

2017 VCE Music Style and Composition examination report

General comments

The 2017 VCE Music Style and Composition aural and written examination featured a revised format that was consistent with the revised *VCE Music Study Design 2017–2021* and the sample examination material. The examination contained two sections worth a total of 100 marks. The questions in Section A focused exclusively on Area of Study 1, Responses to music. This section featured five questions based on short excerpts of music from a wide variety of geographical and historical backgrounds and was worth 70 marks. Section B featured three questions related to Area of Study 2, Organisation and context and was worth 30 marks.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual 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 resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Section A featured excerpts from a range of music styles from a variety of cultures. Many students completed responses that showed great skill in aural analysis. These responses showed students' ability to analyse composers' use of the elements of music and compositional devices in previously unheard excerpts of music. High-scoring responses communicated the characteristics of the music works and linked to subjective observations about matters such as mood and character.

Responses often showed higher-order thinking and in many cases impressive use of language that evoked the sound of the music. Low-scoring responses tended to rely on affective language and analogies that were applied in a less insightful manner. These responses tended to contain fewer direct references to characteristics of the excerpts. Of particular note were students' responses to questions that called for discussion or explanation. In cases where students completed a description of the excerpt in instances when a discussion was called for, full marks could not be awarded. In constructing discussions students with high-scoring responses:

- clearly answered the question with a clear contention
- provided a measured argument that included points for and against their contention
- identified mitigating factors
- used sentences that linked paragraphs to help make explicit connections to their contention.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	1	2	7	21	26	23	13	6	5.2

In general, students' responses to this question were of a high standard. Most students capably described the nature of the layers of sound that featured vocal, instrumental and body percussion sound sources. Students could use any method of identifying the layers. Layers that could have been described in responses included:

- electronic 'whooshing' sound incorporating a crescendo at the opening
- female vocal soloist with double tracking
- body percussion – handclaps, 'patsching', stamping and finger snaps, 'pop'
- instrumental percussion – a sound similar to clave, syncopated mid-range percussion sounds
- homophonic chorale-style singing featuring a number of parts
- some use of drones.

A variety of approaches was employed, including description of the sounds, rhythms, articulations and dynamics. Many students alluded to texture; however, the question did not specifically call for a formal identification of textures found in the excerpt. The highest-scoring responses to this question included a description of particular aspects of the vocal, instrumental percussion and body percussion lines. For example:


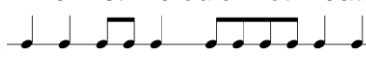
Following the sharp, wind-type, breathy sound which precedes the entry of the female voice part, a repetitive tapping or clapping sound enters with the voice parts, reiterating a simple rhythmic figure; this use of body percussion sounds and rhythms lends the excerpt a sense of continuous movement. The gentle, breathy sounds of the male and female voices create a soothing, almost lullaby-esque effect which is enhanced by this simple repetition of rhythm. After the murmur(s)....of this segment, however, the excerpt is interjected by a much more abrupt, somewhat harsh use of vocals, before a return to the previous tranquillity and the addition of a droning sound, perhaps from bagpipes.



Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	3	15	18	22	22	20	4

Students were awarded a maximum of three marks for their identification and description of each of the two motifs. Most students were able to identify two motifs with a good degree of clarity; however, describing these motifs posed more challenges. Most students chose to identify the higher-register vocal material as one motif and the lower vocal material as another motif. This was not the only approach that could be taken. Some students chose to describe two aspects of the lower material, which contained two sections. In order to score four or more marks students needed to include references to combinations of any of rhythm, pitch, contour, repetition, register and range. Some students included visual representation of the motifs. These representations included traditional western notation of rhythm, use of terminology such as solfa and tel fa, letter names, strokes and number systems representing meter as well as beats of the bar.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Melodic motif 1.  *The first melodic motif features two soprano voices singing in a high register, repeating a*  *rhythm, one sings a single note and the other with a varied melodic contour*

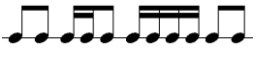
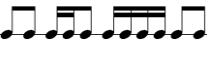
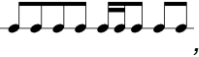


Melodic motif 2.  The second motif is sung by male voices, complementing the 1st (motif) through joining them in the second part of the phrase . They use a repeated scalar ascending contour, in the low register adding richness of tone to the sopranos.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	1	1	11	13	18	15	19	12	8	1	5.9

This question required a discussion of the use of repetition. This posed some difficulties for some students. Many students were able to complete responses that were quite detailed; however, most students did not incorporate the conventions that would allow their responses to be classified as a discussion. As a result, only a small number of students scored high marks. The word 'use' in the question gave students great scope to incorporate references to character and mood. The highest-scoring responses linked a description of mood or character to more technical aspects of the musical material such as ostinati, swapping of motifs between parts, use of drones, repeated structures, echoing and implementation of call and response.

The following high-scoring response uses standard western rhythmic notation in an effective manner. Despite the differences in rhythmic notation between this response and the student response for Question 2a., both responses are correct in this respect.

- The melodic motifs of part (a) emphasize initial applications of repetition as they are reoccurring, however on a more micro scale, repetition is employed in their first rhythmic melodic motif of  as the note is repeated on.
- The opening (of the entirety of the work) employs a low string drone which involves very minor changes in pitch, thus creating repetition of pitch.
- The continuous applications of call and response particularly between the A and A sections (occurring between high sop voice & full male dominated choir) influences the repetition within this work.
- The chant like applications of vocals (within the choir) have the same repetitive rhythm of the opening  as well as , however with a thicker texture an lower register, later in the piece thus showing repetition.
- The clapping of both the tambourine and drum  prove the repetition of an ostinati like pattern.
- The overall structure of the work is [A, AI, AII, AIII, B, A AII], thus while variation is also heavily applied, the prevalence of the A section 'foundations' is evidenced through repetition.
- The continuing scales...over  also exhibits repetition.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	1	3	5	9	16	20	19	16	8	4	6.3

This question required students to describe particular characteristics of a music work that was performed on a shakuhachi. The work contained sounds that were characteristic of techniques commonly employed on this instrument. Students were asked to describe how contrast was created, with specific reference to three elements of music: articulation, dynamics and tone colour. Examples of articulation, dynamics and tone colour that may have been included were:

- loud and soft phrases (dynamics)

- loud and soft attacks to phrases (dynamics/articulation)
- loud and soft releases to phrases (dynamics)
- varying placement of dynamic accents/breath attacks at the beginning/in the middle and the end of phrases (dynamics)
- pure quality and breathy quality of tone (tone colour)
- pure and noisy tones (tone colour)
- sustained and ornamented tones (articulation)
- staccato/legato (articulation)
- 'slapping' of fingers on the holes of the shakuhachi (tone colour/articulation).

Most responses included references to specific evidence from the music and showed a good understanding of the three elements of music that are mentioned in the question. The employment of subheadings in responses added clarity and specificity to some responses. The responses that achieved high marks incorporated several references to the way contrast was created by the artist's use of the specified elements of music. For example:

- *On a global level, articulation, dynamics and tone colour used in this excerpt helps to create contrast within the single instrument which plays the piece*
- *The aerophone uses alternating tone colours, swapping between a harsh, raspy, aspirated tone colour to a smooth, and clear tone colour. This creates micro level contrast within phrases.*
- *The contrasting tone colours are complemented by contrasting articulation. The phrases are shaped by a legato articulation and the use of vibrato, yet they are just as often interrupted and interjected by harsh accents and unpredictable embellishments such as erratic acciaccaturas and aggressive trills. The contrasting use of articulation creates an unstable atmosphere.*
- *Dynamics are used to create contrast at a medium level between phrases. An aggressive, 'forte' phrase will be juxtaposed against a 'piano', lyrical one. Within phrases on a micro level, diminuendos are often used toward the end of phrases contrasting the loud, abrasive dynamic that often opens the phrase, creating a smooth effect.*

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	12	39	33	15	2.5

Students implemented different approaches in responding to this question. In most instances they chose to describe two individual segments of melody within the excerpt. Some students interpreted the question in a different manner and wrote about the general nature of the melody from two different perspectives. This was an equally valid approach and saw some students commenting on overall melodic shapes, variation, motific development, variation in accompaniment, the use of sequence and the structure of the melodies such as question and answer.

It is important that students read the question thoroughly. As the question called for a description of 'two ways' that melodic material was used, the first or second ways that were described were assessed and any subsequent points the student made were disregarded. Some high-scoring responses used numbers and/or subheadings to clearly identify the two ways that they were proposing. Many students were only able to achieve two marks for this question. One cause of this was a lack of detail. Students should consider the depth required to achieve full marks. In this instance students needed to include enough detail to show insight into how (for what purposes and in what ways) the melodic material was used in order to achieve full marks.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average
%	0	0	1	3	3	4	8	16	18	15	11	8	8	3	1	8.4

The elaborate nature of the music in this excerpt and the broad nature of the question gave students the opportunity to respond in a variety of ways. Many highly detailed and comprehensive responses were completed. Students were called upon to discuss how the composer created tension in this excerpt. Examples of tension created through the treatment of the elements of music and compositional devices might include:

- 'detuned' or micro-tonal approach to tonality/temperament
- slight unease with sliding pitches to quiet discord
- soft strings added in repeated phrase
- build-up of tension with introduction of minor key
- staged addition of percussion and low brass
- strong rhythmic percussion lines are introduced
- strings in driving quavers, continuously repeating pattern, providing counterpoint to percussion
- all driving figures disappear, contributing to an ominous character in the last section
- dramatic use of silence
- use of a crashing halt
- pitches flatlining to a unison.

As was the case in previous questions, constructing a discussion proved challenging for many students.

Beyond high levels of detail in such responses, students needed to frame their discussion, for example, an explanation about a clear contention that was then supported with evidence from the music. These often explained the degree of tension present or compared the aspects of tension within the music with other characters. Other responses used linking sentences at the end of paragraphs to structure the discussion. Some students who achieved high marks also included conclusions at the end of their responses.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The tone colour of the electronic wash of sound at the start combines with guitar riff at a static pitch with a rhythmic drive to create a sense of unease right at the beginning of the excerpt.

The contrast between the tinkling tone colour of the simple piano melody and the fluctuating dynamics of the buzzing electronic sound creates tension. The rising contour of the string melody also creates tension through increasing the pitch, and combined with the increase in textural density through the increased volume of the electronic whirr increases the tension.

The sudden loud, low, reverberant bass drums with their percussive, repeated, rhythmic drives create tension through their sudden sharp contrast to the gentle colours and tempo to the former section, now changed to faster, more urgent pace.

The loud, sharp, deep, overblown brass notes create tension when combined with the drums as the deep tone colours create a sense of foreboding.

Tension is also created through:

- *The repeated, ascending motif of the strings in the second section, whose constant rhythm creates a sense of urgency*
- *The build up of textural density, achieved by an increase in dynamics and introduction of more sound sources such as electronic drum set.*

- *The sudden silence in the extract contrasting with the sudden, deep dark loud brass blares, whose sudden, unexpected rhythms create significant tension.*
- *The percussion drive becoming more intense with the introduction of the electronic drum beats which play continuous, smaller rhythmic values.*

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	5	27	20	25	17	5	3.4

In this excerpt the composer exploited a variety of rhythmic techniques that purposefully created a sense of rhythmic ambiguity. High-scoring responses were able to identify the ambiguous nature of the meter and rhythm and suggested how the ambiguity was created. The highest-scoring responses incorporated music terminology clearly. Some terms that were applied included:

- rhythmic ostinati
- regular pulse
- metric displacement
- syncopation
- polyrhythms
- cross rhythms
- polymeters
- hemiola

Students made many assertions about the underlying meter or time signature of the work.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	0	3	5	7	17	18	14	12	7	9	4	3	6.7

Responses that scored well focused on both instrumentation and texture and connected these with the sense of specified characters of 'movement and energy'. High-scoring responses were able to explain the development of both texture and instrumentation over the course of the excerpt.

Responses may have included the following observations:

- wood block alone is quickly joined by rapid ostinato on clarinets
- trumpets playing a major triad with added 6th on a strong beat
- woodwind and lower brass are also introduced playing their own patterns
- a new chord (one that is sounded a tone lower) is intermeshed with opening chord. This is followed by flute and piccolo flourishes, which work in contrast to the driving rhythms
- regular rhythms established with repeated chords
- piccolo and flute flourishes are extended
- pitch is raised – energy intensified by chords in new positions
- new section with major chord, addition of bass drum, gradual addition of instruments, notes and increasingly complex harmonic material
- bass drum and whooping percussion.

Some of the highest-scoring responses incorporated observations on issues such as rate of harmonic change and the contribution of polymeters on the density of texture.

Lower-scoring responses struggled to fully connect texture, and, more so, instrumentation, with movement and energy. These responses used music terminology with less sophistication and misidentified some standard instruments of the orchestra.

The following excerpt from a student response uses many of the structural features required in a discussion.

Woodblocks create a consistent forward drive by playing “l l l” consistently this creates forward moving energy in momentous drive.

The trumpets at the beginning play fanfare like rhythms in a high register to create excitement. They create a slightly thicker texture but the short articulation allows clarity. These rhythms are dotted and repeated.

The flute tremolo like rhythms are soft but chromatic, their ascending nature creates excitement.

Flutes later in the work play high pitched descending flurries that create excitement in their rapid nature and irregular, interjectory interruptions. This also thickens texture adding to the energy and growth.

The chimes create a tinkling tone colour in their rapid, fast and high pitched flurries. These create bursts of excitement as they contrast other instruments in texture such as trumpets and strings.

Section B

Section B assessed students' understanding of the Outcome 2 works that they studied in Units 3 and 4. In this section students were required to respond to questions that focused on:

- use of compositional devices, globally, and at micro and macro levels
- contextual issues
- style
- composers' use of the elements of music.

These questions related to students' chosen Australian, 'other' and post-1950 works. It should be noted that if a response is completed about a work that does not fit the parameters for a question, no marks can be awarded. In nearly all cases appropriate works were referred to in the responses completed in Section B.

Many high-scoring responses were completed. The highest-scoring responses showed an in-depth knowledge of the works chosen for study. In these cases, students made many direct references to the works. These references were used to evidence pertinent and specific assertions about the works. There were fine uses of music terminology. However, some students struggled to respond to questions in this section of the examination. Questions on context and style posed particular challenges for students. These questions assessed students' high-order thinking skills. Low-scoring responses lacked clarity, detail and cogency.

A broad range of works was chosen for study. Along with works previously chosen for study from the jazz, contemporary popular and western art music traditions, students also studied works from the world music and stage and screen genres. Selection of works studied is critical to students' success in this section of the examination. The works chosen for study should be carefully considered. Music works studied should allow for sufficient relevant details to be included.

Some responses in this section seemed to be prepared responses that did not adequately engage with the question. It is recommended that students prepare thoroughly and practise applying their knowledge to a wide variety of question types. Some student responses included extraneous information.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	5	6	8	19	18	15	10	9	5	5.8

Students were required to respond to this question in relation to the Australian work that they had studied in Unit 3. This question required students to discuss the composer's implementation of repetition and variation. This question focused on these compositional devices at micro and macro levels. Many students found this challenging and some struggled to construct a discussion. Additionally, some students found it challenging to incorporate commentary on repetition and variation at both macro and micro levels. Some high-scoring responses were completed. These responses showed a deep understanding of the work studied, and students were able to explain the moods and characters created by the composer's use of repetition and variation.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	16	26	23	32	2.7

This question (as well as Question 2b.) required students to respond to the 'other' work studied in Unit 3. In order to achieve full marks students needed to identify a contextual issue and then describe its influence on the work. Most students responded to this question in a very effective manner, and many students received full marks. The responses that did not achieve high marks showed confusion about the influence of the contextual issue on the work and/or did not make sufficient reference to the work to demonstrate the importance of the contextual issue. It is important that students consider the weighting for questions and the number of writing lines supplied. This can be used as a guide to the amount of information they need to supply.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	9	17	22	25	12	14	3.5

Some highly detailed and insightful responses to this question showed a strong understanding of the stylistic features of the works studied. The highest-scoring responses were able to focus on traits of one or more of the compositional devices. The lower-scoring responses showed confusion about music styles. Students should familiarise themselves with the information about style on page 14 of the study design. It should be noted that a deeper understanding of style is required. Similar treatments of the elements of music can exist between many styles of music. In some cases a more thorough disambiguation was required to ensure accuracy.

Question 3

For Questions 3a. and 3b. students were required to complete responses about the post-1950 work studied in Unit 4.

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	11	24	37	25	2.7

Question 3a. called for a description of the structure of the work they had studied. Many students chose to describe the structure of the work through diagrams with or without annotations. Other high-scoring responses included tables, subheadings, dot points and prose. Responses that were

awarded lower marks were characterised by inaccuracy. Other low-scoring responses lacked detail.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	9	22	25	20	14	8	3.3

This question required students to explain the composer's use of either tone colour or rhythm/time. Many students struggled to complete responses that included a sustained description of one of the specified elements of music. A small number of students completed responses that included descriptions of both elements of music. In these cases, only references to the first elements of music were assessed. A small number of very high-scoring responses were completed. These were highly detailed and often drew on information about the characters, style or other sophisticated insights that directly related to either tone colour or rhythm/time.