



2008 Music Group Performance GA 3: Aural and Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The format of the paper was consistent with the guidelines in the sample examination material on the VCAA website <www.vcaa.vic.edu.au> and comprised of a total of 98 marks across three sections. Students had to answer nine of the ten questions, with the option of responding to either Question 9 (Part-writing) or Question 10 (Improvisation) in Part C. It was encouraging to note that more students attempted the entire paper than in previous years. However, the overall standard has declined.

As in previous years, many students were unable to achieve equal results across the areas of focus in Section A (Music language and Aural perception). The lack of basic music terminology was the most serious weakness for a significant number of students. However, it was pleasing to note that the formal introduction of 'music language' to the *VCE Music Group performance Study Design* appears to have resulted in improvements in some of the music literacy and aural perception domains of Section A. A number of students used pen for their Section A answers; this is not advisable, especially for transcription tasks such as Questions 3 and 5.

Examination Technique

Many students are still not reading and fully understanding the questions. This year many students' responses were either 'generic' or directly relevant to questions found on papers from previous years. Such responses invariably did not answer the questions on this examination. It is strongly recommended that students do not attempt to 'second guess' what will be on the paper and/or prepare responses beforehand then attempt to 'reshape' them for the questions asked.

Many students planned their responses well, for example, through a series of key words linked by arrows, which helped jog their memory and keep them 'on task'. Many of the high-achieving students highlighted and/or underlined exactly what was required in each part of each question so that, once they had read and analysed the question, they only needed to re-read the highlighted/underlined components in order to present a succinct, salient, focused and well-organised response. Most of the stronger students used dot points for most responses, which assisted in presenting clear, deliberate and cogent comments and arguments.

Students and teachers need to be aware that the instrument (or voice) played by the student can have significant bearing upon their overall ability to respond to particular questions. Care should be taken to ensure that all students develop the required skills, particularly in relation to aspects of key knowledge that are less familiar to them. For example, while singers might use their performance experience to write perceptively about characteristics of melody, they may need to spend time developing skills in learning and using music language associated with harmony. While drummers might be able to identify and describe features of rhythms easily, they may need to develop skills in analysing and describing characteristics of melodies. In the same way, guitarists who habitually use TAB may need to focus on developing skills in reading and writing pitch notation and single-line players may need to focus on identifying and analysing relationships between parts. Students who generally perform fully-notated music may need to develop their ability to identify and describe the role and relationship between composed and improvised elements of specific arrangements, such as embellishment or fills at the end of phrases or motifs that are derived from a melody and used as the basis for an improvised solo.

The most common areas of weakness included:

- a lack of basic theoretical knowledge, especially regarding the correct names and numbers for intervals and the correct terminology used for chords
- fundamental problems with the implications of key signatures (see Question 1)
- limited aural skills, including difficulty identifying tonalities (scale forms) and intervals within a melodic context, notating rhythms on their own and melodies (pitch and rhythm), both from within score-based settings (see Questions 3 and 5)
- limited ability to use the other (not-to-be-transcribed) parts of the printed score in transcription questions (see Questions 3 and 5) in order to optimise the likelihood of responding correctly
- confusion about the notes in chords with 7ths and the notes in primary triads
- confusion about or misunderstanding of basic terminology that is taken directly from the study design
- not using the reading time wisely, so that questions were not thoroughly understood and responses were not focused appropriately.



Other concerns included:

- some students did not attempt to answer some of the questions, especially in Section A
- many students wrote prose answers that were very hard to decipher, often due to illegible writing, blunt pencils, and/or poor spelling and grammar. Students are reminded of the importance of writing clearly and correctly
- confusion or lack of awareness about the meanings of musical terms arose frequently. 'Dynamics', 'articulation', 'phrasing', 'rhythmic features', 'expressive devices', 'texture' and 'tonality' were often dealt with inappropriately or incorrectly. Many students approached issues of 'dynamics' from the perspective of 'dynamism', 'liveliness' or 'energy' rather than relative volume and/or volume-based relationships. Most students who wrote about 'expressive devices' placed them within the context of the use (or not) of electronic effects/audio processing devices. Limited understanding of 'texture' as a musical characteristic was evident in the majority of instances where students chose to write about textural differences. It was clear that these terms and concepts, which are taken directly from the study design (see the Appendix, Music performance, on pages 99–102), need to be defined and/or discussed and used more regularly in teaching and learning programs
- many students did not appear to know the characteristics, requirements and components of different prose-based response formats; for example, the requirements of 'identify', 'describe', 'evaluate' and 'discuss'. Only 'identify' allows students to simply name or make a list. 'Evaluate' requires a degree of analysis and 'describe' requires the demonstration of knowledge, especially with respect to salient characteristics, components or elements. 'Discuss' requires the application of knowledge to demonstrate understanding, invariably demanding a higher level of insight. The relative marks available for each response type should provide an indication of the level of depth and/or breadth necessary.

Advice

- Students need to be aware of the requirements of various question types (see above) and should practise answering similar questions as part of their teaching and learning program.
- Students should use the 15 minutes of reading time productively and ensure that they have read each question carefully.
- Students should write as clearly as possible, especially when notating on a staff. When notating music, students should use a pencil and an eraser rather than a pen.
- When undertaking transcription questions, students are advised to do their rough work on the blank manuscript paper provided and then transfer a neat, legible copy of their final response to the space provided for the answer.
- If students do their rough rhythmic transcription work using 'stick' notation (stems and flags without note heads) or slashes across lines representing rhythmic subdivisions/segments of each beat, they need to be very careful when they transfer their work from the 'rough work' page to the answer space. Often, students' work was more accurate on the 'rough work' manuscript page than on the staves provided for the answer. It is not advisable for students to write their final answer using 'stick' notation unless it is perfectly clear at all times. Dotted rhythms tend to become 'muddled' with this style of notation.
- If students have difficulty with precise, pitch-based, (modern) mensural notation (that is, the exact notes and rhythms) in melodic transcriptions, an attempt should still be made to express the contour/shape of the melody, even if a line graph is used. Although this approach cannot result in full marks, marks may be awarded for a written expression of the melody's relative contour. It is possible to gain marks for the melodic transcription question by notating the rhythm with complete accuracy and using a line graph to present a precisely plotted contour of the melody. Nevertheless, if students can plot contour precisely and transcribe rhythms accurately, they are advised to use 'proper' notation, if possible.
- Where possible, students should have access to appropriate aural training software and a computer music 'sequencer', especially to program rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural training (perhaps also improvisation training) and to realise their harmonisations (for those who select the part-writing option in Unit 4).

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

For each question, an answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

The lists of possible responses or characteristics are example of salient points and/or aspects of the question's components.



Section A – Music language and Aural perception

Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

Question 1 – Music language – Recognition of intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	11	21	16	20	23	3

1. Major 3rd
2. Major 6th
3. Augmented 4th
4. Major 2nd
5. Major 7th

The question asked for quality and number so tritone was not accepted for Augmented 4th. Students must always read questions carefully and they are advised to underline or highlight the important words.

Many students did not acknowledge the key signature (3 flats) and therefore read the incorrect interval.

The natural sign in bar 4 should have prompted the student to look out for a key signature.

Students still need to learn the correct terminology as many responses included perfect 6th, minor 5th and sus 4th.

A large amount of students could not correctly count the distance between the two notes and this was very disappointing.

Students should avoid using a small ‘m’ for minor and large ‘M’ for major. Many students wrote it in the middle and obtained no marks.

Question 2 – Aural perception – Recognition of intervals and scales

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	20	23	30	16	12	1.8

First interval: Minor 6th
Last interval: Perfect 4th

One mark each was given for quality and number. Less than half of the students were able to correctly identify all intervals. Students are strongly advised to attempt all questions. Marks are not deducted for answers that are incorrect.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	59	0	41	0.8

Tonality: Major

It was disappointing that many students did attempt the question/and or not hear the major tonality and that less than half were able to identify the correct tonality.



Question 3 – Aural perception – Melodic transcription

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	16	31	18	12	7	5	5	3	2	2.3

Oboe

Horn in C

Harpisichord

Gm D Cm D Gm Eb F#07 Gm Cm D Gm Eb Cm Aø D7 Gm

Bassoon

The overall standard was disappointing. It is clear that students still need more practise with melodic transcription in four part contexts. Many students clearly did not understand the relationships between the melody and harmony provided (including chord types).

Students did not use the notes of the chords given to them, for example:

- Bar 2 beat 1 – Bb taken from the G minor chord and A (acting as a passing note)
- Bar 2 beat 2 – G and Eb, notes taken from the Eb Major chord
- Bar 2 beat 3 – F# and A are notes of the chord
- Bar 2 beat 4 – G is the root note of the chord given
- Bar 3 beat 1 – four semiquavers in step wise movement starting on the root of the C minor chord, C then up by step to D, then down by step to the root note C, then down by step to Bb
- Bar 3 beat 2 – the 5th and 3rd of the D Major chord provided, A and F#
- Bar 3 beat 3 – G, A and C. Root note of G minor then step wise then minor 3rd. Most students were unable to notate either rhythm or pitch
- Bar 3 beat 4 – Bb, the 5th of the Eb Major chord provided.

Very few students were able to transcribe the F# notes in either bar. Students and teachers must work harder on developing these very necessary musical skills through developing understanding of functional harmony.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 4 – Aural perception – Recognition of a chord progression

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	10	13	13	4	3	11	5	42	4.4

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1. A Major7
2. E(dom)7
3. D Major7
4. A Major

or

1. I Major7
2. V7
3. IV Major7
4. I Major

or

Bass note	A	E	D	A
Character/quality/type	Major7	(dom)7	Major7	Major

Many students were able to recognise the correct response. Some students did not hear the 7th chords and only gained five out of seven marks. It was disappointing that some students could not hear or recognise simple but different chord types.

Part 3: Rhythm

Question 5 – Aural perception – Transcription of rhythms

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	14	20	16	12	9	7	7	7	10	3.2

Violin

Horn in C

Double bass

Timpani

Many students found this question difficult and the mean score for this rhythmic question was disappointing. A number of problems were evident.

- Some students still did not notice the time signature, this year in common time, so each bar must add up to four crotchet beats.
- Some students lost track of the pulse, particularly in bar 2 between beats 2 and 3 followed by the triplet in beat 4.
- Bar 2 – a lot of students missed the syncopation thus placing the next beats incorrectly.
- A lot of students did not hear the triplet on beat 4.



- Bar 3 – a lot of students did not hear the semiquaver-quaver-semiquaver pattern.

Part 4: Characteristics of a pre-recorded work

Question 6 – Aural Perception and evaluation of the characteristics of a pre-recorded work

Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	13	26	24	17	11	4	2.9

This was a difficult question because students needed to write on both the guitar and the piano and be able to write sufficient information to obtain full marks.

A large number of students did not describe the rhythmic features of what they heard and many did not seem to understand what 'rhythmic' meant and wrote about the melodic features.

Question 6b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	10	26	25	22	11	4	3.1

Melody

- vocal range was narrow
- repeated notes at the beginnings of phrases
- essentially antecedent-consequent structure
- strings provide a melodic 'oscillation' (perhaps a counter-melody) in a narrow range between Db and G

Harmony

- Db Major (VI Major) minim, Bb minor (iv minor) minim, F minor
- (i minor) semibreve
- the harmonic progression was created by the bass part

Texture

- fairly thick
- elements of both homophony and polyphony
- sonic placement of most of the instruments and the voice were comparatively low (basically within the low-mid register guitar) – piano has been removed so the 'standard' treble register is no longer featured

The majority of students attempted this question. The best responses were those presented in a table as they were well organised and thought out. There were many superficial responses with some students only referring to one segment of the work. Some students did not describe the differences between the segments, and simply wrote about the elements of each, without presenting a clear description of any differences.

Question 6c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	2	5	11	16	19	18	16	8	4	4.3

Melody

- Chorus: Delivered by the vocalist. Limited register for the first two phrases, on the third repetition of the phrase there is a leap up of a fourth. The fourth phrase moves to a lower register. Phrase repetition is a feature – both melodically and rhythmically.
- Instrumental Interlude: Delivered by piano. Higher register. More leaps which are a feature. Arpeggiation up and down a Db Major 9 chord (i.e. F, Ab, Eb, Db, C, Ab/G). Uses same notes but up an octave from the vocal chorus melody. Phrase repetition is a feature as well.

Expressive devices

- Chorus: Lighter vocal quality used. Louder dynamic level for all instruments. Single note (Ab) in the head register in the third phrase.
- Instrumental Interlude: Softer dynamic level. Drums create more movement by using semiquaver pattern with accents on off-beats.



Rhythm

- Chorus: Drums play with a quaver feel, with accents on the off beats. Bass is playing ti-ti-si-ka pattern. Guitar has same rhythm as bass; harmonic rhythm is the same in both sections. Strings play mostly minims with quavers at the ends of some phrases.
- Instrumental Interlude: Drums play with a semiquaver feel, with accents on the off-beats, some students talked about this being a double time feel. Bass plays even quavers for the first half and then begins to play minims and semibreves. Piano is playing crotchets and minims. Guitar plays predominantly a semiquaver ostinato. Strings playing sustained chords minim, minim, semibreve.

Texture

- Chorus: Primarily homophonic, but with some polyphonic elements from the strings. Textural density is increased because most instruments are brought to be of equal importance within the arrangement.
- Instrumental Interlude: Implied homophony, two interlaced ostinato, textual density decreased, many sustained instruments removed.

Tonality

- F natural minor (Aeolian) – four flats (Eb notes presented from voice and piano arpeggiations).

The majority of students attempted this question. The best responses were those presented in a table as they were well organised and thought out. There were many superficial responses with some students only referring to one segment of the work. Some students did not describe the differences between the segments, and simply wrote about the elements of each, without presenting a clear description of any differences.

Section B – Aspects of performance

Question 7 – Aspects of performance – Presentation of and preparation for performance

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	1	4	4	9	13	12	14	14	10	11	5	3	6.9

Connectedness to the selected styles was an important issue in this question. Responses needed to establish a link between each of the relevant styles and the individual performance techniques used to realise the relevant stylistic characteristics.

Areas of concern included:

- Many students did not answer the question in relation to the individual.
- A number of students discussed their ‘practice’ techniques, rather than their ‘performance’ techniques.
- Students who clearly understood the question wrote detailed responses as to how they worked on their individual ‘performance’ techniques for each work.
- Students must read the question carefully.

In addition to the points stated on the paper other possibilities could have been: ornaments and embellishments; pitch and tuning issues; bends; multi-phonics; use of improvisation if appropriate to the style; use of effects; experimentation with different interpretative emphases.

Question 8 – Aspects of performance – Performance environment

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	5	8	17	17	17	14	11	5	3	5.5



Most students attempted this question. A number of students wrote about how they went about setting up their equipment, not understanding the real meaning of ‘placement of equipment’.

Strong answers went into great depth to discuss the ‘problems’ with the performance environment and how they went about ‘fixing’ the problems. They established a link between the evaluation and the outcome by way of doing something appropriate and making clear how that action enhances or optimises the outcomes. Other strong responses discussed the positioning of instruments for effective sound production.

Some students identified the problems within their performance environment but failed to discuss how they dealt with the performance environment to create an effective performance.

Optimising the performance with respect to optimising/enhancing performance outcomes was the most important issue.

At least one of the dot points on the examination paper needed to be mentioned in the students’ response to obtain full marks.

Other potential foci might include:

- avoid ‘fly space’ above a proscenium stage – play on the apron, for example
- use of sound enhancements/alteration devices (for example, digital delay, reverb, echo, distortion, overdrive)
- use of graphic (or parametric) equalisation
- use of acoustic baffles to try to eliminate resonant frequencies, false accentuation of frequencies and timbres
- changing instruments (especially electric rather than acoustic guitar or bass)
- mutes
- audience seating
- tempo alterations
- changes to relative balance between instruments
- use and/or selection of microphones.

Section C – Part-writing OR Improvisation

Question chosen	0	9	10
%	7	47	46

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	18	8	12	15	14	11	12	6	4	18	8	3.4

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	23	25	52	1.3

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	17	5	10	10	11	11	9	8	7	5	4	3	1	4.5

It was impressive that many more students attempted this section than in previous years.

Question 9 – Part-writing

Question 9a.

Many students were unable to describe characteristics of the melody or melodic excerpt but wrote about how they created their part-writing composition.

Many students chose to write on how they went about selecting a chord progression, but failed to discussion of implied harmonies from the melody, so their response was neither valid nor relevant.

Possible points of instruction for the main words include:

- implied harmonies – triadic, suspensions, quartal and secondal
- contour – linear, angular and arpeggiated
- tonality – scales, modes and progressions.

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Other potential characteristics which must relate to melody may include:

- range
- metric/durational issues
- phrase characteristics
- internal or formal relationships such as palindromic, retrograded, inverted and sequencing.

Question 9b.

Possible answers included but were not limited to:

- durations
- polymetrics
- polyrhythms
- motivic
- sequences
- imitation
- harmonic rhythm
- rhythmic ostinati
- rhythmic stratification
- agogic accent
- syncopation
- variation
- additive
- phrase relationships (especially balanced and unbalanced).

Many students completed this question but their responses did not always relate to rhythm.

Many students wrote about the elements of music not necessarily rhythmic features.

Question 9c.

Phrasing

- balanced/unbalanced (used in an expressive context)
- legato to marcato (and all points in between)
- contour
- contrasted ranges
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- general and specific interrelationships between melody, harmony and rhythm
- use of fermata
- harmonic phrasing
- rhythmic shaping
- issues relating to 'subtleties' of phrasing

Articulations

- accents
- legato to staccato
- ornaments and embellishments
- ghosting
- diction related issues

Dynamics

- loud/soft
- balance-related considerations
- changes in volume (subito, crescendo, decrescendo, etc.)
- contrast
- layering
- terracing

Other refinement processes

- voicings (especially with respect to harmonies)
- doublings



- textural density alterations (especially adding or removing instruments or voices)
- alterations to ranges of individual parts/voices

Question 10 – Improvisation

This year there were much better responses to this question than in previous years.

Question 10a.

Many students did not describe the characteristics of the source material, but described how they improvised. Some students only discussed one characteristic.

Melody

- contour
- range
- sonic position (tessitura)
- instrumental combinations to create different colours, densities and/or sonic effects
- issues related to instrumental ‘doubling’
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- the general and specific interrelationships between melody, harmony and rhythm

Chord progression

- expression of the chord progression itself
- single chord groove
- consistent/ regular changes of harmonies
- use of chordal ostinati
- extended segments (phrases) with regular or irregular subdivisions

Featured lines

- melodic
- bass
- counter-melodies
- linear harmonisations
- contrary/conjunct motion of equal (or secondary) parts
- rhythmic
- implied harmonic issues

Many students did not understand the word ‘refine’ and many superficial responses were given that did not fully answer the question.

Question 10b.

Possible answers included but were not limited to:

- durations
- polymetrics
- polyrhythms
- motivic
- sequences
- imitation
- harmonic rhythm
- rhythmic ostinati
- rhythmic stratification
- Agogic accent
- syncopation
- variation
- phrase relationships (especially balanced and unbalanced)
- the ‘groove’, the role of rhythm and the ‘rhythm section’ (if used).



Many students completed this question but their responses did not always relate to rhythm.

Many students wrote about the elements of music that were not necessarily rhythmic features.

Question 10c.

Phrasing

- balanced/ unbalanced (used in an expressive context)
- legato to marcato (and all points in between)
- contour
- contrasted ranges
- general and specific interrelationships between melody, harmony and rhythm
- harmonic phrasing
- rhythmic shaping
- issues relating to 'subtleties' of phrasing

Articulations

- accents
- legato to staccato
- ornaments and embellishments
- ghosting
- diction-related issues

Dynamics

- loud/soft
- balance-related considerations
- changes in volume (subito, crescendo, decrescendo, etc.)
- contrast
- terracing

Many students described how they performed their improvisation rather than describing the expressive elements used.