



2012 Music Investigation GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

In the 2012 Music Investigation performance examination, students were expected to present a live performance of at least four contrasting works that related to the Focus Area underpinning their study in Units 3 and 4. The students were also required to submit, along with a performance program sheet, a Focus Statement outlining their Focus Area and the relationship of the selected performance program to this area. At least one work in the program was to be selected from either the Prescribed List of Group Works or the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works, as published on the VCAA website.

Students could nominate to present either as a soloist or as a member of a group. The majority of students presented as soloists.

The majority of students achieved scores that ranged from very good to outstanding.

Students who attained the highest scores based on all the assessment criteria presented music performance programs that included the following attributes.

- a submitted Focus Statement that clearly outlined the Focus Area and specifically relevant performance techniques that would be demonstrated in the performance examination
- a performance program with musical items that were clearly relevant to the above point
- an outstanding level of skill and musicianship on their chosen instrument(s)/voice

Students who attained the lowest scores based on all the assessment criteria presented music performance programs that included some or all of the following attributes.

- a limited level of skill and musicianship on their chosen instrument(s)/voice
- a performance that did not connect to the submitted Focus Statement
- lack of the technical skill level necessary to demonstrate understanding of music styles and performance techniques relevant to the Focus Area outlined in their submitted Focus Statement
- the Focus Area as stated in the Focus Statement was vague and lacked any genuine focus – the students' performance examination thus could not reasonably demonstrate relevance to the Focus Area
- the performance program contained musical items that had no genuine relevance or connection to the student's Focus Area

The performance program, Focus Area and Focus Statement

Students need to recognise the importance of presenting a performance that clearly demonstrates their Focus Area.

While the Focus Statement is not directly assessed, it provides the crucial reference point for assessors to understand the intention of the student's performance in the examination.

The Focus Statement should clearly outline a 'statement of intent' that the student will be able to demonstrate in their performance examination. It also should clearly outline relevant and characteristic performance techniques that assessors can expect to hear demonstrated during the performance examination. It may also refer to a well-defined timeline. The student should avoid including in the Focus Statement distracting background or performance techniques that will not be featured in the performance examination.

The Focus Statement might also list each musical item along with the relevant performance techniques and rationale as to why the piece is being performed.

Some students may take the opportunity to introduce each piece with a description of how the piece relates to their chosen Focus Area. Although not mandated, this practice makes clear to assessors the connection between the performance and Focus Area.

Note also that the Focus Statement that is presented for a student's performance examination will at times articulate a Focus Area that is less broad than it may have been at the start of the school year.



Unsatisfactory Focus Areas

Focus Areas were audited early in the year to provide advice to students and teachers, and to ensure that the Focus Areas chosen were appropriate, clearly articulated and would work well as the basis of a program for the performance examination. In some cases, recommended changes were not made and Focus Areas that were deemed unsuitable were used as the basis of the program in the performance examination. The result was that these students were severely disadvantaged in their examination.

Assessment criteria

Students should be familiar with the assessment criteria.

1. Compliance with the requirements of the task

Compliance is scored according to whether a Focus Statement has been presented to the assessors prior to the examination.

2. Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

Students were expected to perform their works accurately and up to the required tempo range for each work chosen. Accuracy included pitch, rhythm, dynamics, articulation and phrasing. At the same time, the passagework, tone production, timing, phrasing and articulation should have been performed with clarity as appropriate to the instrument.

3. Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency

Firstly, to score well in this criterion, students needed to select programs containing a wide range of performance techniques that they could demonstrate as relevant to their Focus Area as stated in the Focus Statement. Secondly, they needed to have finely developed technical resources in order to perform these techniques with control and fluency. Fluent techniques were apparent when the work seemed to be performed effortlessly.

Control of passagework was demonstrated most highly in performances that remained even and disciplined at the required tempo. It was also demonstrated through the ability to alter tempo and/or dynamics, and through subtle pitch adjustments as appropriate to the instrument. This was all done within appropriate stylistic conventions of the Focus Area.

4. Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities relevant to the Focus Area

A range of tonal qualities relevant to the Focus Area should be evident. Quality, variation and projection of expressive tone throughout a wide dynamic range should be evident as appropriate to the Focus area.

5. Skill in articulating and phrasing

The student's performance should demonstrate artistic and expressive use of phrasing and articulation relevant to the Focus Area, and communicate beyond the referenced works (notation/ recording) by use of appropriate nuances and performance techniques.

6. Skill in differentiating the structures and textures within each work of the Focus Area

Students were required to perform a variety of structures and textures, characteristic of the Focus Area and convey differentiation of the structures and textures of each work.

7. Skill in differentiating the musical lines in the selected works as appropriate to the Focus Area

The highest-ranking students in this criterion recognised the importance of performing programs that had a variety of textures relevant to the Focus Area. The parts and textures were particularly well balanced, and an empathy and synchronisation between the solo and accompaniment, or group members, was evident. This occurred in a variety of contexts. The most typical was between group members, or between the soloist and accompanist. It was also demonstrated through soloists' internal synchronisation and balance of parts of a musical texture. Performers on solo instruments such as piano, harp and classical guitar demonstrated these elements internally by balancing the levels of the various textures. The best singers and instrumentalists demonstrated the various textures, even in the unaccompanied work, as well as the accompanied works. These students were extremely well rehearsed with their accompanist, had a high degree of technical mastery so as to be able to separate the different musical textures and were able to use tension and release to bring out the main musical elements.

8. Skill in presenting an interpretation of the works that is informed by historical and/or contemporary practices and conventions relevant to the Focus Area

The performance should incorporate interpretations of works that demonstrated an understanding of original performance practices as well as current stylistic conventions relevant to the Focus Area.



9. Skill in performing with musicality through creativity and individuality

The performance should demonstrate individuality and creativity within performance practice as appropriate to the Focus Area. The performance should convey an understanding of the Focus Area through applying elements of personal interpretation.

10. Skill in demonstrating how the musical works in the program are representative of the Focus Area

The student will have clearly demonstrated the relevance of the musical works performed to the Focus Area.

11. Skills in the presentation of a cohesive program relevant to the Focus Area

The performance program should be cohesive and well structured with the use of performance conventions in the given style(s). The program should have emphasise effective musical communication with the intended audience.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Solo

Students who performed as soloists in this examination performed with a wide variety of classical, contemporary and world instruments, including an Indian tabla. Contemporary popular voice had the largest cohort of students, followed by contemporary popular guitar, drum-kit and saxophone.

As mentioned above, one of the main factors in awarding marks was the extent to which the performance related to the Focus Area. The highest-ranking students were able to clearly and concisely articulate and demonstrate their Focus Area. In reading the Focus Statement, it was very clear what the area of investigation was. The performance then clearly demonstrated what was written. At the same time, the performance contained a variety of elements, as specified in the assessment criteria. These students were also able to use a variety of performance techniques and musical elements to create interesting and varied performances.

Some students seemed to have difficulty understanding what they were investigating via the performance and Focus Statement. Some students were let down by Focus Statements that were too general and performances that seemed to have little or no relationship to the Focus Statements. Some Focus Statements were light on facts. Others were so broad and general that they could have been written to justify almost any program. Some needed more detail and others provided a great deal of irrelevant information. While some students had a strong command of musical terminology in their Focus Statements, others lacked precision in their language, demonstrating a lack of understanding of their Focus Area. Some students failed to make any obvious link between the chosen 'set work' and the other works in their program.

Group

Each student was required to submit a Focus Statement, even where members of a group had selected similar focus areas. The performance program presented often allowed for similar focus statements to work in the one examination time. Some students should have considered whether their Focus Area would best be demonstrated by performing in a separate examination to other students from the same school.

Teachers and students also needed to be careful to ensure that they put together the strongest possible program for the assessed students. When determining the musical performance program for the examination, they needed to consider their selections in relation to the criteria, especially regarding the relevance to their focus. Some students successfully performed original compositions that were relevant and well crafted, but other students presented a majority of original compositions in their program, with limited connection to the Focus Area.

Specific issues (group and solo)

Contemporary popular voice (solo) – use of microphone

An exciting development for students is that the use of a microphone is allowed. While this carries obvious benefits, it also poses challenges for singers. Students who decide to use a microphone should practise microphone techniques and become thoroughly comfortable and confident in this area. They should also consider demonstrating the ability to sing without a microphone in one or two songs for contrast and variety. This would also allow the student to demonstrate different aspects of vocal technique. The issue of setting up equipment must be considered due to time constraints, as well as balance between the vocalist and the backing.

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Voice (classical and contemporary – group and solo) – range and keys

When choosing works for a program, it is recommended that voice students consider performing in different ranges to highlight the different colours in their voice. At the same time, the choice of key is very important for the successful delivery of a song. Sometimes a key needs to be altered (sometimes requiring the re-transcription of an accompaniment) to better suit a student's developing vocal range. Some students do themselves a disservice by keeping all songs in the original key in their edition of the music.

Accompaniments and style

As students have the opportunity to play in a specific style or genre in this subject, it is absolutely essential that live accompanists who are chosen to support students are experts at playing in the chosen style. When performing with backing tracks, students need to consider the quality of the backing and the balance of their part with the backing track. Mistakes made in 2012 included using backings that were too soft and thus failed to provide adequate support, as well as backings that were too loud and drowned out the solo part.

Some students had their own part playing in the accompaniment (group or solo). In most instances, this affected the stylistic integrity of the performance. In some cases, it was difficult for assessors to clearly determine what was actually played by the soloist, thus adversely affecting the student's mark for one or more criteria.

Short programs

There are no prescriptions about program length, apart from requiring a minimum of four works, and a maximum length (see the prescription of maximum length for different scenarios, such as solo or group, including the number of assessed performers). It was possible to perform four two-minute pieces without incurring any penalty. However, it was difficult for students to fulfil the assessment criteria to a very high level if they chose such a minimalist approach. Students were expected to demonstrate a breadth of work studied over the course of a year and show a depth of understanding. Some programs presented were very short and displayed only very limited and simple techniques. Students were encouraged to make the best of the opportunity to perform to the maximum time allowed, and to display a depth of understanding of their Focus Area through a wide variety of technical and musical resources.

Unaccompanied works (solo)

In Music Performance, it is often the unaccompanied work that separates the good students from the best students. Although it is not a requirement in Music Investigation, some students could have benefited if they had performed an unaccompanied work in their program. In some programs, the unaccompanied work could have been the missing style needed to complement the rest of the program.