



2009 Music Solo Performance GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2009 Music Solo Performance aural and written examination consisted of three sections and was worth a total of 109 marks. All sections of the examination were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published in the Assessment Guide. The question style and the length of the examination were consistent with the published sample examination material.

The mean score for the 2009 paper was just under 60 per cent, which was an improvement on the 2008 mean score of 55 per cent. Examination techniques were sometimes lacking; some students were unable to complete the paper and others presented very brief answers to questions which instructed them to ‘discuss’ or ‘explain’.

Rote-learned responses that did not answer the specific questions asked continued to be an issue in Sections B and C of the examination. Students and teachers are reminded that prose questions are not an opportunity for students to simply recite everything they know about a set work. Rather, students should draw on their knowledge of the works they have studied to respond to the specific question being asked.

Many students struggled to employ discipline-specific terminology in their responses to questions in Sections B and C, and instead relied on metaphor to describe various musical elements. While the *VCE Music Solo Performance Study Design* does not mandate a specific set of music terminology, students who were able to use specific terms, rather than metaphor or extended prose descriptions of musical ideas, tended to be better able to answer the questions in these sections.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

For each question, an outline answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

Section A – Theory and aural comprehension

Section A was worth approximately 52 per cent of the marks. As such, it was not possible for a student to score well on the paper without a thorough knowledge of the fundamentals of music theory and the capacity to aurally perceive these features at work in a melody and a chord progression.

The 2009 cohort displayed an improved capacity to write music notation correctly. However, many students continued to struggle to make the vital links between music theory and aural acuity. It is important that the different question types of Section A not be taught in isolation; Questions 1 and 2 should function as a ‘primer’ for Question 3, while Questions 4 and 5 should make students aware of the tonal ‘context’ in which chords exist and give students effective strategies to tackle Question 6.

Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

Question 1 – Music theory – Intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	2	4	8	10	9	15	21	30	6

- ‘C’ above
- ‘G’ below
- ‘C’ above
- ‘B-flat’ above
- ‘F-flat’ below
- ‘G-flat’ above
- ‘G’ above
- ‘D-flat’ below

The mean score for this question demonstrated that students were well prepared to answer the question. The intervals that were most likely to be incorrect were the diminished fourth above ‘F-sharp’ using the treble clef (some students struggled with the concept of a diminished interval) and the major third below ‘A-flat’ using the bass clef (some students were perhaps uncomfortable with the concept of an ‘F-flat’ and instead wrote ‘E’, which, as an enharmonic, is incorrect).



In order to score well on this question, students needed to have a clear understanding of both the numerical size of an interval and interval quality. The issue of quality proved problematic for some students. Students must thoroughly understand the concept of intervallic quality; therefore, no marks were awarded if only the numeric size of an interval was correct.

Question 2 – Music theory – Scales and modes

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	13	1	11	1	15	3	24	3	28	4.9

- D Major pentatonic descending: ‘D’ (given), ‘B’, ‘A’, ‘F-sharp’, ‘E’, ‘D’
- B-flat Melodic minor ascending and descending: ‘B-flat’ (given), ‘C’, D-flat’, ‘E-flat’, ‘F’, ‘G’, ‘A’, ‘B-flat’, ‘A-flat’, ‘G-flat’, ‘F’, ‘E-flat’, ‘D-flat’, ‘C’, ‘B-flat’
- B-flat Whole tone descending: ‘B-flat’ (given), ‘A-flat’, ‘G-flat’, ‘E’, ‘D’, ‘C’, ‘B-flat’ (enharmonic equivalents were acceptable in the construction of this scale)
- C minor Lydian ascending: ‘C’ (given), ‘D’, ‘E’, ‘F-sharp’, ‘G’, ‘A-flat’, ‘B-flat’, ‘C’

While the D Major pentatonic and the B-flat whole tone scales were well known by the majority of students, many students did not know the C minor Lydian scale. In order to score marks for a scale, students needed to have all the notes correct; as scales represent a specific pitch set, it was not possible to receive partial marks for having some of the notes correct. Exceptions were made and partial marks were awarded if the B-flat Melodic minor scale was correct in one direction or if the scale was correct but the response featured an error in notation (for example, the accidental on the wrong side of the note head).

Question 3 – Aural comprehension – Melodic transcription

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



While students demonstrated an improved capacity to respond to this question, a number of students struggled with the issues of notation, theoretical knowledge and aural acuity required. Many students treated the question as an exercise in isolated melodic transcription and did not appear to pick up on the cues presented by the three given lines. As in previous years, the given parts revealed both the scale and ‘key’ (Mixolydian on ‘C’) and the line itself featured extended passages of conjunct motion with four leaps throughout the course of the line.

Students were awarded marks for correct pitch, rhythm and contour jointly and in isolation and, where errors were made, students were not penalised more than once within a bar. For example, if the leap in bar two was incorrectly identified as a third instead of a fourth, the semiquaver scale passage that followed was likely to be ‘out’ by a step; marks were deducted for the initial error and not for subsequent pitch errors within the second bar that followed on from this first error.

Students and teachers should be aware that the difficulties associated with the melodic transcription question can be mitigated by an understanding of how different elements of the study design interact. This question was not designed to be an exercise purely in aural acuity; it also required a working knowledge of the music theory components of the subject.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 4 – Music theory – Individual chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	9	9	14	23	39	3.6

- B-flat minor: ‘B-flat’, ‘D-flat’, ‘F’
- A Dominant 7: ‘A’, ‘C-sharp’, ‘E’, ‘G’
- G-flat Major 7: ‘G-flat’, ‘B-flat’, ‘D-flat’, ‘F’
- C-sharp half diminished: ‘C-sharp’, ‘E’, ‘G’, ‘B’
- E-flat Augmented: ‘E-flat’, ‘G’, ‘B’



This question was well answered, with 60 per cent of the cohort getting four or more of the chords correct. The C-sharp half diminished and the G-flat Major 7 chords caused the most difficulty, with some students constructing the incorrect seventh for these sonorities. Students need to take care in the presentation of music notation, particularly regarding the position of note-heads and the placement of accidentals. Where the position of a note-head was unclear, full marks could not be awarded.

Question 5 – Music theory – Diatonic chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	13	7	8	8	14	12	38	3.9

- Supertonic 7 chord of D harmonic minor: E half diminished: ‘E’, ‘G’, ‘B-flat’, ‘D’
- Submediant chord of B-flat Major: G minor: ‘G’, ‘B-flat’, ‘D’
- Leading-note chord of C major: B diminished: ‘B’, ‘D’, ‘F’

Students performed well on this question, with 38 per cent attaining full marks. However, some students struggled to link issues of chord constructions with the diatonic context of chords. This was evident when students incorrectly labelled a chord in Question 5a., but went on to correctly notate the chord in Question 5b. As this question is the ‘primer’ for the aural chord transcription question, it was vital that students had an understanding of both chord construction and the diatonic context in which these chords exist.

Question 6 – Aural comprehension – Recognition of a chord progression

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	0	0	1	2	5	8	10	10	8	9	8	7	6	6	9	10	9.3

1. C minor 2. E-flat augmented 3. A-flat major 4. G dominant 7 5. B diminished 7 6. C minor
or

Harmonic Grid	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
Bass note	C	E-flat	A-flat	G	B	C
Quality	<i>minor</i>	Augmented	Major	Dominant 7	Diminished 7	minor

Students performed reasonably well on this question, with a mean score higher than that of previous years’ examinations. The majority of students correctly identified the tonality and clearly heard the final chord as a repetition of the first chord of the progression. The second and third chords of the progression proved difficult for some students, with the augmented quality of the second chord and the bass note of the third chord (A-flat) incorrectly identified by many. This third chord was revealing in that many students correctly labelled the quality as ‘Major’ but did not identify the base note accurately; this shows that, as for Question 3, many students did not make the necessary links between the aural and theory components of the study design. In the tonal context of the question (chords derived from the C harmonic minor scale), the only possible major triads are those built on ‘G’ and ‘A-flat’. As the next chord in the progression (the fourth chord) featured an unambiguous ‘G’ in the bass (which was correctly identified by the majority of students), a good knowledge of the theory that underpins this question should have allowed, by a process of elimination, students to identify the bass note of the third chord as ‘A-flat’. The fact that many did not suggests that the link between aural and theory was not clear in the minds of some students.

Marks were awarded for the bass note, the quality of the triad and the identification of the correct seventh, where relevant. Students were not penalised twice on the basis of an incorrect identification of a seventh. For example, in the fourth chord, if a student identified the chord as a Major 7, credit was given for the fact that this seventh chord is based on a major triad (the same triad present in the correct quality – the dominant seventh); only the mark for the seventh was lost. In the same way, incorrect identification of the bass note did not prejudice the marking of the quality of a chord, regardless of what mode/terminology the students elected to answer the question in.

Section B – Analysis of excerpts of previously unheard music

Most students made a reasonable attempt at Section B, with mean scores for Part A and Part B higher than those of 2008. Higher marks were awarded to students who tailored their listening analysis to deal with the specific issues raised by the questions. Students who wrote a ‘listening diary’ for these questions tended to be awarded lower marks as their responses were cluttered with irrelevant information.

As in previous years, some students lacked the necessary music terminology to effectively deal with the relevant elements of music. Many students relied heavily on metaphor to describe elements, giving rise to two significant problems. Firstly, metaphor and non-music-specific adjectives tend to displace a demonstration of specific music



knowledge and insight that is most likely to achieve high marks. Secondly, the use of metaphor often leads to unintentional value judgments which tend not to reveal anything significant about the music.

Question 7a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	1	1	3	5	9	12	13	15	15	14	7	6	7.8

Higher-order responses made clear the link between two elements of dynamics, articulation and tone colour, and the issue of contrast. Lower-order responses neglected issues related to contrast and, in some cases, did not deal with two of the required elements. The range of responses included, but was not limited to, the following.

Dynamics

- The brass instruments begin quietly but soon become more strident or ‘brassy’.
- The dynamic curve tended to follow the shapes of the phrases.
- A significant diminuendo occurred at the end of verse 1 leading into verse 2 – this functioned to make the piccolo line stand out.
- There was similar use of diminuendo at the end of verse 2.
- The interpretation in performance was marked by the use of timbral crescendo (the addition of instruments functioned to raise the dynamic).

Articulation

- Melodic lines featured the use of both slurring and staccato, particularly in the brass and piccolo – this worked to create contrast within particular lines, but, through repetition, functioned to give the interpretation a sense of unity in the large scale.
- Articulation was used to accentuate the syncopation in both the piccolo and the brass.
- The ‘way-oh’ legato lines were accompanied by portamento.

Tone colour

- The interpretation contained many changes of texture and instrumentation, which, taken together, worked to create a changing tone colour.
- Contrast was created between the relatively sparse, ‘dark’ opening and the bright sound of the full brass later in the excerpt.
- The piccolo created a ‘tone colour’ counterpoint to the other timbres present in the excerpt such that, even when the parts were played in unison, changing tone colours were created.
- The glissandi in the horns and low brass created a smooth contrast with the relatively harsher colour of the high brass.

Question 7b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	2	5	13	20	19	20	14	7	4.9

Students who understood the concept of rhythm as a sectional division in an ensemble (that is, a rhythm section), rather than as an element of music, tended to struggle with this question. Higher-order responses were marked by the use of discipline-specific terminology and were supported by musical examples. The range of responses included, but was not limited to, the following.

Royal Philharmonic Pops Orchestra

- There was extensive use of syncopation in a metrically strict manner, offset by bridging material that featured ‘straight’ crotchets and quavers.
- There was a straight 4/4 ‘rock’ drum beat with emphasis on beats two and four.
- Drum ‘fills’ were used to demarcate different sections of the interpretation.
- Long notes were used for climax/bridging sections.
- In the final section, three levels of rhythm worked together with syncopation occurring at different points to create a ‘rhythmic counterpoint’.
- The lower parts tended to emphasise the down beat, while the upper lines used syncopation.

Wilman De Jesus

- This excerpt had a freer approach to rhythm; syncopation was less metrically strict.
- A characteristic reggae feel/groove worked to contrast the standard rock rhythm of the other interpretation.



- A ‘buzzing’ percussive sound worked to emphasise the first and third beat of each bar from the second verse onward.
- The synthesised slide whistle worked to emphasise some off-beats in later verses.

Section C – Analysis of works from the *Prescribed List of Ensemble Works*

Work chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	4	0	41	15	3	6	4	14	12	1

Strawberry Fields and *Dumb Things* were the most popular works from the *Prescribed List of Ensemble Works*, with over 50 per cent of the cohort studying one or both of these works. While students are free to choose any two works from the list, they must know enough about each interpretation in performance to answer any question that might be derived from the relevant key skills in Outcome 4 of Unit 3 and Unit 4 of the study design.

A small number of students identified works from the old list that were not carried over onto the new list; these responses could not be assessed and the students received no marks for the questions in Section C. The list is available on the VCAA website <www.vcaa.vic.edu.au>.

Question 8a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	3	7	12	19	16	17	12	9	4.7

This question required students to describe how one contextual issue influenced one of the interpretations in performance that had been studied. Higher-order responses made a clear link between the contextual issue and the actual interpretation, and featured arguments supported by musical examples. Mid-level answers were characterised by a description of a contextual issue, with a more tenuous link between the issue and its influence on the interpretation. Lower-order responses were characterised by generic descriptions, often of multiple contextual issues (the question required a description of **one** only) that did not speak to the actual interpretation. For example, students routinely listed ‘LSD’ as a contextual issue for *Strawberry Fields*. Few students who took this approach were able to show what, if anything, this had to do with the actual music beyond the very low-order suggestion that ‘LSD’ contributed to the ‘druggy feel’ of the work. The rigour associated with this examination required greater depth and a clearer knowledge of the work than is demonstrated in this example.

Question 8b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	4	2	6	7	14	17	16	15	9	8	5.3

This question required students to discuss the similarities and differences between two interpretations in performance of one work with reference to melody, rhythm and articulation. The instruction to ‘discuss’ directed students to go beyond a simple description of how each element operated in the interpretations and, further, enabled students to introduce other elements/issues into their responses, provided that reference was made to the three elements required by the question. Higher-order responses demonstrated a thorough knowledge of both interpretations, integrated discussion regarding the two interpretations (rather than simply giving a description of one followed by a description of the other), and gave a balanced discussion of both interpretations. Mid-level responses were characterised either by description rather than discussion, or by an uneven focus on the two interpretations. Lower-order responses tended not to meet the requirements of the question with regard to the three elements. Many students struggled with the element of articulation and instead wrote about issues related to instrumentation and tone colour. Students and teachers are reminded that articulation refers to the attack, release and decay of a sound; discipline-specific terminology such as legato, staccato, marcato, accent, etc. were best used when discussing this element.

Question 9

Work chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	5	7	0	14	21	3	8	8	13	22	1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	7	1	3	4	5	6	9	8	11	13	10	6	7	6	3	3	7.9

This question required students to explain how at least two of articulation, duration, dynamics and tone colour were used to contribute to expressiveness in both interpretations in performance. While the mean result for this question showed a slight improvement over the 2008 examination, many students struggled to go beyond a straightforward

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description of two elements. Far fewer students were able to construct an explanation, and many students demonstrated a lack of understanding of the issue of expressiveness; many made no mention of expressiveness at all, and those who did tended to focus on emotive aspects of expressiveness. Expressiveness relates to issues of expression, communication and intention in music; some composers/performers seek to express emotions, others seek to express ideas, still others see meaning in the structure and design of their music rather seeking extra-musical references for their work. All of these issues could have been relevant in an explanation of expressiveness.