of the actions and choices of a composer, without reference to a wider context. The study design, and the broader academic discipline that surrounds the study of music, define style by the way the elements of music are treated.

Style can be seen in operation through an era or a period, a geographical area, a cluster of performers working in a similar context or can be seen in terms of the output of a particular composer. It is this last issue that some students struggled with. Students who defined style in terms of a composer’s personal style sometimes used this as a way of actually neglecting issues related to style.

A personal style is typically observed by identifying how multiple works in a composer’s output display similar treatments of the elements of music. It cannot be used as a mechanism to claim that a particular composer’s output sits outside broader stylistic considerations. A composer may display a range of styles throughout their creative life. A composer may also produce works that can be understood as representing a transition between, or a fusing of two styles; however, no composer’s output can be considered exclusively in terms of a personal style. In order to describe ways in which works chosen for study in Section B of the examination are representative of particular music styles, students must demonstrate knowledge that goes beyond the isolated actions of a composer and look to a broader context.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding errors resulting in a total less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Section A consisted of five questions and was worth 55 marks. An audio CD lasting 57 minutes and 36 seconds accompanied this section of the examination.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	0	0	3	3	8	10	12	13	16	20	12	4	8.3

Students performed well in this question, with the majority scoring nine or higher out of a possible 12 marks. The best responses overtly linked the notion of ‘interest’ to the elements of music and/or compositional devices, with specific points in the music used as evidence of this link. Less capable students tended to write unfocused listening narratives of the work. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following issues.

- A hemiola in the first flourish worked to capture the audience’s attention.
- An ‘off-beat’ syncopated figure engaged listeners by introducing an element of uncertainty in an otherwise motoric rhythm. The constant syncopation in the percussion used in the work added to this effect.

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- Instrumentation and tone colour worked to create interest via constant change. One instrumental group never came to the fore for more than one structural unit at a time (typically a four-bar section).
- The primary motive was repeated, but featured an accompaniment that changed creating, for example, contrary motion between the low and high instruments.
- A variety of countermelodies were used; countermelodies were introduced early and integrated into the texture as the piece progressed.
- While the repetition of a tonal and functional harmonic progression worked to build predictability, the incorporation of a significant degree of dissonance, particularly in the penultimate iteration of the progression works to create interest.
- While the dynamics of the piece were generally loud – which in itself functioned to ‘demand’ the attention of the audience – a crescendo towards the conclusion of the piece also worked to create interest.
- The texture of the music featured a constant interplay of contrapuntal ideas sitting over a homophonic texture, a device that added complexity to the work, and thus the potential for interest.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	0	2	13	17	28	40	3.9

Introduction – four equal-length structural units with the following phrase structure: A; A (percussion introduced); B; B

Verse – four equal-length structural units with the following phrase structure: B; B; B; B

Chorus – four equal-length structural units with the following phrase structure: C; C¹; C¹; C¹

Bridge – two equal-length structural units with the following phrase structure: D; D

Verse – four equal-length structural units with the following phrase structure: B; B; B; B

Chorus – four equal-length structural units with the following phrase structure: C; C¹; C¹; C¹

Students once again displayed an excellent capacity to identify structure, with many students receiving full marks for this question. The best students were able to describe more than just macro structural issues and featured descriptions of issues related to phrase structure and symmetry. Less capable students tended to feature irrelevant information not related to the structure of the excerpt.

Students did not need to use terminology such as ‘verse’ or ‘chorus’ in order to achieve full marks, but did need to create a description of these ideas that was commensurate with this terminology.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	0	2	5	6	9	15	20	19	16	8	6.9

This question required students to describe how the lead singer was accompanied throughout the excerpt. The best responses included detailed descriptions of features such as the action of various layers of sound, the harmony and tonality of the excerpt, and the action of other elements such as rhythm or articulation.

Less capable students constructed answers that did not provide adequate detail to demonstrate skills in aural analysis. For example, general observations related to the syllabic vocalisations of the sampled choir were not, of themselves, adequate to score highly in this question. Students did not need to comment on the fact that the excerpt referenced the composer Bach, but were also not penalised for doing so. Answers included but were not limited to the following issues.

- A description of the rhythm of the choral accompaniment, including knowledge of the progression.
 1. Bach sample (intro): I – I6/4 – V – V7 – I (with appoggiatura) – I – II6 (with appoggiatura) – VII7/V (applied dominant) – I6/4 – V
 2. oscillating tonic and dominant under verse
 3. circle of fifths in chorus, with a cadence that led back to tonic

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- Narrative description of changing instrumentation throughout the excerpt (choir, drums, other percussion including the triangle; sampled strumming instrument in the chorus).
- Narrative description of texture – ostinato; juxtaposition of choir with contemporary pop ensemble.
- Articulation – choir vocalisations; contrast with children’s voices in bridge.
- Descriptions of other elements under the lead singer such as the simple time rhythm and the action of the two repeated rhythmic riffs.

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	1	6	4	14	15	24	23	12	5.6

This question featured a brief musical excerpt that required students to speak directly to various elements of music. The first part of the question focused on the development of melody and required students to construct a discussion around this element. The best responses examined melody in detail in both the violin and piano parts and used discipline-specific terminology to support discussion. The less capable students tended to lack the vocabulary to discuss issues of melody. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following issues.

- The violin line featured a repetition of a phrase characterised by a descending melodic contour.
- This contour consisted of an arpeggio followed by a repeated note that ended in a trill.
- This figure was developed via a melodic sequence.
- Both parts featured short, clearly defined and punctuated phrases.
- The second section of the excerpt featured repeated notes followed by a step-wise ascent.
- The piano and violin featured a melodic unison in the B section, but employed a call and response interplay in first section.
- The length of phrases became extended as the excerpt progressed.
- An octatonic scale form was employed in parts.
- The violin line included a range of filigree including flourishes and ornamentation.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	6	18	35	41	3.1

This question required students to describe the dynamics of the excerpt and was well answered, with the majority of the cohort achieving three or four out of a possible four marks. Many students effectively used a diagram to map the action of the dynamic level through the excerpt using a time-series graph (with time as the *x*-axis and dynamic level as the *y*-axis). The best responses included a description of the dynamics of both instruments featured in the excerpt. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following issues.

- Terraced dynamics in the first section of excerpt.
- A continuous crescendo was used in the second section.
- There was a tendency for dynamics to increase as pitch and tessitura went higher.
- The dynamics worked to create a dramatic profile for the excerpt.
- The excerpt began ‘mp’ and as the pitch rose there was a crescendo.
- When the violin played a lower-pitched melody, the dynamics decreased to ‘pp’ and again crescendo to ‘f’ as the melodic line rose. This was especially evident in the piano part, which supported the melody and played ‘answering’ descending passages.
- The dynamics were integral to building the atmosphere of the piece, and helped support the climax at the end of the excerpt.

Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	10	32	34	21	2.6

This question functioned as a discriminator for Section A, with students required to describe the use of articulation in excerpt. Full marks were reserved for students who had an awareness of the music terminology used to describe articulation. As such, students who relied solely on metaphor performed less well in this question. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following issues.

- The violin part featured a consistent accent on the first note of the triplet figure in the first section of the excerpt.
- Staccato notes were regularly used in the piano accompaniment.

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- The excerpt featured a contrast in articulation between the repeated notes of the violin and the trill that followed.
- The bowing pattern used by the violin also contributed to the articulation used in the excerpt, with separate bowing used in the onset of each figure, followed by a slurred trill under a single bow at the termination of these figures.
- The accented playing by the violin worked to highlight the start of each phrase and revealed a consistent pattern of articulation throughout each section.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	0	0	3	3	7	8	13	19	17	15	9	5	8.2

This question required students to form a critical response around the issue of drama in a piece of art music that incorporated references to musical gestures commonly associated with 1950s science fiction film scores. Students did not require knowledge of this context to achieve full marks. High-scoring responses were characterised by insightful observations that connected that action of elements of music to drama. These responses demonstrated a clear ability to aurally analyse music and used discipline-specific terminology to good effect. The less capable responses, once again, used metaphor in place of specific information about the excerpt. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following issues.

- The excerpt featured hugely exaggerated melodic gestures marked by a wide range of pitch and large leaps.
- It featured a very crowded texture with all instruments playing at once, unremitting throughout the excerpt.
- The texture swiftly moved from monophonic to polyphonic with different layers of sound working in dialogue. The polyphonic texture created a sense of chaotic activity aided by occasional passages of heterophony (where two or more instruments converged on one line, but were slightly rhythmically misaligned, or where one part was ornamented but another unadorned). This activity could be understood as contributing to drama.
- Extremes of tessitura were a feature of every instrument used.
- The title created a context for listening and raised audience expectations around a specific language of gesture related to 1950s sci-fi. Students were not expected to know any specific genre here, but the title did provide a focus for how various musical gestures related to the issue of drama.
- While the excerpt featured extremes of horizontal and vertical dissonance it was not atonal.
- Instrumentation – the theremin was used to create an unfamiliar, eerie sound and, when combined with the other features listed here, worked to contribute to a sense of drama in the excerpt. Note that students were not required to identify the theremin – a description of the sound source to support an explanation around this point was entirely acceptable.

Section B

Section B consisted of four questions and was worth 45 marks. The questions were linked to the works that students had studied in Units 3 and 4, and addressed issues of context, music style and compositional design. The majority of the cohort selected works that were appropriate for study (noting that Questions 6 and 8 had to be an Australian work and a work composed since 1910 respectively) and properly identified these works. Students and teachers are encouraged to select works that can act as effective vehicles for study. While there are no stylistic restrictions associated with the works chosen (except that the two works chosen in each unit are in a different style from those studied in other units), the area of study examined by Section B of this examination focuses on organisation and context, and the works selected need to support discussions around both of these areas.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	1	4	8	8	13	17	16	14	17	7.1

This question focused on a contextual issue related to the Australian work students had studied. It included a prompt in the form of a quote, which was designed to help students adapt the information they had learnt into a discussion. The majority of the cohort performed well on this question. High-scoring responses were characterised by detailed, accurate and insightful information about the work studied adaptively presented in a coherent discussion. Students who did not provide insight into the work studied, but instead made general and often unfocused remarks about issues of context, did not score as highly on this question.

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Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	2	11	18	15	19	31	4.2

This question required students to describe two musical terms used to support the analysis of the other work they had studied in Unit 3. It overtly assessed the key skill related to the use of appropriate music terminology and language included in Area of Study 2. Students were free to use any music term to answer this question, including traditional analytical terms and, where appropriate to the work studied, instrument-specific performance terminology. In general, students answered this question well. Students were rewarded for a general understanding of the terms presented or an understanding contextualised around the work they had studied.

Question 6b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	7	4	5	2	12	15	18	14	11	12	5.4

In this question, students were required to take the two terms they had described in Question 6a. and create a discussion around how the composer had developed musical ideas in the other work they had studied in Unit 3. The primary challenge of the question related to the students' capacity to define the notion of 'musical ideas'. Students were able to define musical ideas as compositional devices, individual elements of music, elements of music working in combination or the outworking of extra-musical ideas through a composition – all approaches were valued and capable of achieving full marks. Students who constructed discussions that provided a coherent picture of how musical ideas were developed in the work performed well on this question. Those who instead described a narrative of the piece, or isolated issues related to the piece without a clear reference to the development of musical ideas, did not score as highly.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	2	4	5	10	7	15	9	15	13	16	6.5

Responses to this question needed to be based on a work composed after 1910, and almost all students responded using an appropriate work. Students were asked to discuss how two elements of music were representative of a particular music style. The best responses were characterised by a broad awareness of issues related to style and were supported with specific music examples from the work studied. The less capable responses were marked by a lack of awareness and insight around the issue of style, and tended to neglect mention of specific examples drawn from the work studied.

Students and teachers are reminded that information learnt throughout the year always needs to be adapted to the requirements of the specific examination question. A number of students provided answers that featured generic information about the style of a piece, without effective reference to the elements of music included in the question.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	0	3	5	8	8	15	11	13	16	17	6.7

This question asked the students to explain the action of two compositional devices in the other work they had studied in Unit 4. It included a detailed prompt designed to assist students in constructing explanations that featured nuanced contextualisations of the compositional devices that formed the basis of their responses. Students did not need to use the content of these prompts to achieve full marks in the question, but did, nevertheless, need to have a good command of the devices as overarching musical mechanisms governing the action of the elements of music in a piece. Students whose responses featured colloquial and blunt understandings of terms, such as repetition and variation, did not score as highly as students who recognised these as umbrella musical terms that represent much more than simply recurrence or change.

It should be noted that it was appropriate for students to construct explanations around two types of repetition, or two types of variation (or, indeed, contrast, though this device is not a mandated compositional device in Unit 4 of the study). There was no requirement for students to explain one example of repetition and one of variation.