

2020 VCE Music Investigation performance examination report

General comments

In 2020 the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced an examination based on the *VCE Music Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*.

Despite the complications of the 2020 academic year, assessors reported a great number of Music Investigation students focused on the development and refinement of individual technical ability (technique). The majority of students were technically well prepared for the examination, clearly evidencing practical development across the year of study.

A small number of students incorrectly presumed the modification of exam conditions that applied to the 2020 VCE Music Performance examination equally applied to Music Investigation. Specifically, this related to the length of available examination time in group settings. Examination performance times were unchanged for Music Investigation in 2020.

All relevant teachers (Department Head, VCE music classroom, specialist instrumental and accompanists) are strongly encouraged to review and discuss in meetings all Music Investigation advice provided to schools via the *VCAA Bulletin* and other VASS-generated communications. It is strongly advised that teachers establish an effective line of communication with their VASS coordinator and that bulletins and other relevant documentation be forwarded to staff in an efficient and timely manner.

Several students presented to the examination without the completed mandatory VCAA paperwork. All students should have an Examination Advice Slip that details their student number, enrolled instrument and the time, date and location of their examination. Also, students must provide two typed copies of the Music Investigation Program Sheet and Performer's Statement. It is important that two copies of the Music Investigation Program Sheet and Performer's Statement be given to the venue coordinator on the day of assessment (preferably when the student formally checks in on arrival at the venue).

Some students presented a Performer's Statement that lacked an identifiable performance focus. These statements appeared better suited to a written analysis task. While interesting as a discussion point, these statements were insufficient in terms of addressing the performance assessment criteria and, as a result, hindered the students' ability to receive recognition for identifiable and relevant practical skill development that occurred across the year of study. As an example, these statements often sought to identify the influence of one performer on another: 'The influence of Jimi Hendrix on John Mayer as a blues guitarist'. A more appropriate Performer's Statement would have been: 'A demonstration of electric guitar performance techniques central to the performance style of Jimi Hendrix evident in a program of works performed and recorded by contemporary guitarist John Mayer'. This second statement takes the Performer's Statement beyond the notion of influence to actual performance/practical evidence.

Other Performer's Statements indicated the student's Investigation Topic was framed on compositional techniques or devices present in a program of works composed by a particular artist. Again, the Performer's Statement, and more broadly the Investigation Topic, needed to be centred on performance techniques set within a nominated stylistic context.

A number of students chose to present original compositions within their assessed performance program in 2020. These were typically, but not exclusively, included in contemporary music settings. This may have been a direct result of the unique circumstances of 2020. Students and teachers are reminded there is no

scope or mechanism within the examination criteria to recognise or reward the inclusion of original compositions within a performance program. As with any repertoire presented for assessment, students are awarded marks for the demonstration of performance techniques (relevant to the Investigation Topic) demonstrated within the nominated stylistic framework (as outlined in the Performer's Statement).

Students who achieved the highest scores across the examination's assessment criteria were able to evidence a sophisticated understanding of style within a carefully selected performance program. These students demonstrated an extremely high level of attention to detail across all criteria; fluency, nuanced technical control, variation of tone, phrase shaping and refined musical purpose defined these programs as outstanding. These students also recognised the examination as a formal recital or similar concert experience; demeanor, poise, engagement with repertoire and appropriate attire for the exam were clearly in the mind of these students throughout the planning and delivery of the examination.

Students who achieved mid-range or lower results often displayed a restricted level of technical proficiency, demonstrated only a moderate understanding of stylistic control and, crucially, conveyed only a vague performance link to the provided Performer's Statement. For many of these students, a more considered and appropriate Investigation Topic and subsequent Performer's Statement, coupled with a more suitable selection of repertoire, may have given access to a stronger result.

Careful consideration to the selection of repertoire, for students at every level of ability, will be fundamental to successfully address the prescribed criteria. While it is generally accepted that every style, genre or period may have the potential to provide access to the highest marks, not every selected program within those styles, genres or periods will be awarded high marks.

Specific information

Assessment criteria

Music Investigation assessment criteria are used for both solo and group settings. The criteria differ from those used for Music Performance.

Criterion 1: Compliance with the requirements of the task

To attain compliance, students were required to perform no fewer than four works within the prescribed time allotted for assessment. These works should have been representative and characteristic of the style, tradition and/or genre outlined in the Performer's Statement. A second element of compliance was that at least one work within the program be selected from either the Prescribed List of Group Works or the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works, as published on the VCAA website.

Criterion 2: Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

Students who scored highly presented a purposefully selected program of technically challenging repertoire that allowed them to demonstrate a high level of expertise. Some programs featured less demanding material that was also performed well; teachers and students are advised to carefully gauge the technical merit of repertoire as some repertoire may not allow students to maximise their scoring potential.

Criterion 3: Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency within the context of the Investigation Topic

Central to Criterion 3, and to most of the other criteria, is the inclusion of 'Skill in' as a precursor to identifying the specific area of assessment. Students who achieved the highest scores for this criterion demonstrated

many performance techniques with outstanding control and fluency. Unsuitable repertoire selection played a key role in some students scoring below their potential. The overuse of repetition, in terms of performance techniques, featured in the programs of students who did not score well.

Criterion 4: Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities relevant to the Investigation Topic

In order to score beyond the middle range, students were required to demonstrate a nuanced range of tonal qualities relevant to the Performer's Statement. Quality, variation and projection of expressive tone throughout a wide dynamic range needed to be shown to achieve high scores.

Criterion 5: Skill in the interpretive control of articulation and phrasing within the context of the Investigation Topic

An expressive, artistic and purposeful delivery of phrasing and articulation relevant to the Performer's Statement was clearly evident in the performance assessments of students who scored highly. Those who found it difficult to convey a developed sense of musical purpose, refinement or sophistication were often limited with regard to articulation and phrase shaping; these students did not score well.

Criterion 6: Skill in differentiating the musical lines in the selected works as appropriate to the Investigation Topic and as appropriate to the instrument and/or instrumental context

To score highly in this criterion, students needed to demonstrate their ability to express the significance, importance or role of musical lines contained in the repertoire. This pertains to both climactic phrase points and, at the other extreme, accompaniment or secondary figures within the repertoire. Where the student simply 'played the notes', even to a high level of technical complexity, higher marks could not be awarded.

Students who did not score well in this criterion struggled to define artistic purpose beyond attempts to accurately 'perform the notes'.

Criterion 7: Skill in differentiating the structures and textures within each work as appropriate to the Investigation Topic

Many students appeared not to be aware of performance opportunities and obligations in relation to this criterion; students showed only limited scope to demonstrate a variety of textures within the repertoire presented for assessment. Fundamentally, Criterion 7 focuses on the decision-making process in relation to the delivery of form, or repeated sections, within a work. Several students simply repeated sections (often multiple repeats) without the appropriate and necessary variations.

Criterion 8: Skill in presenting an interpretation of the works that is informed by historical and/or contemporary practices and conventions relevant to the Investigation Topic

A key component of the broader Music Investigation study relates to the notion of performance research. In this criterion, students must demonstrate what they have learned from the leaders in the field. Criterion 8 is an opportunity for students to practically demonstrate knowledge of style as it has been performed by elite musicians.

Students who did not score well in Criterion 8 had either not sufficiently researched the musical style(s) they were presenting or had chosen to 'go their own way' in terms of acknowledging conventions set by elite musicians from the field.

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

Students who scored highly in Criterion 9 were able to effectively conceal the technical demands of repertoire, drawing the listener's focus to matters of sophistication, nuance and musical purpose.

Where students struggled with the technical demands of repertoire, it was noted that access to creativity was typically limited.

Criterion 10: Skill in demonstrating how the works in the program are representative of the Investigation Topic

The highest scoring programs made obvious the direct relationship between all repertoire presented for assessment and the description provided to assessors in the Performer's Statement. Students did not score well when the link between the Performer's Statement and the program performed was tenuous.

Criterion 11: Skill in the presentation of a cohesive program relevant to the Investigation Topic

The delivery of the performance program on the day of the assessment should be informed by the conventions of the style(s) being presented. Students need to demonstrate they have researched the performance conventions of elite musicians relevant to this criterion if they are to achieve high scores.

Many students performed as if they were in a rehearsal; several students performed with their backs to the assessors or chose to bring chairs to the stage (where that was not the convention appropriate to the repertoire).