



2008 Music Styles GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2008 examination consisted of three sections and comprised a total of 100 marks. All sections of the examination were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published in the sample examination material. The question style and length of the examination were consistent with the published sample material.

The majority of students displayed effective examination technique; 95 per cent of the cohort completed the paper and there were fewer instances of students writing excessive essay style responses to questions with ‘describe’ stems, while omitting or neglecting questions with a ‘discuss’ stem. It was pleasing, particularly in Section A, to see fewer students wasting time writing introductory paragraphs that simply restated the examination question.

The cohort seemed at ease with the structure of the examination; the vast majority displayed a clear knowledge of the requirements of the study design and most demonstrated a good command of the music terminology needed to express the concepts covered by the study. Of concern was the increasing number of students who used works from the *Prescribed List of Ensemble Works* mandated for Music Solo Performance. Students and teachers are reminded that while these works are potentially appropriate for use in Music Styles, there are significant differences in the requirements of the two studies and that students rarely benefit when required to study the same work from two perspectives.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Section A consisted of five questions and represented 44 of 100 marks. An audio CD lasting approximately 51 minutes accompanied this section of the examination. The length of the CD corresponded to the weighting of Section A as set out in the sample examination material. Questions 1 and 5 included ‘prompts’ that were designed to give students a context and/or terminology to assist in answering these questions. Extra time was allotted to these questions to give students the opportunity to read the extra material and students displayed a pleasing capacity to effectively interact with this additional stimulus.

This section of the examination elicited some fine responses, and the cohort again demonstrated a high degree of aural acuity. As in previous years, the lower order responses tended to be in the form of a listening diary as opposed to directly answering the question. Mid-range responses tended to be structured around the elements of music; these students had difficulty synthesising the various domains covered by the study. For example, if asked about a compositional device with the requirement of referring to a specific element of music, these students wrote a section on the device and a section on the element. The best responses to this style of question used the mandated element as an example of the operating of the compositional device.

Very few students structured answers around superficial emotive responses to the excerpts in Section A and, for the most part, responses in this section were free from unsubstantiated value judgements.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	2	4	8	18	26	23	19	6.1

Most students handled this question very capably. Some weaker responses had difficulty relating the element of rhythm to the use of repetition and variation, and some described issues associated with the instrumentation provided by the question prompt rather than dealing with the required content of the question. High-scoring responses provided an insightful description of repetition and variation, and included most or all of the following issues.

Repetition and Variation

- call and response between the soloist and male choir
- repetition of chorus by male choir functioned like a ritornello – repetitions were occasionally abridged or varied.
- wind ‘pad’ repeated throughout
- the rhythmic ostinato repeated throughout with subtle shifts and variations
- repeated drumming patterns

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- repetition and variation in the solo male vocal line; this featured a recurrent descending 'scale-like' pattern that began higher for longer phrases

Rhythm

- hoquet techniques in the horns
- polyrhythm
- regular patterns with the occasional 'hiccup'
- layering of percussive effects

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	1	6	21	27	24	22	4.4

This question elicited some very good responses, particularly in relation to texture. A good proportion of the cohort identified the 12-bar blues pattern operating in the excerpt, but many had difficulty constructing a description of harmony beyond this observation and instead resorted to vague, non-musical adjectives to describe this element. High-scoring responses employed relevant music terminology and were able to specify aspects of harmony and texture including the following information.

Harmony

- primarily triadic constructions with free addition of dissonance
- natural minor/modal pitch material
- structural idea derived from the 12-bar blues
- pizzicato bass line emphasised the root notes of various chords
- harmonies created through contrary motion in double-stopped viola passage
- essentially functional progressions decorated with motivic interpolations

Texture

- began on a unison descending glissando
- moved through a range of textures: monophonic/polyphonic and homophonic
- the melodic line was regularly positioned below the accompanying lines
- unusual dissonant chords were used to punctuate the texture

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	0	0	1	6	16	19	20	15	16	8	6

This question elicited a range of responses. Some students provided a generic description of three elements rather than describing how contrast was achieved. The best responses dealt directly with the issue of contrast and used the mandated elements as examples of the operation of contrast in the excerpt. Many students selected both instrumentation and tone colour as two of the three mandated elements, but were then unable to effectively differentiate between the two. A description of instrumentation ought to be characterised by features such as a list of instruments or sound sources and the function of those instruments in an ensemble (i.e. bass function, melodic function, etc.). A description of tone colour, on the other hand, ought to deal with issues such as instrumental timbre, variations to standard instrumental timbre (such as muting or extended techniques) and how instruments are used in combination to create an effect. Students and teachers are advised that, as an aspect of examination technique, thought and care is needed in selecting elements where they are presented as options. High-scoring responses included aspects of the following.

Tonality

- suggestions of a tonal 'infrastructure' – triads/arpeggios/tonal scales
- reinforced bass line (a feature of tonal music)
- pedal point employed to reinforce tonic/dominant relationships
- tended to bitonality in places (often according to instrumental group, i.e. the strings in one key set against the brass in another)
- in spite of extensive dissonance, the music was regularly drawn back to the tonic

Rhythm/Time

- strong pulse, motoric rhythm used throughout
- syncopation related to texture – this occurred according to instrumental layers

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- strings/horns/bass line were involved in a rhythmic counterpoint
- use of simple cross rhythms

Dynamics

- linked to instrumentation and the functional division of the orchestra
- crescendos occurred according to instrument group – i.e. a ‘timbral’ crescendo
- textural combinations allowed for different expressions of dynamics – i.e. the strings working in a higher tessitura gave the impression of a crescendo

Articulation

- contrasts were set up with regard to the style of articulation – the strings tended to employ a strong accent followed by a ‘clipped’ or mezzo staccato style release, while the brass featured long sustained notes characterised by accents followed by longer decays
- deliberate detailing of attack and decay with regards to accents
- accents worked to emphasis cross rhythms

Instrumentation

- conventional orchestra with piano
- ‘functional’ division used in orchestration
- melodic role for horns acted as an underpin and counterpoint to the strings

Tone colour

- strong, strident bass line; heavy ‘pungent’ horns; gregarious string writing (adjectives supported by examples and an explanation were used to good effect)
- orchestral colour, achieved through ‘instrumental counterpoint’ was a significant aspect of the work

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	20	21	24	35	2.8

This question was well handled with the majority of students able to produce an accurate description of the structure, albeit with varying degrees of detail. The structure was as follows:

A B A B¹ A

Each ‘A’ section consisted of four symmetrical phrases. The ‘B’ section was the same length as the ‘A’ section but consisted of three phrases, the third involving an extension. Dynamics and phrase structure worked to delineate the form. The form of the piece is best described as extended ternary, however, students who described the structure as a rondo were not penalised, provided they identified the similarities between the two episodes. Full marks were awarded to students who correctly identified the form and provided some detail as to the phrase structure of the ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections. Lower marks were awarded to students who either provided less detail or presented a structural description that contained errors. While diagrams were used to excellent effect, some students chose to provide a prose description of the form; either approach was able to garner full marks.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	4	14	17	19	24	13	10	5.3

The ‘explain’ stem of this question gave students the scope to use the analysis of structure provided in Question 4a. as the starting point for a consideration of the elements of melody and dynamics/volume. High-scoring responses devised integrated answers that jointly considered the issues of melody, dynamics and repetition. Lower-scoring responses were characterised by discrete descriptions of melody, dynamics and repetition that did not clearly function as explanations. Capable responses included the following observations.

Melody

- ascending line across the first three phrases of the ‘A’ section; the line descends somewhat in the fourth phrase
- primarily conjunct or arpeggiated horizontal motion
- clearly tonal with diatonic scales providing the source of the pitch material

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Dynamics

- dynamics functioned to mirror the melodic contour
- crescendo and decrescendo were directly linked to the structure of the work with each 'A' and 'B' section featuring this technique
- the entire piece worked as an elongation of a crescendo/decrescendo

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	0	0	2	6	17	21	15	23	10	7	5.9

This question functioned as a discriminator for Section A of the examination. Most students demonstrated their capacity to create a response that synthesised their 'listening analysis' of the required elements and further demonstrated their capacity to interact with the language of the question prompt to create relevant and insightful discussions. Some weaker responses tended to stray into issues of imagined extra-musical effect rather than dealing with salient information and analysis. Good responses included the following aspects.

Instrumentation

- rock band combined with ethnic folk instruments
- 'listening diary' or timeline showing instrumental interactions

Tone colour

- folk style of singing included harmonics/drone/glottal stopping
- harmonic singing/tremolos and wailing effects
- wide tessitura in female voice
- male voice – whistling plus biphonics worked to provide a counterpoint to the amplified/electronic sound of the popular instruments
- tone colour changed as various parts of the band pass around a single melodic line

Rhythm

- repetition of rhythm – ostinato
- rock band riffs contrasted with lyrical/smooth folk lines
- rhythmic unison between the folk instrumental parts at key structural points
- folk singing featured more complex ad lib rhythms 'out of time' with the rock ostinatos
- typical popular music conventions of drum entry pre-empting the successive structural sections

Section B

Section B consisted of four questions and represented 35 of 100 marks. These questions were linked to the works students had studied in Units 3 and 4, and primarily went to issues of context, style and compositional design (in other words, the use of elements and compositional devices). One work in Unit 3 needed to be an Australian composition and one work in Unit 4 needed to have been composed/created since 1910.

Teachers are again advised to be careful in selecting works for study in Units 3 and 4. The works chosen must give students the scope to deal with all aspects of the key knowledge and key skills, including the treatment of elements, the use of compositional devices, aspects of style and contextual issues. Students undertaking the 2008 paper used a wide range of works. These included, but were not limited to, the following.

Australian works

- Ross Edwards: *Symphony Number 4 – Star Chant*
- Stuart Greenbaum: *90 Minutes Circling the Earth*
- Paul Kelly: various songs including *From Little Things Big Things Grow* and *How to Make Gravy*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Earth Cry*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Port Essington*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Sun Music I*
- Nigel Westlake: *Antarctica*

Works composed since 1910

- Berio: *Sequenza III*
- Duke Ellington: *Concerto for Cootie and Ko-Ko*

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- Philip Glass: *Koyaanisquatis*
- Messiaen: *Quatuor Pour la Fin du Temps*
- Enrico Morricone: *The Ecstasy of Gold* and *Trio* from the film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*
- Schoenberg: *A Survivor From Warsaw*
- Shostakovich: *String Quartet Number 8 – 1st Movement*

Some students struggled with requirement of adapting the material they had prepared to the specific contexts presented by the questions. This examination functioned to sample various aspects of the key skills contained in the study design; it purposefully did not provide students an opportunity to simply recite every element of learning. As such, prepared answers will never entirely suit the context provided; students must be able to tailor their 'learned' responses to specific questions.

The best responses to the questions in Section B demonstrated a facility to employ all of the key skills contained in Area of Study 2, particularly the requirements of using music terminology appropriate to the style of the selected works and using music examples to support analysis. This last point acted as a discriminator between mid and high-scoring responses; the most capable students were able to use specific music examples (including bar numbers or other descriptors) to indicate precisely the sections that demonstrated the points they were making.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	2	7	12	16	26	34	4.5

Students responded very well to this question with one third of the cohort receiving full marks. High-scoring responses set up descriptions that used the element of texture as an exemplar of aspects of contrast. Weaker responses either dealt with the texture and contrast independently or did not make the link clear.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	1	1	4	7	9	11	20	16	18	14	6.2

The best responses to Question 7 made clear the connection between their description of a music style and how the chosen work was representative of that style, using specific examples from the music. Mid-level responses tended to merely provide a generic description of a music style with occasional references to the chosen work. Lower scoring responses did not clearly articulate the concept of style and instead focussed on issues such as a composer biography or anecdotes surrounding their chosen work.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	5	1	3	5	5	5	7	8	15	13	15	10	10	7.7

This 'discuss' question required a synthesis of knowledge that ideally went beyond a straightforward description of three elements. The best responses clearly linked one or more contextual issues to the three elements selected and used musical examples to highlight how the contextual issue(s) had impacted upon each element. Lower-scoring responses either neglected one or more elements or failed to coherently link the elements to the contextual issue(s).

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	1	8	9	12	9	17	14	28	5.6

Many students used comparative tables to good effect here. Some students mentioned one point related to repetition and one related to variation for each work, and due to the depth of their response related to these points, devised very convincing answers. Others elected to present a longer list of issues associated with repetition and variation in less detail. Both approaches were appropriate and capable of garnering full marks. Some students seemed reticent to present similarities, electing instead to focus only on differences. Students are reminded that an effective comparison can reasonably focus on either or both of these aspects.

Section C

Section C consisted of one question in four parts and represented 21 of 100 marks. This section required students to account for a composition/arrangement/improvisation completed in Unit 4 by explaining various aspects of the creative process they undertook to complete the work. Student responses to this question demonstrated that, like previous years,

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the cohort continued to produce an impressive array of music characterised by diversity and creativity. The structure of Section C gave students the opportunity to briefly describe the structure of their piece and a practical consideration that affected their creative process (Questions 10a. and 10b.), to explain their creative process in relation to the elements of music (Question 10c.) and to construct a discussion of the creative process(es) required to adapt their piece for a different circumstance (Question 10d.).

Question 10

10a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	8	29	61	2.5

Full marks were awarded to students who provided a detailed summary of the structure of their composition. Over half of the cohort was able to do this. Lower marks were awarded to students who provided an overly generic description of structure or did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the concept of structure.

10b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	15	44	38	2.2

This question elicited some mixed responses with many students only describing their use of music copying software without any deeper reflection on how this affected their creative process. Full marks were awarded to students who worked with one of the question prompts to a reasonable degree.

10c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	2	8	14	24	25	25	4.4

This question was very well done with half of the cohort achieving a result of five or six out of a possible six marks. An 'explanation' style response was required, and those students who merely described their use of two elements without providing a clear picture of their creative process were not awarded full marks.

10d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	5	1	5	7	9	13	23	17	12	8	5.6

This 'discussion' question was reasonably well answered with many students capably showing how their composition could be adapted or extended. The best responses displayed imagination and creativity in providing a detailed account of how a creative process could be used to effect the adaptation. Lower-scoring responses tended to deal with generalities such as the length of their composition or aspects of mood and affect, with only a tenuous connection to the specifics of a creative process.