

## **2014 Music Performance (Solo/Group) GA 2: Performance examination**

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Over the course of a year, students in this subject undertake a variety of areas of study, including performance, performance technique and musicianship. They do this either as a soloist or as a member of a group. The key skills they are expected to develop in Unit 4 include the ability to:

- prepare, refine and present performances of a program of group and solo works that demonstrates a range of music styles and diversity of character
- demonstrate accuracy, fluency and control in the performance of selected group and solo works
- demonstrate idiomatic tone quality, clarity and variation of tone in the performance of selected group and solo works
- shape the performance of selected group and solo works through control and variation of expressive elements of music
- present informed interpretations of selected group and solo works that demonstrate balance between relevant personal, stylistic, practical, technological, historical and cultural influences
- use relevant historical and contemporary performance conventions to interpret and perform selected group and solo works
- demonstrate communication, interaction, cooperation and empathy with other musicians as appropriate to the performance of selected works
- demonstrate stylistic characteristics and refine their ability to communicate awareness of musical structures in the performance of selected group and solo works
- demonstrate understanding of the roles of, and relationships between, instrumental voices in selected group work(s) or parts within the texture of solo work(s)
- demonstrate presentation techniques and conventions of performance that are appropriate to the instrument(s), ensemble(s), works, styles and performance space(s)
- perform using effective sound production and/or sound reinforcement techniques as appropriate to the acoustic properties of performance venues, the style and character of selected works and the performance contexts.

### **SPECIFIC INFORMATION: Solo Performance**

Each student's competence in these key skills is assessed in the performance examination. Students perform using one of 34 prescribed instruments (or an approved alternative instrument) in a formal recital examination with a maximum duration of 25 minutes. These instruments include all traditional orchestral instruments, voice and keyboard instruments (classical), as well as a wide range of contemporary instruments represented in all popular styles including rock, pop and jazz styles. All instruments are assessed against the examination criteria. Students are given an independent mark against each criterion.

#### **Criteria**

##### **Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirement of the task**

Prescribed lists of acceptable works to be performed in the examination are published on the VCAA website and are updated annually. The preamble to each prescribed list clearly describes the requirements of the recital. For example, there are specific minimum requirements for the total number of works and the categories that must be represented, as well as special requirements, such as performing from memory, required accompanied works and required unaccompanied works.

##### **Criterion 2 – Skill in performing accurately and with clarity**

The preparation of works to be performed should begin with the accurate learning of those works as referenced and within appropriate performance conventions (for example, if tempo variations are typical of the performance in a given style, they should be evident). Students who gain the highest marks for this criterion have generally prepared thoroughly throughout the year. The discipline in their preparation is always evident in the performance and their accuracy is very high. Some students may perform accurately but under tempo, which does not allow access to the highest marks. Performances that are basically accurate but that lack clarity cannot gain access to the highest marks.

Students gained a wide variety of marks for this criterion, from very low to very high. There was a high correlation between students who achieved the highest marks in this criterion and students who achieved very high marks in all the other criteria.

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## **Criterion 3 – Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency**

The discriminator in this criterion is the range of techniques performed. Having the widest range of techniques in the chosen program as well as having the skills to perform those techniques with control and fluency gained access to the highest marks. Students who chose the simplest works from the prescribed list, or who chose works that all had similar techniques, were immediately disadvantaged in this criterion, as were students who just performed the minimum works required for compliance. Skill in performing with control and fluency is typified by evenness of passage-work, clarity of articulation, fluent performances uninterrupted by stops and starts, internal synchronisation of technique, and all at any dynamic level.

## **Criterion 4 – Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities**

Students who scored the highest marks in this criterion chose programs that contained a wide variety of possible tonal effects. Guitarists could produce a variety of tones through amp setting, guitar pick-ups and effects pedals, and even through the use of different guitars. Guitarists could perhaps use an acoustic guitar for chordal or finger style, showing the production of a rich tone without amplification. Singers should aim to manipulate tone colour and vocal placement to clearly reflect the style of each song. Drummers should make sure the kit is tuned to bring out the best tone in the instrument. They should use different sticks as appropriate to the different styles being performed and consider adding extra equipment to the kit, such as a cowbell, wood block, cymbals and so on. For the snare solo, drummers should consider using a different snare, appropriately tuned.

## **Criterion 5 – Skill in expressive communication through articulation and phrasing**

Music is incapable of linguistic expression (unless it is sung, and that expression is only possible through the use of text) and yet is capable of expressing that which is linguistically inexpressible. Within the instrumental context and genre, creativity of expression is expected through the use of articulation and phrasing. This can create the element of surprise in a performance, adding to its 'expressiveness'. An engaging performance will take opportunities to be expressive. Students who (within their instrumental context) created an expressive performance gained the highest marks in this criterion.

## **Criterion 6 – Skill in differentiating the musical lines**

For students who perform with an accompanist, this criterion is used to assess the specific ability of the student to lead a performance as well as to work within a balanced ensemble. Access to the highest marks will typically occur where there are opportunities for the student to both lead and follow. The precision of the ensemble is assessed from the student's viewpoint. While the accompanist is obviously not assessed, the competence of the accompanist will either support or hinder the student in their endeavour to score highly in this criterion. A dominating and overpowering performance from the accompanist will not give the student the opportunity to create adequate balance and/or interaction. Too often, students who perform 'contemporary' programs are criticised because they use inappropriate levels (or playback equipment). Playback that is too soft or that lacks a wide enough frequency range can be difficult or impossible to interact with. For example, a small speaker that adequately supports a singer in a practice situation is possibly not going to be adequate in a larger performance space. Students who gained the highest marks in this criterion used the best accompanist or the best playback equipment and had rehearsed in a variety of spaces. They were able to adjust to the performance conditions to create performances that were both balanced and synchronised.

## **Criterion 7 – Skill in differentiating the structures and characteristics of each work**

Students who performed very similar works throughout the program limited their access to high marks in this criterion. The highest-scoring programs used a wide variety of structures and were performed by students who had the ability to demonstrate the different structures and characteristics of each work. Some of the highest-scoring students were able to heighten the tension that was already inherent in the musical works, to create the global shape of each work and to make each work sound different from each other work.

## **Criterion 8 – Skill in presenting an informed interpretation of a range of styles**

Students are expected to perform music that represents a range of different styles within their examination program. When they choose to limit this because of a preference for a particular style, they limit their access to higher marks in this criterion. In a program that can potentially allow a student to demonstrate a wide range of styles, it is essential that students have a clear understanding of the different styles available. The best way of gaining this understanding is to listen to the range of styles in their program. This may require some guidance, but will be well rewarded. An informed understanding of style is gained through mimetic listening. That means listening to and copying or miming the style. As students do this more and more, the style becomes a part of their musical palate, so that they can adopt the main elements of the style without necessarily performing an exact copy of another performance (see next criterion).

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## **Criterion 9 – Skill in performing with musicality through creativity and individuality**

The musical reference (notation, referenced recording or both) is the starting point when learning any work and it must eventually be interpreted with integrity. Every performer brings something different to the performance of a musical work. Students are not only invited but expected to bring something of their own personality to the interpretation of their program of works. Sometimes a student might rank very highly in terms of creativity, but if no consideration is given to the style performed, then the overall score in this criterion will not be high. Elements that a student might modify could include distortion settings on a guitar, vocal inflections, use of tempo modifications or length of pauses, embellishments on repeated sections, dynamics, pedalling (piano) and so on.

## **Criterion 10 – Skill in presenting a musical program within appropriate performance conventions**

The performance examination is a formal recital (performance, gig) and students should treat it as such. At times, students asked assessors' permission for a range of things to do with their performance. This is not appropriate in the examination context. It is incumbent on the student to understand the performance examination conditions published by the VCAA, and to understand that the performance space and time is theirs to control for the time allocated for the examination. While it is an examination, students are invited to treat it as a formal performance. It is up to them to consider what that means in terms of program order, tuning, flow of the program, dress, stage management and so on. Students who excelled in this criterion made the space theirs, and delivered a flowing and polished performance. Some formally introduced the works they intended to perform, others did not. As appropriate to the styles being performed, some students used movement while others did not; however, they all remained absolutely poised throughout the performance. Many students made the effort to dress appropriately as it helped them get into a performance mindset.

## **Issues to consider**

### **General**

- Accompanists need to be chosen wisely. Rehearse as often as possible and consider balance (criterion 6).
- Playback equipment for backing tracks needs to be appropriate, with levels set wisely. Do a quick sound check in the room before the performance starts (criterion 6).
- Make sure the program complies with the conditions published for your instrument (criterion 1).
- Choose the correct pieces. For contemporary instruments, the arrangement is vital.
- Make sure the examination program is presented as a performance and practise performing the program as a whole (criterion 10).
- Consider the performance space in terms of where to stand or sit in relation to the piano (for accompanied instruments).
- Utilise the opportunities to demonstrate a diversity of styles, techniques, tonal qualities and structures within the 25 minutes allowed (criteria 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).
- Try to craft the program so that every work chosen sounds different and enables the student to focus on showing different skills.
- Fill out your program sheet clearly and use the titles and movements as listed in the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works. Cite the composer, the correct title and the correct category.
- Choose pieces within a range of technical difficulty that you can manage.
- If the program uses close to the full 25 minutes, ensure that you have the stamina to perform it all at the same standard.
- There is opportunity for embellishment or improvisation (as appropriate to the style) if repeats are performed (criterion 8).
- Be prepared for contingencies. Bring extra leads and cables, extension cords, strings, reeds and sticks, as you would for any important performance (criterion 10).
- Contemporary instrument performers should consider performing one or a few works with a live accompaniment – perhaps a second guitar or bass (criterion 6).
- Except for a drum kit, equipment brought into the examination room must be able to be brought in and removed quickly. Aim for quality and portability.
- If you decide to verbally introduce the pieces in the performance examination, keep the introduction brief and make sure it enhances the performance.
- Amplifiers and drum kits must be used with occupational health and safety (OH&S) standards in mind. Sound must not exceed safe listening levels.
- Some students tended to overuse drink bottles. With the exception of a particularly hot day, no more than a few discreet sips should need to be taken. Overuse and misuse of the water bottle often detracts from criterion 10.

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## Instrument-specific comments

### Contemporary guitar

- Try to explore a wide range of styles. Many guitarists play the same limited group of favourites on the list.
- It is a good idea to use more than one guitar. If using an acoustic guitar, it is best to rely on performance technique to project the tone, rather than amplification.
- Make sure the notated solos are played.
- In particular, work on developing finger-style techniques throughout the year.

### Drum kit

- Explore as wide a variety of styles as possible.
- The brushes piece and snare rudiments tend to be the weakest areas with this instrument.

### Voice – Contemporary popular

- If using belting techniques, make sure the correct techniques are used. Some students were potentially damaging their voices through a lack of understanding or proper development of the belting technique.
- Take the ‘vocalise’ category seriously. Sing an expressive song. Many fine singers have failed to achieve high marks in this category as they had clearly not prepared this category adequately.
- Be aware of the category that each song comes from and sing it in the appropriate style.
- Consider the staging of the performance. Stand where you can face and address the audience, but also have some eye contact with the accompanist.
- When considering the use of an accompanist, bear in mind that it can be very effective to use a guitarist as well as a pianist.

### Contemporary piano

- Many students demonstrated little knowledge of how to use the sustain pedal.
- Some programs were performed with a lack of discipline, suggesting that a higher degree of preparation is needed.

### Pianoforte

- Students are advised to not take on programs that are too difficult for them to master.
- Sometimes students demonstrated poor understanding of the use of the sustain pedal.

### Wind and brass

- Make sure that articulation and phrasing are given due attention.
- Consider the stamina required if performing a long program. Some students run out of stamina before the end of the examination.

### Strings

- Avoid taking on works that are too difficult.
- Often, intonation was the area of greatest weakness in performances.

## Group Performance examination

### GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2014, students were assessed against 10 criteria. Each student was assessed by two assessors and a maximum of 10 marks was available for each criterion. Many of the criteria were identical to those used in the Solo Performance examination. Thus, students were assessed in both solo and group using either identical criteria or criteria of equal importance. Each student was assessed on their performance according to the criteria, not globally. The criteria were applied equally to all students across all instruments they used in their performance.

Students who presented for the Group Performance examination performed with a diverse range of instruments, including voice, in the context of many different types of groups and ensembles. Students’ ability to address the criteria varied and was influenced by their performance skills, understanding of the music styles being performed and experience in performing in a group context.

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Students who attained high marks confidently exhibited a high level of musical, technical and interpretative skills, and displayed excellent interaction with the other members of the group.

Students should be conscious of maximising their marks in the criteria related to group interaction (criterion 8) and the balance of the musical instruments (criterion 6). These criteria require conscious listening to and acknowledgment of other group members. They also require students to adjust their individual contribution to enhance the overall group sound.

The presence of poise and focus (criterion 10) was strongly evident in the performances of many high-achieving students. It was evident in the sharing of introductions and an awareness of arrangement, stage etiquette and/or movement as appropriate to the group context. Another example of poise and focus was adapting positively to unforeseen situations, such as when another band member forgot their part or broke a string.

Students need to make decisions about the group composition and performance program that are advantageous to the group as a whole. For example, it may be preferable to have two vocalists perform in separate examinations even though the rest of the assessed band will play for both singers. In this situation, the instrumentalists would be assessed in the first examination, leaving them free to accompany the second vocalist in the second examination. Some of the songs from the first program could be repeated, along with additional songs suited to the second singer. As a result, the two vocalists could present programs that are more suited to each individual. Conversely, two singers could work within the same ensemble, exploiting the criteria with a demonstration of skills such as harmony singing and duet arrangements.

It is important that groups choose keys for songs that are suited to the vocalists as well as the instrumentalists. The focus should be on selecting songs that support each student to maximise their possible score. At times, students should consider transposing the songs themselves to find more appropriate keys for all students. Students should be careful when sourcing tab transcriptions from the internet; it is worth checking the original recordings for accuracy.

Students who maximised their use of resources such as YouTube videos and recordings of alternative (live) versions of works often presented performances that better exploited their available instrumentation. Assessors observed the creative use of non-original arrangements of both prescribed and non-prescribed works, including acoustic, a cappella and original augmentations (for example, extra solos, harmonies or breakdowns).

Students consistently met the requirement to perform two musical items from the Prescribed List of Group Works. A number of students performed additional works from the list, which is permissible. It can be difficult for groups with two or more assessed performers to address the criteria at the highest level if they select only two works from the list. In these cases, students should consider performing more than two prescribed works to allow all of the assessed performers to meet the criteria.

Teachers and students should also ensure that they put together the strongest possible program for the assessed students when they are performing an entire program of items from the list. When determining the musical program for the examination, students should be careful about selecting a majority of original compositions; they need to consider their selections in relation to the criteria, especially regarding a range of musical styles.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Prescribed List of Group Works

Students must include at least two works from the current Prescribed List of Group Works in their end-of-year performance examination program. This list is available on the VCAA website.

### Assessment criteria

The criteria for awarding grades are applied to the whole program, not to individual works. There are 10 criteria covering all instruments and the performance of all works in the program.

In 2014, almost all students fulfilled all the requirements of Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirements of the task.

The examination specifications and criteria for this examination also include annotations to help unpack each criterion into components more relevant to particular instruments. Comments made in relation to solo performances should also be considered by students who select to perform as members of a group.

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## Selection of instrument

The term ‘instrument’, as used in the study design, includes voice. Students may choose to perform on more than one instrument in their performance examination; however, they should consider the likelihood of scoring well in the assessment criteria when making this decision. For example, students may not maximise their marks if they try to assist the balance of their group by playing an instrument that they are not particularly competent with for a considerable part of the program. The student should be careful not to compromise the amount of time spent performing to their strengths.

An opposite example might be where the student is a strong performer on more than one instrument. In this situation, there are certain criteria in which the student may benefit from performing on more than one instrument, such as ‘skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency’ (criterion 3) and ‘skill in performing as a member of the group’ (criterion 8).

## The examination

Assessed students perform as members of a group or ensemble, and are assessed in this context. The level of ability of other members of the group does not directly affect the assessed student’s results. Assessors concentrate on the performance of the student being assessed and on how well they meet the criteria for assessment.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the assessed student’s ability to maximise their results depends upon the context within which each individual performs. For example, a drummer who keeps irregular time or rhythm will affect the assessed student’s ability to maintain an even tempo and accurately interpret rhythm patterns, and will therefore indirectly influence the assessed student’s ability to obtain their highest score.

## Composition of the group

A group is defined as two or more students enrolled in a secondary school. Where a group comprises two performers only, that group may not have a non-student performer as a member. The musical parts should be arranged so that each performer is equally able to take a leading role during the performance.

However, the assessed performer(s) can vary the composition of the group during their performance as they wish, which may enhance the ability of the assessed performer(s) to demonstrate a variety of styles and techniques. Students must decide how best to organise their group contexts in a program to help them give their best performance.

Students should also be aware that non-students may only assist as part of the group within certain guidelines, as outlined in the examination specifications. Teachers and other non-assessed performers are advised that their role, if they are participating, should not distract from, or limit the ability of, the assessed performer(s) to present a program that will maximise their marks. Assessed performers should perform in a way that allows them to maximise their results in all criteria. Hence, non-assessed performers should not count in, conduct, tune, adjust instruments and equipment, lead or otherwise play a dominant or distracting role during the performance examination. This will only reduce the number of opportunities for the assessed performers to address all of the criteria.

## Program selection

The program should contain at least four contrasting works, including at least two works from the Prescribed List of Group Works. Works should be selected from the published list for that examination year, as the list is revised annually. Students who select works from Section B must ensure they perform the actual section, movements, etc. that are listed.

The program selected by the student(s) is the foundation for achieving their best result. It is strongly recommended that students carefully consider the selection of works for their program, on the basis that each work contributes to a program that meets the assessment criteria.

All assessed performers should ensure that they participate significantly in presenting all works in their program. Assessed performers should present the works selected from the prescribed list at a standard that is consistent with the rest of the program. This may involve arranging works to create appropriate parts and/or allowing opportunities for improvisation, as appropriate to the style.

When performing a work from Section A, or similar music styles, performers do not necessarily need to present accurate note-for-note transcriptions, but it is essential that the original integrity of the music be retained. Chord progressions and the main melody should be faithful to the original. Variations may occur for a number of reasons, particularly if groups have instrumentation different to the original work.

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Students should avoid only performing works from styles that they are most familiar with, as this may limit their ability to perform in a variety of styles. The assessed performer's primary focus should be on performing a program that is diverse in style and mood. However, it is acceptable to present a program that has a range of styles within a particular type of group, as contrasting styles can exist within particular genres, such as rock or jazz. Groups can perform music that has contrasts in styles within a broader genre or style; for example, a jazz group could perform swing, bebop, west coast and/or fusion. Students should not necessarily perform styles that are not associated with the type of group that they represent.

As well as scoring highly in the criterion that assesses their ability to perform a variety of styles (criterion 7), assessed performers who present a diverse program can also score higher marks in other criteria. For example, by performing a diverse program stylistically, the assessed performer(s) could also score more highly in Criterion 3 – Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency.

Students should demonstrate their ability to use a range of performance techniques. Each instrument is capable of producing different timbres, dynamics and effects, and has an inherent potential to allow the performer to apply a range of performance techniques. Students should be able to demonstrate their awareness of this in their performance. A guitarist, for example, could use a plectrum, finger style, sliding, bends, double-stopping, tapping and/or alternative tunings.

The assessed performer(s) should also avoid performing material that merely repeats material previously presented. This may require development of arrangements or the use of improvisation, embellishment and ornamentation.

### **Time limits**

The time allowed for the examination varies according to the number of assessed performers in a group (details can be found on page 46 of the *VCE Music Study Design*). The following are the maximum durations for different groups:

- one assessed performer: 25 minutes maximum
- two or three assessed performers: 30 minutes maximum
- four assessed performers: 35 minutes maximum
- five or six assessed performers: 40 minutes maximum.

Assessed performers are advised to make full use of the time available. Specifically, students should make sure changeovers between performances are well rehearsed to ensure that they make the most of their performance time. It is recommended that the prescribed works be performed early in the program to ensure that criterion 1 is met within the time limit.

### **Setting up at the examination venue**

Students are advised to check their equipment carefully before leaving for the examination. They must remember to pack all the required equipment, including replacement strings if appropriate. They should also bring extra power boards and extension leads so that their planned set-up is not compromised by the placement of power points at the venue.

Students are advised to arrive at the examination centre at least 30 minutes before their start time. Students will have access to the examination room at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the examination and should use this time to set up and adjust equipment, tune their instruments and warm up. Non-assessed performers may assist in adjusting the equipment before the examination; however, once the examination has started, only the assessed performers may adjust their instruments and equipment.

When setting up, students may need to restrict their volume if another examination is underway in a nearby room. All examination performances must be presented at safe volume levels. During the year, students should practise in a variety of rooms in order to become accustomed to different performance spaces with varying qualities of acoustics and volume requirements.

Groups should plan how they will sit or stand during the performance. Assessed performers must ensure that assessors can observe all performance techniques and technical skills. This may mean setting music stands so that finger movement and breathing techniques are visible. The seating plan or group organisation may be varied across the program to achieve the best performance environment for each work in the program.