

2018 VCE Music Performance performance examination report

General comments

The 2018 Music Performance performance examination was the second for the revised study design. Performances demonstrated a focus on research, which had been completed in a number of areas, including technique, style, practice techniques, tone, balance and structure. As well as having completed research, students needed to come to the performance thoroughly prepared. There was a clear link between a high mark for criterion 2 (accuracy and clarity) and high marks for the rest of the criteria. A secure knowledge of all technical aspects of the playing made it easier for students to both cope with performance anxiety and focus on all musical aspects of shaping and interpretation.

In many cases, students who were less well prepared tended to rush in the examination, resulting in poor accuracy, clarity and/or fluency. This in turn affected their ability to demonstrate an adequate stylistic understanding of the works performed. Other aspects of their playing were also compromised, such as tone, understanding of the musical lines, use of musical tension to create a sense of communication, phrasing and the use of a variety of articulations.

Some students compromised their ability to access the highest marks due to a poor choice of program. Many of the assessment criteria address a 'range' of performance elements that need to be present in the program. Some students performed a limited range of these elements because their programs were limited. Programs that lacked a variety of styles, performance techniques, tonal elements, structures and characters did not score highly.

Most students who performed with an accompanist were well rehearsed and able to score well in criterion 6 (differentiation of musical lines). Appropriate choices of accompanists were made, allowing students to demonstrate a variety of interactions and perform in a variety of styles. However, in some cases accompanists struggled to perform accurately or fluently, which hampered assessed students' performances.

Most students understood that the examination was a performance, and they showed this through a level of poise, creative programming (order of the works performed) and the use of appropriate performance conventions. However, some students may not have practised performing in a range of acoustic environments and did not adjust their tempi (for example) to the acoustic environment. The biggest issue was when students played too fast in a very bright acoustic, causing a lack of clarity. Alternatively, some students performed too slowly in a dry acoustic, which made it more difficult for them to sustain musical lines.

Specific information

Solo performance examination

Criterion 1 – Compliance with requirements of the task

The majority of students achieved full marks for this criterion. If the minimum required number of works was performed, and all required categories were represented, the student was awarded full marks.

Criterion 2 – Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

There was a strong correlation between students who achieved high marks in this criterion and high marks in all the other criteria. Students who were thorough in learning the mechanics of the works they performed tended to be thorough in all aspects of their performance.

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

Most students who chose programs that exemplified a range of techniques evident in the Prescribed List of Works had access to the highest marks in this criterion. Some of these, however, did not perform a wide range of techniques. Students who used only a limited range of techniques restricted their ability to gain high marks.

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

Students who chose pieces that allowed them to perform a range of tonal colours had access to the highest marks. Some students were able to perform a palette of sublime, colourful, dramatic, poignant and exciting tonal effects at a variety of dynamics. On the other hand, there were some students who paid little attention to attempting different tonal effects, limiting their access to high marks.

Criterion 5 – Skill in expressive communication through articulation and phrasing

The highest-scoring performances were full of expressive phrasing and articulations. While many students scored high marks, students could develop greater expertise in the skills required to score highly in this criterion.

Criterion 6 – Skill in differentiating the musical lines

Performances with accompanists were generally successful, with many students able to demonstrate a variety of textures and interactions. There were many thoroughly rehearsed performances that were well balanced in the acoustic environment provided. In a few cases, an inadequate ability of accompanists adversely affected the student's ability to maximise their marks. Students who used backing tracks were generally well organised and were able to manage their set-up and pack-up efficiently. They understood the importance of balancing and synchronising of their part with the backing. In a few cases, students had not prepared well and had trouble getting their backings to work in the examination room. In other instances, the backings were not appropriately balanced with the student's playing, and they did not demonstrate an adequate level of familiarity and synchronisation with the recording.

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

Students who prepared well for this criterion were able to create a sense of musical storytelling, capturing different moods within the works and creating a strong sense of tension and release. Each work sounded different and engaging.

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

It was very evident in student performances whether the student had done much aural research (i.e. listening to a range of recordings of both the works performed and other works in the same style). Some students had clearly done much listening to quality performances and were able to perform their works in a variety of appropriate styles. The most accurate and confident performers were able to focus on how they would interpret the notes. Students who struggled to play the notes accurately or fluently were not able to maximise their marks in this criterion.

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

As with Criterion 8, students who could perform their program with fluency and accuracy were generally able to become more personally involved in their playing. They were able to add nuances that were different from performances by professional artists. In some cases, however, performances were copies of other well-known performers (particularly in the contemporary instruments). Some students ignored contemporary conventions of performances and performed their own versions of works. While this may have been highly creative, it did not acknowledge the statement in the criterion description ‘... as appropriate to the styles of music performed’.

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

Most students were able to perform within appropriate performance conventions, coming to the task with a sense of poise and being able to adjust to the performance conditions. Their performances flowed well, and a sense of appropriate performance conventions and etiquette was evident.

Group performance examination

In 2018, 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 each individual criterion. The criteria were applied equally to all students across all instruments. In 2018, there was a high standard of preparation for the performance and confident use of a diverse range of stylistically appropriate techniques that contributed to many engaging performances.

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.

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 ways they can maximise their marks in the criteria related to group interaction (criterion 8) and the balance of the musical instruments (criterion 6). These criteria require the 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 strong presence of poise and focus (criterion 10) was evident in many high-scoring performances. This involved the sharing of introductions, awareness of arrangement, stage etiquette and/or movement as appropriate to the group context. Other elements included adapting

positively to unforeseen situations, for example, when another band member forgot their part or broke a string.

Students and teachers should consider a range of individual skill areas to best approach the composition of groups and program development. It is important to place students within a group context that best allows them to meet the requirements of the criteria.

For example, when a class contains more than one vocalist the group composition and repertoire will be informed by the individual characteristics of each student. Elements such as vocal range, tone, timbre, ability to harmonise, dynamic range and a grasp of stylistic authenticity should be determining factors in decisions regarding instrumentation and repertoire.

The two vocalists could either present separate programs reflecting their individual strengths or work within the same ensemble, exploiting the criteria with a demonstration of sharing skills that include a combination of lead vocals and harmony singing.

In 2018 it was evident that close attention was paid to selecting correct keys for vocal students while also considering the needs and technical abilities of the instrumentalists. Examples of this included selection of a key to best accommodate a vocal student's range and the use of a capo for guitarists.

Students should be careful when sourcing tablature transcriptions from the internet; it is worth checking the original recordings for accuracy.

Students are advised to use a range of resources such as YouTube and alternative (live) versions of works as references when they are planning arrangements and interpretations. Ideas from their listening can be used to exploit their available instrumentation. Successful acoustic and a cappella versions of both prescribed and non-prescribed works were observed, as well as augmentations such as extra solos, harmonies and breakdown sections.

Students consistently met the requirement to perform two musical items from the Prescribed List of Group Works. Some students performed additional works from the list, which was 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 this case, students should consider performing more than two prescribed works to allow all of the assessed performers to meet the criteria.

Students should ensure that they put together the strongest possible program 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 Prescribed List of Group Works in their end-of-year performance examination program. This list is available on the VCAA website and updated annually.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria 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 2018, the requirements of criterion 1 concerning 'compliance with the requirements of the task' were met with very few exceptions.

The examination specifications and criteria for this examination also include annotations to help unpack each criterion into components more relevant to particular instruments.

Selection of instrument

In 2018 a broad range of contemporary and orchestral instruments, including voice, were used in Group performance examinations. Many students chose to perform on more than one instrument. In some cases students presented on a second instrument and were able to successfully expand their range of demonstrated skills. There are certain criteria in which students 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). However, other students impacted their marks by playing a second instrument that they were not particularly competent with for part of the program. Students should be careful not to compromise the amount of time spent presenting on the main or primary instrument.

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 bass guitarist, for example, could use a plectrum, finger style, slapping, muting, double stopping, tapping and/or alternative tunings.

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.

Composition of the group

A group is defined as two or more students. 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 using different combinations of non-assessed performers during their performance as they wish. This 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 achieve the best outcome.

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. 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 best address all of the criteria.

Program selection

The program should contain contrasting works, including at least two works from the Prescribed List of Group Works and at least two other works. Works should be selected from the published list

for the examination year, as the list is revised annually. If selecting works from Section B, it is important that students 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.

In 2018 the standout programs not only contained diversity in style, technique and dynamics, but gave assessed performers the best opportunity to address the criteria. Successful groups were able to present programs tailored to exploit their specific instrumentation, for example, string quartet/vocal ensemble. Groups often showed contrast in styles within a broader genre, for example, jazz group programs containing swing, bebop, west coast and/or fusion.

Time limits

The time allowed for the examination varies according to the number of assessed performers in a group (this can be found on page 44 of the *VCE Music Study Design*).

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

Assessed performers are advised to make full use of the time available. Specifically, students should make sure changeovers between pieces 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, with full participation from assessed performers, 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. All examination performances must be presented at safe volume levels.

In 2018, some ensembles set their mix of instruments and voices based on the sound balance heard in and around the performance area only. Students are advised to set and check the overall

dynamic balance of the presentation from both the performance/stage area and the approximate positioning of the assessors.

During the year, students should practise in a variety of rooms in order to become more adept at setting and checking appropriate dynamic 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.