2021 VCE Music Investigation external assessment report

General comments

Music Investigation is a performance-based study that allows for students to undertake performance research within an Investigation Topic nominated by the student. Central to undertaking the study is the presentation of a live performance, which is typically just under 25 minutes in duration. The presentation must be framed, or linked, to the technical demands and stylistic content relevant to the chosen Investigation Topic.

On the day of the performance examination, students submit a Performer’s Statement that provides a guide to assessors about the nature of the presentation that is about to take place. Specifically, the Performer’s Statement should seek to identify the stylistic content, technical demands and underlying sophistication inherent within performance research that has been undertaken by the student across the year of study. It is anticipated that students will endeavour to validate or prove their depth of skill and control in relation to, and potentially beyond, the guide provided in the Performer’s Statement.

A set of 11 examination criteria is used to score the performance examination. Each criterion is graded independently by two assessors using a marking scale from 1–10. In total the assessment is graded to a maximum score of 220.

While there are a number of examination conditions, all of which should be carefully reviewed by teachers at regular times throughout the year, two key compliance issues are worthy of particular note. First, students must perform a minimum of four works in the examination. One of these must be selected from either the Prescribed List of Group Works or the Prescribed List of Solo Works as published by the VCAA. Second, a Performer’s Statement must be submitted to the assessors on the day of the assessment before the commencement of the performance. A small number of students failed to successfully complete these two compliance requirements and a mandatory reduction of scores was imposed.

Examination conditions

In addition to the compliance requirements identified above, there are a number of examination conditions students/teachers/schools are required to adhere to when presenting for assessment.

All students enrolled as a solo performer have a maximum time of 25 minutes to present the examination performance. A significant number of students presented performances of less than 20 minutes, some less than 15 minutes. This invariably reduced the potential of students to highlight stylistic variation, a greater number of identifiable performance techniques, and evidence of a full year of performance research and rehearsal.

Within a group examination context, the maximum performance time permitted varies:

* one assessed performer has a maximum of 25 minutes
* two or three assessed performers have a maximum of 30 minutes
* four assessed performers have a maximum of 35 minutes
* five assessed performers have a maximum of 40 minutes.

Similar to the solo setting, a significant number of group students chose not to use all of their available time when presenting for the performance examination.

Investigation Topic

Some students presented weak or unclear Investigation Topics. This made it difficult for assessors to award higher scores across the published criteria. Several Investigation Topics focused on content not relevant to performance, style, performance techniques or the criteria. These topics appeared to be written to support a lecture presentation or historical document. Successful Investigation Topics sought to clearly identify a range of identifiable performance techniques set within a stylistic context, framed within an identified timeline.

All potential Investigation Topics were formally audited in February 2021 by the VCAA. As part of this audit process, the VCAA provided approval, guidance and support for teachers and students before they embarked on the year’s study. The process sought to certify that every student topic would enable the candidate to present a coherent program in relation to the published performance examination criteria. As has been the case in previous years, recommendations and advice provided to some schools appeared to have been ignored. This invariably resulted in the presented Performer’s Statement being, to some degree, inappropriate or limited. These students often presented performance programs that were limited in terms of scoring potential.

Enrolment – Group/Solo

Students must nominate to present as either a soloist or as a member of a group. One assessed performer within an ensemble is not a solo candidate. Schools are advised to carefully check all students enrolled in Music Investigation have been entered in the Victorian Assessment Software System (VASS) with the correct code.

Every student must be entered in VASS with the correct instrument code for solo candidates, or be registered as GR (Group) for all group candidates (regardless of the instrument/s to be performed on the day of the examination). At various points throughout the year, teachers/students became aware they had incorrectly enrolled within the study. When this was realised on the day of the examination, students felt uncomfortable, and their performance confidence was possibly affected.

Special provision

Where a special provision, consideration or request for changed examination conditions, beyond those listed in the VCAA guidelines, is sought, VCAA approval is required before the day of the examination. A mechanism for approval of special provisions or changed exam conditions on the day of an assessment does not exist. Assessors and examination centre coordinators do not have the authority to modify conditions on the day of an assessment.

Specific information

Performer’s Statement

On the day of the examination, students are required to provide two copies of their typed Performer’s Statement to the VCAA examination coordinator, who is typically located at the entrance of the examination venue.

The Performer’s Statement should outline the practical skills to be displayed by the assessed student in the live performance. The statement should detail characteristic performance techniques together with an explanation of the chosen musical context (e.g. style, period, performer).

Some students did not comply with the VCAA conditions and advice surrounding the Performer’s Statement. Several students hastily hand-wrote statements after learning, upon arrival at the examination venue, they needed to submit the essential document before the performance beginning, or a scoring penalty would be applied.

Crucially, some teachers appeared to fail to recognise that the Performer’s Statement holds the potential to point assessors towards the performance techniques, stylistic nuance and subtle control that were highlights of the skills developed by the student across the year.

In summary, the Performer’s Statement should articulate:

* the stylistic context/s of the selected program
* performance techniques central to the selected program
* how the selected program ties together within the nominated Investigation Topic
* a timeline or boundary that frames the program
* other information relevant to performance (such as where sophistication exists within the style/repertoire/performance techniques being presented).

Examination criteria

Key terms to consider across the broader criteria are ‘skill in’, ‘range of’, ‘depth of sophistication’ and ‘relevance’. Teachers are advised to highlight these terms when considering the criteria against skill sets being developed and presented by students.

Criterion 1: Compliance with the requirements of the task

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 98 | 9.9 |

Compliance was reached when the student selected a work from either the Prescribed List of Group Works or the Prescribed List of Solo Works and a Performer’s Statement was submitted on the day of the assessment.

Criterion 2: Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 10 | 14 | 14 | 16 | 31 | 7.9 |

Students were scored on their ability to perform repertoire at the appropriate tempo, evidencing precision of accuracy in relation to pitch, rhythm, dynamics and articulation, and clarity of passage work in terms of timing, tone production, phrasing and articulation.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 12 | 9 | 15 | 15 | 31 | 7.8 |

Central to achieving a higher score in this criterion was the purposeful selection of works that contained a wide range of performance techniques relevant to the nominated Investigation Topic. Performances that scored highly made it clear, as they progressed through their program, that a variety of performance techniques were being evidenced with a high level of dexterity and security.

Performances that did not score well were typically overly repetitious in terms of the number of performance techniques being evidenced. In some cases, it was evident that techniques central to the performance conventions contained in the program were edited, simplified or entirely missed in the delivery of the examination program.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 17 | 10 | 13 | 13 | 32 | 7.7 |

Some students who demonstrated a high level of skill in Criteria 2 and 3 did not score as well in Criterion 4 due to a failure to evidence a range of expressive tonal qualities*.* While it is accepted elite musicians will have an outstanding primary or core tonal character that will be central to their performance identity, efforts must be made to evidence variation in this study.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 8 | 15 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 35 | 7.8 |

Students who accessed higher marks for Criterion 5 demonstrated nuanced control of melody and rhythm through the refined manipulation and control of articulation and phrasing. These students were able to highlight the stylistic qualities of repertoire through the purposeful and artistic shaping of tone, rhythm and dynamics (within the context of articulation of phrasing).

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0.5 | 5 | 6 | 18 | 9 | 12 | 10 | 37 | 7.9 |

At its most fundamental level this criterion relates to a performer’s ability to understand and demonstrate the function and significance of individual musical lines contained in repertoire.

Students who achieved the highest scores in this criterion were able to evidence:

* empathy and use of rubato between soloist and accompaniment
* synchronisation and establishment of groove within a rhythm section
* dynamic control and effective use of balance to highlight tension and release central to the stylistic conventions of the presented repertoire.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 17 | 9 | 12 | 11 | 36 | 7.8 |

Some students appeared not to address this criterion in their selection of a performance program, study throughout the year or the delivery of the final performance examination. In its simplest application, this criterion relates to the demonstration of how form, or repeated sections within a work, are interpreted (differently) in performance.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 0.5 | 4 | 2 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 39 | 7.9 |

Fundamental to achieving higher scores in Criterion 8 was the ability to evidence a practical understanding of performance practices used by expert performersfrom the broader professional performance world.

Students who chose to overly focus on ‘doing their own thing’ in terms of interpretation and execution of performance techniques received lower scores.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 12 | 13 | 13 | 9 | 36 | 7.8 |

Students who demonstrated the highest levels of creativity and individuality were able to rise above the technical demands of repertoire, shifting their performance focus to issues of nuance, intent and sophistication.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 13 | 10 | 12 | 12 | 38 | 7.9 |

It was not always clear how items within a student’s performance program connected to the Performer’s Statement provided. Some students who presented technically accomplished performances could not be awarded higher scores due to a lack of relevance/connection to the provided Performer’s Statement.

Students are advised that where a connection across the program could be perceived as tenuous, an effort should be made to make clear (through the Performer’s Statement or introducing repertoire) just how repertoire is relevant to the nominated Investigation Topic.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 13 | 11 | 18 | 41 | 8.3 |

Many students appeared passionate about the performance research they had selected for study throughout the year. Not only was this visually recognised by assessors, but it was also heard musically. These students achieved higher scores as they were typically not only excited to share their music but were highly organised about the delivery of the program.