



2010 Music Solo Performance GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2010 Music Solo Performance aural and written examination consisted of three sections and was worth 105 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 2010 paper was approximately 55 per cent, which was lower than in 2009. Some students did not complete the examination. In many instances, this appeared to be a result of an inability to manage examination time in a way that reflected the structure of the examination. For example, many students completed prose questions with an introductory paragraph that served only to rephrase the question; other students spent time writing much more than was needed on Questions 8a. and 8b. (worth 8 marks each) while neglecting Question 9 (worth 15 marks). Students can improve their performance with careful time management.

The lack of discipline-specific terminology in responses to questions in Sections B and C of the examination was again a problem in the 2010 examination. The study design mandates key skills related to a selection of elements of music. Surrounding these elements is a vocabulary of musical terms that allows for succinct and incisive observations related to musical constructs. Eschewing this language denies students the capacity to speak to musical issues in the depth required by the study design. So, while the study design does not mandate specific terms, a working knowledge of terminology in order to discuss and analyse elements of music is vital for students to capture and quickly communicate ideas. Many of the lower-scoring responses in Sections B and C were characterised by a lack of music terminology.

Teachers should note that in 2011 a revised VCE Music study is being implemented. Advice about the study and examination can be downloaded from the VCAA website.

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 54 per cent of the marks. To score well on the paper, students needed 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. Some parts of the cohort displayed splinter skills with regard to theory and aural comprehension. For example, some students understood how to construct chords as required in Question 4, but were unable to situate chords in a tonal context, as required in Question 5. Many students struggled to then link the theoretical material they had learnt related to scales (Question 2) and chords (Questions 4 and 5) with the aural material required by Question 6. A thorough grounding in the theory that underpinned Questions 2, 4 and 5 should have equipped a student with a context for Question 6 that informed aural ability. For example, in Question 6, the top note was the same for the first three chords and the fifth chord in the progression. Students who heard this aspect of the progression were able to apply this knowledge to rule out a range of possible chords; this information then provided students with a significantly limited range of possible responses. The fact that many low-scoring responses suggested chords outside the tonal context made possible by the given key indicated that some students were not making the necessary links between theory and aural comprehension.

Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

Question 1 – Music theory – Intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	3	4	8	10	14	16	20	22	5.7

Treble clef:

- A-flat above
- C-flat above
- F-sharp below
- C below

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Bass clef:

- B-flat above
- D-flat below
- E-flat above
- B-flat below

Nearly 60 per cent of the cohort scored six or more marks for this question. While this is a pleasing result, the skills associated with intervallic construction constitute a core aspect of theoretical knowledge. As such, the 40 per cent of the cohort who scored five or fewer marks out of eight demonstrated a limited grasp of this competency. Intervallic construction requires knowledge of both ‘number’ and ‘quality’. Most students were able to deal with the ‘number’ aspect of intervallic construction; ‘quality’ proved more problematic. For example, in the second interval to be constructed, most students were able to correctly identify C as the correct note space indicated by a fifth above, but fewer were able to correctly manage the quality of the interval, in this case a diminished interval requiring a flat to be added to the C.

The issue of enharmonics also caused some students difficulty. For example, in the seventh interval to be constructed (a diminished fourth above the given note B) a response of D sharp was assessed as incorrect. While D sharp is enharmonically equivalent to the correct answer, E-flat, the two notes form different intervals (a major third in the case of D-sharp). Some students also struggled to construct intervals below the given note correctly.

Question 2 – Music theory – Scales and modes

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	11	0	13	0	15	0	22	0	40	5.4

- B-flat Harmonic minor – descending: B-flat, A, G-flat, F, E-flat, D-flat, C (B-flat)
- C Dorian – ascending: C, D, E-flat, F, G, A, B-flat (C)
- D Algerian – descending: D, C-sharp, B-flat, A, G-sharp, F, E, (D)
- C-Major pentatonic – descending: C, A, G, E, D, (C)

Many students wrote three or four of the required scales correctly. Students’ grasp of the conventions of music notation was mostly satisfactory, very few students incorrectly placed accidentals or misaligned note-heads. Of the four scales, the Algerian scale caused the most difficulty. In terms of learning strategies, students are advised to learn different scales as inflections of more standard note sets. In the case of the Algerian scale, it is most effective to learn the pattern not as an arbitrary note set, but as a variation of the harmonic minor scale – in this case a harmonic minor scale with a raised fourth degree.

Each scale was worth two marks, and students needed to get the scale entirely correct to earn these marks. Single marks were awarded to responses that had imperfections in music notation but correctly identified all the notes of the scale or that presented the scale in the wrong direction (i.e. ascending where descending was required).

Question 3 – Aural comprehension – Melodic transcription

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	2	6	9	8	9	7	8	8	8	7	7	6	5	4	4	3	6.9



The melodic transcription question was a high-order task that functioned as a discriminator for Section A of the examination. While many students demonstrated a correct application of music notation conventions (including correct stem direction and placement of accidentals), many struggled to correctly transcribe the pitch and rhythm of the exercise. Marks were awarded for contour, rhythm and pitch; students could score reasonably well if two out of three of these aspects were evident in their response. Many students successfully identified the scale used by the exercise (melodic minor) and used this information to inform how they went on to determine pitch. The question featured triadic constructions on every strong beat, and middle- and high-order student responses demonstrated an awareness of how the part to be transcribed interacted with the three given lines.



Part 2: Harmony

Question 4 – Music theory – Individual chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	8	11	15	21	39	3.5

- D Major 7: D, F-sharp, A, C-sharp
- E half diminished: E, G, B-flat, D
- E-flat minor: E-flat, G-flat, B-flat
- D-flat Augmented: D-flat, F, A
- A (full) diminished 7: A, C, E-flat, G-flat

Students generally handled this question well with 59 per cent of the cohort correctly constructing four or more of the five chords. One persistent issue was the placement of the flat signs in the E-flat minor triad. Many students placed three flats aligned vertically together in front of the three notes of the triad. While these responses were marked as correct, students should be aware that the three flats needed to be offset, in terms of vertical alignment, in order to avoid overlapping notation.

Question 5a–b. – Music theory – Diatonic chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	18	6	14	8	15	7	31	3.4

- Mediant chord of C harmonic minor: E-flat Augmented; E-flat, G, B
- Subdominant 7 chord of D Major: G Major 7; G, B, D, F-sharp
- Submediant 7 chord of B-flat harmonic minor: G-flat Major 7; G-flat, B-flat, D-flat, F

A number of students struggled with this question, and 18 per cent of the cohort received no marks for the question. It is possible this indicates a lack of understanding related to the tonal context in which chords exist. It was observed that many students were able to construct chords in isolation (as tested in Question 4), but were not able to draw conclusions as to appropriate chord construction from the tonal contexts provided by Question 5. It is advised that students and teachers focus on chord construction from the perspectives of building individual chords and how particular chord structures can be drawn from various scales. This material is vital as a primer for the aural perception of chord progressions in Question 6 and for real-world applications of chord progressions.

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
%	7	5	10	12	8	7	8	5	5	5	3	4	4	4	5	6	6.4

1 B-flat minor 2 E-flat minor 3 G-flat Major 7 4 D-flat Augmented 5 C half-diminished 7 6 F Dominant 7
or

Harmonic grid

Bass note	B-flat	E-flat	G-flat	D-flat	C	F
Quality	minor	minor	Major 7	Augmented	half-diminished 7	Dominant 7

Students struggled with this question with over 30 per cent of the cohort receiving three marks or fewer. Assessors gave credit for correctly identifying bass note, quality of triad and the type of seventh used (where applicable). Many students again seemed unaware of the tonal context in which chords exist. A student with a thorough grounding in theory would be able to glean from the key of the question (B-flat harmonic minor) the following information:



Root note	Quality of triad	Quality of 7 th chord
B-flat	minor	*Not examinable
C	diminished	half-diminished 7
D-flat	Augmented	Augmented 7
E-flat	minor	minor 7
F	Major	Dominant 7
G-flat	Major	Major 7
A	diminished	diminished 7

The knowledge here can be drawn from the given key entirely and can be determined without hearing the progression. This information could then provide a context and a 'check' for what a student heard in the course of completing the question. The fact that many students correctly identified the root note of the fourth chord in the progression as D-flat, but labelled the quality as diminished 7, indicates a lack of awareness of theory, and less a failure of aural ability. Students and teachers are reminded to link competencies related to aural and theory as closely as possible. Aural work is difficult without an underpinning of theory, and theory is often seen as unproductive without an aural application.

Section B – Analysis of excerpts of previously unheard music

Deficiencies in examination technique were evident in Section B: some students did not properly read the question and either included irrelevant information in their responses or referred to an incorrect interpretation in performance (with regard to Question 7b.). The 2010 examination rigorously explored a range of elements of music – some students struggled to use appropriate language to discuss these elements.

Question 7a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	1	2	3	6	10	13	14	15	13	13	5	4	7.3

Students were able to answer this question using a comparative table, dot points, prose and other modes of response, all methods were acceptable and capable of scoring full marks. The best responses came from students who identified both similarities and differences; students who focused solely on differences sometimes struggled to respond to two of the required elements. Answers to this question included, but were not limited to, the following.

Richard Harris interpretation in performance

Articulation

- the excerpt was predominantly *mezzo-staccato*
- there was some slurring used in motive leading up to the syncopated section
- the syncopated segment featured sustained accents (accented *tenuto*)
- the excerpt featured the use of articulation to accentuate syncopated passages

Dynamics

- levels were fairly even throughout as is typical for a 'radio mix'
- most dynamic variation was 'terraced' – textural density varied through the number of instruments used in any given section (trombones/brass used for dynamic effect)
- there was some use of *diminuendo* in the second part of discrete phrases
- the melodic contour (descending) of some phrases gave the impression of *decrescendo*

Melody

- 'bell-shaped' contours were evident in the melodic phrases
- 'chordal' melodies were used in several segments (harmonised in consecutive chords)
- most intervallic relationships were conjunct
- horizontal pitch orientation featured short motivic statements ('riffs')
- sustained string counter-melody offset the primary melodic line
- short counter-melodies were evident in places particularly in the brass and the woodwinds

Hugo Montenegro interpretation in performance

Articulation

- The accompaniment was comparatively crisper.
- The use of the vowel shapes from the chorus ('do' and 'bop', for example) had an effect on the nature of the articulation. In some places smoother, in other places somewhat more crisp.

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- Both slurring and *staccato* were used to create interest in main melodic line. Variation of articulations was a more prominent feature of this arrangement.
- Articulation in the syncopated section purposely imitated the brass. (Attack and decay slopes were intentionally imitated; in other words, the voices were used in an instrumental manner).

Dynamics

- greater range of dynamics was evident
- greater depth of dynamic contrast (the mix was much more 'hi-fi')
- greater use of different instruments and combinations of instruments was evident, textural density issues applied similarly, but to a larger extent
- 'hairpins' (crescendo-decrescendo) were used in some vocal phrases

Melody

- the performance of the melodies and counter-melodies in this arrangement were noticeably more precise
- counter melodies from guitar and 'synth' strings (in particular) were significantly more prominent (and different in various places)
- the use of chordal melody was similar to the other version, but the balancing of parts (and the use of some instruments) was different

Question 7b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	2	3	7	15	21	20	17	11	4	4.6

This question required students to consider a further two elements of music in relation to the Hugo Montenegro interpretation in performance only. High-scoring responses were able to overtly link the elements in question to the issue of adding interest to the interpretation in performance. While students were able to self-select the nature or focus of issues related to adding interest, responses that consisted of straightforward descriptions of the elements did not score as highly as those that linked interest and elements. Answers to this question included, but were not limited to the following:

Rhythm

- fundamentally a rock rhythm that was extensively contrasted by syncopated phrases
- the work was highly syncopated
- rhythmic unison was evident in various places
- rhythms underpinned phrase structures significantly (for example, the timpani presented 'consequent' phrases in some places)
- the accuracy and consistency of the articulations and the adherence to strict durations made the interpretation noticeably 'tight' or 'sharp'
- voices were used to accentuate syncopations, especially via the use and delivery of various vocalised syllables
- counter melodies (especially from the guitar) were contrasted against the syncopations (flowing quavers versus the syncopated lines)
- the 'synth' string's counter melody was smooth and sustained and constituted another rhythmic contrast

Tone colour

The instrumentation of the ensemble provided a range of options for descriptions of tone colour. Some notable examples include:

- use of voices added a range of 'colourations'
- syllables were used to alter the nature of the articulations from the instruments
- 'synth' strings were harsh and strident, especially in comparison to the voices
- brass instruments were generally clear and well-differentiated
- rhythm guitar settings were fairly 'edgy' and constituted another sonic contrast
- counter-melody in the guitar was located in the treble range and created an idiosyncratic effect
- 'standard' role of the rhythm section was somewhat blurred; the section was rather more within the polyphony/counterpoint of the arrangement rather than 'sitting' the rhythmic bed
- the drums were used in an almost 'melodic' sense in several places; this was primarily because of the simplicity and linearity of the drum part



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

The most popular works chosen were ‘Strawberry Fields’, ‘Dumb Things’, ‘Summertime’ from *Porgy and Bess* and the excerpts from *Carmina Burana*. These four works accounted for over 70 per cent of the cohort across Questions 8 and 9. While students generally used appropriate, mandated works to answer questions in Section C, some used the same work for both Questions 8 and 9. Where this occurred, the student could only earn marks for one of the two questions, the higher-scoring question was credited to the student in this instance.

Question 8a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	4	8	13	18	17	18	11	8	4.6

High-scoring answers were characterised by a clear link between the two elements under consideration and the issue of expressiveness. Low-scoring responses were characterised by overly generic descriptions of the elements and a lack of discipline-specific language. The most successful responses displayed a detailed knowledge of the various set works and could pinpoint, with reference to examples, issues associated with melody and articulation as related to issues of expressiveness. Only one interpretation in performance needed to feature in answers to this question – a number of students used valuable examination time writing about both interpretations in performance.

Question 8b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	7	4	10	14	16	16	16	10	7	4.3

This question required a straightforward description of tone colour and dynamics and referred to the interpretation in performance that was not used in Question 8a. In general, the cohort was able to write effectively about tone colour (albeit with extensive use of metaphor) but, in general, struggled to make more than superficial observations about dynamics. As for the previous question, the best responses demonstrated a broad knowledge of the interpretation and demonstrated this knowledge with examples from the work.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	8	3	5	6	8	10	9	10	13	10	9	4	3	6.1

High-scoring responses effectively linked between background and/or contextual issues and the way these issues influenced, informed or affected both the interpretations in performance under consideration. Middle and lower-scoring answers tended to simply describe background and/or contextual issues without showing how these issues affected both interpretations.