2020 VCE Music Style and Composition: Externally assessed task report

General comments

The 2020 VCE Music Style and Composition: Externally assessed task (EAT) had only one section in 2020, which was the Unit 4 overall work, notation and documentation. The task was based on the *VCE Music Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*.

A spread of marks was represented across the scoring spectrum; however, the overall quality of work in 2020 was of a high standard. Although some works met the criteria, a higher level of sophistication was required to obtain the highest marks. A small number of works did not meet the criteria or demonstrate an understanding of the required task. Generally, students clearly demonstrated an understanding of the use of compositional devices and treatment of the music elements.

Overall, the documentation for the Unit 4 EAT supported and authenticated the major work and outlined the creative process. Clear, concise wording of the process was well outlined and discussed with very few submissions not fulfilling this element. A full journal supporting the year’s work accompanying the documentation is not required for this task. Overall, the music notation was in an appropriate genre-specific format.

Some high-scoring submissions demonstrated a creative, sophisticated and functional use of compositional devices, while lower scoring submissions had limited treatment and development of the musical work. There was a lack of functional application in some works, which did not allow for the idiosyncrasies of specific instruments. This can be avoided by appropriate instrument selection early in the process. It is recommended that teachers and students carefully read the study design, assessment criteria and VCAA supporting materials. Key stakeholders are also encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Music Styles Descriptors and Marking Guide to ensure the musical work and documentation can be awarded the full range of marks and that the guidelines for the EAT are met. Most materials were labelled appropriately. When submitting the files, schools are encouraged to note if the recording of the work is in Sibelius or a similar program, which should be uploaded in the music notation file. While not compulsory, live recordings of the musical work are encouraged where possible, as this demonstrates the idiosyncrasies, originality and playability of the work.

The fusion of electronic music with live performances was evident in 2020 and was mostly well executed. Overall, students using this medium were clear in their documentation of the creative intent and purpose, outlining goals and ambitions, and describing the creative process. Generally, this genre was successful in achieving creative aims. Graphic notation, and appropriate replication of the chart provided, was generally detailed.

Specific information

Documentation Unit 4

Documentation in Unit 4 was mostly thorough, providing information on the work. Composers’ creative intent from initial conception to the final realisation of the work was well articulated and described overall. Documentation should clearly outline the creative intent and creative process, detailing decisions made and how the student arrived at the final work. This supports authenticity and the overall integrity of the final work. Students who scored highly in this area demonstrated insight into the creative process and a detailed justification of decisions made throughout the different stages of the creative process. These students had clear, explicit links to the work using music language and industry terminology.

Documentation overall

The documentation for 2020 was of a high standard and, for the most part, was within the specified word limit. It is recommended that, when providing images of bar analyses, students clearly provide the reader with insight into the understanding of the Unit 4 EAT task. Images with little supporting reference to the body of work do not enhance or assist the musical work. Annotated scores need to be considered as they contribute to the overall word count.

Unit 4 Original music work

A range of musical styles and genres was represented, with the marks being spread across the full range of scores. A minimal number of works were in the lower band, and the overall quality of work was high. The musical works that were awarded the highest marks demonstrated innovative and creative manipulation of the musical elements and an inventive use of the compositional devices of repetition, variation and contrast. The Unit 4 works that did not develop musical ideas, were not playable or did not demonstrate a thorough understanding of the task could not be awarded full marks. There were many imaginative and unique submissions of orchestral and fusion music, which were mostly well presented. Orchestration and idiomatic understanding were of a high standard. Musical works that were computer-generated and outside physical playability, voice range or idiomatic function were not able to be awarded full marks. However, a number of composers documented and demonstrated their creative process with integrity, resulting in a very successful end product. There was a trend towards the use of technology incorporated into live music in 2020; for the most part, this proved to be creative and original, allowing for marks in the higher bracket.

The use of meter allowed for expressive and creative outcomes. A comprehensive understanding of orchestration was well understood and demonstrated by the higher scoring students and was artfully incorporated into these compositions. Many compositions were recorded live; although this is not a requirement, live recordings are encouraged as they demonstrate the playability of the works and give a more authentic representation of the composer’s intentions. This is not always possible or appropriate depending on the genre, and a midi file is equally acceptable. Sequenced recordings were mainly well balanced and provided clear renditions of the music works. Students need to clearly outline the creative process in their documentation, and it should be reflected in the musical work.

Notation

Overall, the music notation was well considered and representative of the musical work in the appropriate genre. Students who scored highly provided specific instrumental and/or midi techniques, with markings in a format appropriate to the genre, such as dynamics, tempo markings, bowing and peddling techniques, ties, slurs and phrase markings, effects, synthetic sounds and other media. Scores that were incomplete, missing time signatures or key signatures, had multiple bars at the end or in a section of the work with notational inaccuracies, or screen shots, could not be given full marks. It is recommended that time be allocated for score cleaning to provide musical nuances before submitting the work. Electronic scores that scored highly provided a clear, well-explained graphic notation score or soundscape. Converted midi files without explanation or cleaning could not gain full marks. It is important to note that the notation is style-specific, so graphic scores converted to traditional notation (or vice versa) do not fulfil the requirements as outlined in the ‘expected qualities’ or ‘appropriate format’ section of the published assessment criteria.