



2003 Music Performance Solo GA 2: Solo performance examination

Introduction

Every year, students who present a Solo Performance Program in this examination demonstrate an extremely high level of accuracy and commitment when playing their instrument or voice. The assessors are always impressed with how strong students are in their preparation and organisation and enjoy the performance flair demonstrated by most rather than observing those who are ‘just playing the notes’.

Despite the large number of students playing in school bands, it is surprising many do not continue their studies on their instruments to this level.

This report explains details of the examination as well as commenting on particular aspects for consideration by students and teachers.

Documentation

A range of information and documentation is provided for class and specialist instrumental music teachers who teach this study.

Most documentation referred to in this section of the report is available online at the VCE Music Performance Solo homepage at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/musicperformancesolo/musicpersoloindex.html

1. Study design

Units 3 and 4: Solo Performance in the VCE Music Performance Study Design contains the key knowledge and skills for, and the description of, the examination. This document is available online. Reference should also be made to the Examination section of the VCE Administrative Handbook which is published annually (in print and online). The following are sections of the study design that are directly relevant to the end-of-year Solo Performance examination:

- In Unit 3: Solo Performance, Selection of Instrument or Voice, Works selected for Study, and Outcome 1
- In Unit 4: Solo Performance, Selection of Instrument or Voice, Works selected for Study, Outcome 1, and description of the end-of-year Solo Performance examination.

2. Prescribed list and errata

The Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works contains information relevant to the preparation for, and conduct of, the examination. Some details and requirements stated in the Prescribed List are out of date and have been replaced by requirements in the revised VCE Music Performance: Solo Study Design.

Students must select works of their program from the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works (accreditation period January 1998 – December 2002). This Prescribed List will continue to December 2005. It is available from Information Victoria, but not available online. All updates and errata to this list are contained in the April 2003 *VCE Bulletin*, No.187, which is available on the VCAA website at the Solo homepage as well as at the following page www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/correspondence/bulletins/2003/April/03APRBUL.pdf

The March 2004 *VCAA Bulletin*, No.11, contains important information about the performance examination conditions for teachers and students. It can be found at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/correspondence/bulletins/2004/march/2004MARBUL.pdf

3. Assessment criteria

The criteria for the award of grades are applied to the whole program and not to works individually. There are 11 criteria that cover all instruments, and the performance of all approved works in the program. The document which lists the criteria also includes annotations which provide commentary about each criterion to help unpack general criteria into components more relevant to particular instruments. For 2004, the criteria can be found at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/correspondence/bulletins/2004/february/2004FEBSUP3.pdf. Note that this document is published annually. Only the current version should be used.

The examination

The end-of-year Performance examination contributes 50% to the study score for Music Performance Solo and requires that ‘students will present a program of approved solo works on an approved solo instrument in a live performance’. (VCE Music Performance: Solo Study Design page 58). The study design also states that ‘the program will include at least four works (five for percussion and six for singers) selected from the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works*.’ Please note that there is a different Prescribed List for ensemble works relevant to the Music Performance: Solo end-of-

year aural and written examination and another Prescribed List of Arrangements relevant to VCE Music Performance Units 3 and 4: Group Performance.

Selection of instrument

The term 'instrument' as used in the study design includes voice.

The choice of instrument may vary within a unit or between units. Students who work with more than one instrument should select a main instrument for Solo Performance. 'The student's main instrument must be selected from the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works. Students wishing to perform on an alternative instrument and use a suitable program of works for that alternative instrument must receive prior approval from the VCAA before commencing the study' (Study Design page 50).

For most instrument lists, students play one instrument. The exceptions are as follows:

- some instrument lists allow the student the option of playing a second instrument, for example in Guitar – contemporary popular, an electric and/or acoustic guitar may be used (Prescribed List p. 39)
- some other instrument lists require the student to play several different instruments; for example in Percussion, 'one work from each of the following four categories of works for percussion: Timpani, Multiple Percussion/Drumkit, Mallet Percussion and Snare Drum' (Prescribed List p. 59) and Recorder (Prescribed List p. 67)
- some lists have more than one instrument listed. Students are only required to play one, for example the list for Cornet in B flat, Flugelhorn, Baritone and Euphonium TC (Prescribed List p. 16).

The prescribed list of notated solo works

Students select works from one instrument list. The name of the list is the instrument name for the purposes of enrolling for the examination through VASS and this instrument name is used when enrolling the student at the beginning of the year. From this information, the VCAA will timetable the student for assessment. At times, a mix up occurs between Voice Classical and Voice Contemporary Popular, and less often Guitar – Classical and Guitar Contemporary Popular. Teachers should check that the student is enrolled in the correct instrument list.

There are 35 lists for 39 approved instruments in the Prescribed List. Each list contains further requirements. These are discussed below.

The Prescribed list defines some important aspects of a performance program.

- the categories in each instrument list define what works are examples of twentieth century music, a requirement of each program. For example, some solo works were composed after 1900, but in a Romantic style and not in any distinctive style that can categorise an example of twentieth century music
- the specifications of instruments to be played, for example harp, organ-electronic, synthesizer. Without specifying a particular brand or model, the instrument should have a minimum of resources and technical capability for the student to manipulate in order to meet artistic expectations of the works in the Prescribed List
- some editions are mandatory. In this case, the particular edition or arrangement may have particular artistic challenges not present in other editions or arrangements. Some editions of Baroque music provide details of authentic embellishment
- for other works, the edition and publisher details are cited for references purposes only. In this case, any reputable edition is suitable
- for some lesser known works, durations are provided to assist in achieving a balanced program within the time allowed for the examination performance
- for a few works lacking details in published editions, the Prescribed List provides additional instructions, for example MM tempo indications in Snare drum works. This detail establishes the level of difficulty. In a similar way, the durations provide a rough guide to an appropriate overall speed in slow movements
- a few works in some lists contain a section that is unstructured – the exact notes to be played are left to the performer. There is usually a comment accompanying the work identifying this. The only part of the performance of these sections which can be considered by assessors is how the student continues to play in the overall style represented by the work. Creative or original improvisation work are not covered in the criteria for the award of grades in this examination
- there are different requirements in terms of accompaniment from instrument to instrument. Some instruments do not require any accompaniment. Only one live accompanist (at a time) is allowed and there is often a limit to the number of pre-recorded accompaniments allowed in the performance of a program
- the Voice – Contemporary Popular works are cited with print music and an audio recording. This is to provide a guide in determining the form and style of the performance that cannot be represented in print
- students are expected to perform the entire work as specified in the Prescribed List. Some items in the list limit the movements that can be selected. Some works have lengthy piano introductions; these can be reduced as long as the solo part is not affected. Some works for oboe, bassoon and trumpet have longer interludes; these should be retained to allow recovery time for the solo player.

Program selection

The program is the vehicle through which the student will demonstrate their music performance in relation to the criteria for the award of grades within the time allocated. The study design and the Prescribed List have important information on program selection, including listing the requirements of all programs.

The Prescribed List contains works of a range of levels of difficulty. Some works with less technical challenges may be excellent choices for students to demonstrate expressiveness and a wider range of musical interpretation. At least one work should be chosen to give the student the opportunity to demonstrate their dexterity in technique. While technically difficult works demonstrate a wider range of techniques, they may provide more opportunities for errors in accuracy and loss of control. For this reason, some students wisely choose contrasting works from the list that are within their technical capability ensuring artistic and musical aspects of the performance are fully displayed in the whole program.

Music Performance: Solo Units 3 and 4 focus on style and interpretation. Works selected for the program should give the student the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding through performance of historical, contemporary and personal interpretation. Strong performance programs will contain works that together give students the opportunity to fully demonstrate all the criteria for the award of grades.

Program requirements

The program requirements in the VCE Music Performance Study Design (accredited 2001–2003 extended to 2005) in relation to the number of works that should be prepared replace those in the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works (accredited 1998–2002 extended to 2005). In the Prescribed List the requirements listed in the introduction and also in the introductory paragraphs at the beginning of each instrument list are also superseded by those in the study design.

There are some students that do not fulfil requirements of the program. This is illustrated in the score for Criterion 1: ‘compliance with the requirements of the task’ being less than the maximum. Students, specialist instrument teachers and class music teachers/VCE Coordinators should check throughout the year that all requirements are being met.

Number of works to be performed

The Study Design states that students are required to ‘perform at least four works, (five for percussion and six for singers)’. This replaces the requirement in the Prescribed List that states ‘at least three works should be performed in the examination program’. It should be noted that percussionists must perform at least five works from four different categories of works.

Where possible, the program duration of music time should add up to around 20–22 minutes. Depending on the duration of each work, a program can typically number between 5–10 works. It is strongly recommended that students performing works from the Guitar – contemporary popular list should perform five or six works due to the generally shorter duration of works on this list.

Where more than one work is selected from a category within a list it is recommended that the composers should be different in order to maximise the range of styles, characters and composers in their program.

Works that are examples of twentieth century music

A requirement for all programs is that they contain at least two works that are examples of twentieth century music including works composed in the twentieth century.

Unaccompanied work

A requirement for all programs is that ‘At least one will be an unaccompanied work’ (study design, page 58).

Unaccompanied performance allows students to demonstrate independently their skill in performing with control. It should be noted that Voice – contemporary popular students should choose their unaccompanied work carefully. Not all works are suitable to be sung unaccompanied. The ones that are recommended are marked with an asterisk (*) in the Prescribed List.

Works performed with accompaniment

At least two works are to be performed with piano accompaniment, with exceptions as listed in the study design (see page 58). In presenting some contemporary works, students may use accompaniments performed live by an instrument other than piano, as long as there is only one accompanist used at any time and there are at least two other works performed with piano accompaniment.

Students should select an expert and experienced accompanist and work with him or her several times before the final examination, if not regularly, in order to refine the musical interaction with the accompanist. Some instrument lists allow the use of a limited number of recorded accompaniments. It should be noted that performance with some recorded accompaniments is more challenging than performance with live accompanists as the tempo of the recording is uncompromising.

Note that the accompanist is not allowed to assist the student in tuning their instrument in the examination room other than to provide a tuning note requested by the student. The accompanist must leave the examination room when not

accompanying. Students should consider this when planning how they will use the 25 minutes allowed for the performance.

Access to resources

It should be noted that students using recorded accompaniments must bring their own playback equipment to the performance examination. Students must ensure their playback equipment runs at the correct speed and pitch. All equipment should be checked to ensure it is in the best working order and is suitable for the task. Students are also required to provide their own music stands. Guitar leads and other cables should be checked for reliability.

The VCAA will inform students enrolled in percussion and drumkit, of the equipment available at their examination venue. Students must provide all other equipment. They may prefer to bring their own equipment and use only some of the percussion equipment provided, for example students may prefer a particular type of cymbal or their own drum tuned for a particular sound.

Students should consider where they position themselves in the room for performance. They should be in a central location in the room, able to communicate musically with their accompanist (as appropriate) and able to direct their performance interpretation to the assessors. Students should perform facing forward and can be seated or standing. They should not hide behind the music stand (if used).

Performance program information form

Prior to the examination, students will receive their individual VCAA Examination Slip and a Performance Program Information Sheet. The examination slip states the student's name, and the date, time, venue of the examination and address of the venue. The Program Information Sheet is completed prior to the examination and presented at the examination. The works selected should be written in order of performance. The other information about unaccompanied work/s, twentieth-century works is a reminder about requirements of the examination. Information in the Prescribed List about the duration for each work is to assist students to perform works close to the designated tempo and to plan the overall program to fit into the 25 minutes allowed for the examination. The VCAA Examination Slip is sent direct to schools electronically through VASS usually in August each year.

Time and duration

Students present a program of their choice on an instrument of their choice to demonstrate their best within a program of a total duration of 25 minutes (study design page 59) including changing from one work to another.

Students are advised to arrive at the examination centre at least 30 minutes before this starting time. Students should use this time to warm-up and settle themselves into a 'frame of mind' for the optimum performance. Students with electronic equipment should arrive earlier in order to unload, assemble and check the working order of the equipment. Percussion students should arrive even earlier with their own assistants to help set up.

Once welcomed into the examination room, piano players should allow a little time to try out both pianos before choosing one for performance. Performers using electronic equipment such as amplifiers, playback equipment should allow time to connect power, balance the tone and volume, and familiarise themselves with the acoustics of the examination room. It is recommended that students practise setting up quickly and effectively for performance. Students should also perform in a variety of rooms with different acoustics in order to become accustomed to adjusting to different performance spaces with varying quality of acoustics.

The actual assessed time for each performance commences with the assessor's announcement (for disc recording purposes) of the student's candidate number, the time, date and examination venue (August 2002 *VCE Bulletin*, No.179, page 5; available online at <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/correspondence/bulletins/2002/august/02augbul.pdf>).

General comments on past solo performance examinations

The best performances allow the performance of each work to start and finish mindful of the mood being set and the drama remaining at the end of a performance. Some students start without any warning with sounds that merge from warm-up and practice; others end the performance of a work abruptly. Students should consider the sound that remains in the room immediately after they stop playing. The sound that lingers is still part of the communication with the audience and should be allowed to fade before moving on. Students should consider these as they plan how they will fill out the 25 minute performance and how they will interpret the works.

Many students handle the pressure of performance with confidence. However, some students would benefit from more practice performing under examination conditions, for example performances at eisteddfods, assemblies, recitals with other solo students from other schools. Students may benefit from performing to other expert solo music teachers and performers for other opinions.

Some works in the prescribed list have very difficult piano accompaniments. Students should practise regularly with an accompanist so as to be perfectly familiar with the interaction between the musical parts and understand the better places where artistic freedom can be explored.

Most students present at this examination with the best endeavour and make a genuine effort. However, some do not benefit from the guidance of a specialist instrumental or vocal teacher who fully understands the requirements of the study and the criteria for the award of grades. Students are strongly advised to work with specialist teachers on a weekly basis, although lessons that are less regular can also work well for advanced players.

Tuning and checking the tuning during the examination is an acceptable part of formal instrumental recitals involving instruments that do not have fixed pitch. This is particularly an issue with orchestral and fretted string instruments.

The following information for some instruments expands on that stated in the study design and Prescribed List.

All brass instruments

The number of students presenting on instruments in this 'family' is modest. Playing these instruments requires great physical stamina balanced with demonstrating sensitivity and artistry. The students who score a high grade achieve this balance and explore the significant works from the list.

Students presenting a brass instrument; especially trumpet and horn, are encouraged to plan their program to allow for recovery time. This can be achieved by allowing the accompanist to play the long interludes where the solo instrument is not playing. Alternatively, the student may take a longer break between works.

In the weeks approaching the final examination, students should not be struggling to perform for 25 minutes; students should be able to perform for longer and still maintain full artistic control. There should be enough stamina in reserve. Furthermore care should be taken as to the amount of extended playing that is done on the day before the examination.

When students are planning their program, care has to be taken to not be over ambitious in programming too many major works without the physical stamina required. Works that are less taxing, but with artistic challenges should be placed carefully in the program order to optimise performance.

Drumkit and percussion

Some student performances for drumkit and percussion are very exciting and dynamic. Percussion performances in particular require meticulous planning and execution to gather, adjust and perform on such a large number of instruments.

For drumkit/percussion students an additional 25 minutes is allocated to set up for performance. This time has to be planned carefully and is best done with several assistants brought along by the student.

A list of drumkit/percussion equipment available at the examination venue will be provided to all drumkit/percussion students by the VCAA. Student should also ask about access points to the venue for loading and unloading, and the number of steps up or down to reach the room.

Students with assistants should set up their instruments so that they can make efficient physical movement from one instrument to another. Communication lines with the accompanist should determine locations of the instruments performed with a pianist. The placement, setup and balancing of the audio playback equipment should also be pre-planned.

If students are not familiar with the brands and models of the equipment provided, they should bring their own. There are differences between all brands and models.

It is highly recommended that any audio playback equipment is checked and in full working order. The volume level should be such that the assessors can hear both the student playing and the backing track in balance.

While some works in the drumkit list are well known in a group context, the student must present the selected work as a solo. Within the context of the overall style of the work, the student is encouraged to embellish or add a bit more to the notated part once they have demonstrated that they have achieved the part.

Guitar – contemporary popular, and electric bass

These are increasingly popular instruments. Students are now better prepared and are presenting a full program. The styles in the programs are becoming more varied and more students are presenting their examination program as a performance.

Generally more than four works should be presented in the program. On average, given the length of most works in the Prescribed List for these instruments, students should present about 7 or 8 works within the 25 minutes allocated for the examination if they expect a comparable grade to students who perform on other instruments.

The works in the program should cover the required categories, contain performance of works by different composers/performers and cover a wide range of styles and characters. Also, while some works are well known in a group context, students must present the selected work as a solo. Planning ways to start and end the performance of this type of work convincingly is important and students need to be sure to use an appropriate pre-recorded accompaniment.

Students need to take care to have the correct edition/arrangement of prescribed works, as sometimes they present the wrong edition/arrangement of popular works, for example 'Yesterday' and 'Blackbird'. All works are expected to be performed in their entirety as specified in the Prescribed List.

It is highly recommended that audio playback equipment for pre-recorded backing is checked and in the best working order. Students are expected to bring their own equipment. A full PA system is both unnecessary and time consuming to set up. The playback volume level should be set such that the assessors can clearly hear both the student playing and the backing track in balance. This equipment and the guitar amplifier (if used) should be preset before entering the examination room. Once the equipment is positioned in the room, all that should need to be done is to plug in one power lead and adjust the overall volume level. The pre-recorded material should be easily cued to avoid wasting time to setup the second backing track if used.

Students are expected to bring their own equipment including guitar/bass amplifier, foot stool, extra music stand, spare leads (just in case), extension power cord, power board, audio playback equipment, AC/DC power supplies, as appropriate. When presenting their program, students of Guitar – Contemporary popular should face the assessors as if they are an audience. Students should avoid facing away from the assessors. The use of a footstool may be valuable in helping guitarists to sit in a balanced way and be able to move their hands freely. Performing in a standing position using a shoulder strap is also an option.

Students should demonstrate a confident, well planned and smoothly executed performance of contrasting works as a total performance. In general students performing on these instruments could do more preparation to better demonstrate this. As this is an examination, no feedback on their performance is provided to any student until the results are posted with other results in December.

Voice – classical, voice – contemporary popular

Students presenting for these two lists combine to make singers the largest instrument group for this examination. The top performers show a wide range of moods and feelings projected convincingly and often with passion and control. The best performances have a strong music understanding between the accompanist and the vocalist.

Teachers and students should check that the student has been enrolled in the correct list Voice – Classical or Voice – Contemporary Popular. Students should not mix works in their program across the two lists. All works in the program should come from one list.

A strong program is one where the student has chosen and demonstrated a wide range of styles and characters represented in the list. Some works will demonstrate skill in performing different shapes of melodies, some rhythmic, some flowing; a work may be more syllabic. Contemporary and Classical programs should not have too much of any one style and or character. Some programs emphasise music styles the student obviously prefers. However, the criteria for the award of grades and the study design emphasises not just a wide range but also demonstrating of authentic performance of the song as originally conceived. This is guided by the actual edition cited in the Prescribed List.

Voice – Classical students should perform in a second language. The tempi from one song to another in the program should vary – some songs fast, some more sustained. Within the limits of an individual's voice, the songs should explore the full vocal range and move freely within that range. Some students have too many works in styles that are similar and they perform them in a similar way. It is expected that students demonstrate their understanding of a wider range of styles. Furthermore, students are expected to uncover the special meaning in each song performed.

Every opportunity should be taken, when singing the unaccompanied work, for students to demonstrate their ability to sing expressively. Some very moving performances have been heard. Without an accompaniment, the singer, for example, is able to take more liberties with timing. Exploring the techniques to be expressive is to be encouraged and practised. However, some students just sing through the unaccompanied work blandly, without any nuances and only one verse and this is not enough.

For Voice – Contemporary popular students, within the context of the overall style of the work, the student is encouraged to embellish or add a bit more to the notated part once they have demonstrated that they have achieved the part. The CD recordings listed provide a reference point to the degree of freedom allowed from the notated work in the Voice contemporary popular list. A limited number of songs can be accompanied by a pre recorded accompaniment. Prior to the examination, equipment should be checked to ensure that it is in full working order. Students should bring their own equipment. The pre-recorded material should be easily cued to avoid wasting time to setup the second

backing track if used. The volume level should be such that the assessors can clearly hear both the student singing and the backing track in balance. No sound reinforcement of the singer is permitted.

Any accompaniments (live and pre-recorded) must avoid stating the lead line or the melody when the student is singing the same line or melody. This doubling most likely will hide the performance of the student and prevent him or her from demonstrating the finer nuances of vocal performance.

For both Voice – Contemporary popular and Voice – Classical, students must perform their entire programs from memory: that is, without the aid of sheet-music or lyric sheets. This reflects the importance of the presentation and projection of the character of each song as part of a whole performance experience.

Organ – electronic and synthesizer

The performers of these instruments bring into the exam a wealth of technology. The repertoire is quite varied ranging from transcriptions to contemporary popular styles. The top students demonstrate creative and dynamic control of all aspects of the instrument and playing in authentic styles. While the quality of sound is purchased with the instrument, the precise setting up and smooth changing of sounds to reflect the wide range of styles and traditions represented in the music selected are demonstrated by the best students.

Students are advised to be proficient in the manipulation and control of their instrument in performance. The settings should demonstrate balance – that is, no one part or instrumental sound should dominate another. This is of particular significance as specific voicings are often not notated in the music for these instruments. Some works in the lists for pianoforte, violin and violoncello are quite long. It is recommended that several long works not be performed in this examination as this will limit the range of works, styles, characters and techniques a student can demonstrate in the time available.

Orchestral strings

Students who play these instruments continue to be well prepared and show understanding of the associated conventions and traditions. The repertoire presented demand detailed preparation and confident execution. The very best students play with incredible accuracy in a dynamic performance with twentieth century works strongly and successfully represented in their programs.

Students of violoncello should carefully plan and time their program as the longer durations of several works in the list make it difficult to allow a wide range of styles and characters within the 25 minutes and minimum number of required works.

Pianoforte

This instrument remains the most popular on the instrument list. Performances strongly reflect a thorough preparation of a wide range of styles and characters. The most successful programs are well balanced and contrasting and usually explore the traditional pianoforte repertoire from the list. The best performance of dramatic works have moments of great strength in tone, controlled build up, controlled tapering and dramatic use of silence. The technically capable students show control in using the sustain pedal. The action is smooth and without thumps or any noise. The pedal is released as often as needed so the sustained sounds are not overly rich in the smaller studios.

It is a shame that only a few students present Australian and Jazz works apart from those composed by Joplin, Norton, Sutherland and Gershwin. There are wonderful choices of other interesting quality twentieth century works that may look awkward initially, but they are excellent contrasting characters.

All students should regularly perform on different pianofortes to learn to quickly adjust to a different instrument. Some students look a little uncomfortable sitting at a grand piano. The higher music stand, the slightly heavier touch and the stronger spring in the sustain pedal seem to be the cause of the loss of flow and smoothness in style. In particular, students who choose to play the grand piano should learn to use the heavier sprung sustain pedal without any noise. Some students perform equally as well on the upright as others who play the grand piano. The assessors recommend that students play the instrument with which they are most comfortable. In the main, the pianos used for examinations are Yamaha and Kawai grand and upright pianos.

All keyboard students should bring in a small hand (or finger tip) towel to wipe down keys and hands should it be a hot day or the performer before them perspired noticeably. Students should expect that the stool in the examination room is at the standard height. However, as each student may be a different height, it can be expected that students would have to raise or lower their body in relation to the height of the keyboard. To help quickly find the optimum height to allow transfer of body weight into the keys, students should bring in their own firm cushion.

Woodwind

The tradition in performing solo woodwind works is strong and well understood in the musical community. The top students demonstrate a very strong sense of style and perform with conviction. Top students of Flute, Oboe and Bassoon demonstrate in performance a very strong understanding of Baroque ornamentation and style.

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