



2010 Music Styles GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2010 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 Assessment Handbook. The question style and the length of the examination were consistent with the published sample assessment material.

In general, the 2010 cohort was familiar with the key knowledge associated with the study and competently applied key skills related to aural analysis. The examination technique applied by the majority of students was appropriate to the requirements of the examination and most students were able to complete the examination in the available time. Very few students rephrased questions or wrote long passages when responses in dot-point format or diagrams or charts would have communicated information more effectively. The aural analytical ability of the cohort was particularly impressive – many students were able to apply aural skills that enabled a detailed understanding of unheard works and included, for example, the capacity to hear intricate aspects of melody and to complete a precise rendering of chord progressions. Students were well prepared for Sections B and C of the examination – they used appropriate works to respond to Questions 5–8 and there was evidence of high-level engagement with the creative tasks mandated by the study design in Question 9.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Section A consisted of four questions and was worth 44 marks. An audio CD lasting 52 minutes and 38 seconds accompanied this section of the examination. The length of the CD corresponded to the weighting of Section A as set out in the Assessment Handbook.

The most successful responses in Section A were characterised by the effective use of discipline-specific terminology, high-order aural analytical ability, a reticence to make value judgments, and answers that were shaped around the specific requirements of the questions. Mid-range responses displayed similar qualities, but were marked by a more limited capacity to use aural analysis to identify and describe specific musical features. Low-scoring responses were characterised by unfocused ‘listening diaries’ that often did not directly answer the question being asked. Students are advised to read each question thoroughly during reading time and, when the examination and CD begin, they should listen carefully to the elements/devices that constitute the focus of each question.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	1	5	26	31	23	14	4.1

This question elicited some excellent answers that clearly identified the chord progression as well as other characteristics of the accompaniment. High-scoring responses employed relevant music terminology and were able to describe the accompaniment in terms that included, but were not limited to, the following:

- a homophonic accompaniment characterised by rhythmic unison
- a bass line that iterated root notes on the beat
- a chord progression of I – IV – V – I consistent throughout (ground bass/chaconne-like structure)
- an increasing textural density
- a low tessitura compared to the recorders
- an increasing emphasis on the down-beat as the excerpt progressed
- an ornamented line in the high string part in the second half of the excerpt, creating increasing melodic interest in the accompaniment as the excerpt progressed.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	2	6	20	30	26	16	4.2

Students displayed a pleasing capacity to meet the requirements of this question with many students receiving high marks. Answers to this question included, but were not limited to, the following:

- a primarily conjunct line
- both lines regularly reaffirmed the tonic
- melodic embellishment that became increasingly complex

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- the two recorders often played a third apart; at other times they worked to a 'question and answer' pattern
- rhythmic diminution was evident in some melodic figures
- periodic heterophony was displayed (one line ornamented)
- mostly metric reinforcement of the beat with occasional suspensions in the second recorder into dominant harmony
- later in the excerpt, the second recorder took on an accompanying role and featured melody that outlined the triads of the chord progression.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	2	10	14	31	24	12	8	5.3

Students displayed a good ability to describe contrast with reference to both micro and macro examples of the device. The device of repetition was less capably handled, with a significant portion of students not able to describe repetition beyond the repeated rhythmic motive in the triangle and shaker parts. Repetition can refer to a range of issues within a composition, including sectional repetition and repetition of motivic and harmonic patterns. Students who were unable to describe repetition in terms of its role as compositional device did not attain full marks for this question. High-order responses were able to describe the aspects of repetition in detail with some students using prose and others using diagrams, charts and notation or a mixture of these approaches. High-order answers outlined the structural significance of the device of contrast and did not simply focus on contrast as a measure of 'difference'.

Answers included, but were not limited to, the following.

Repetition

- repeated rhythmic idea in the triangle and shaker connected through rhythmic augmentation
- repeated motivic ideas
- sectional repetition informing the structure of the excerpt

Contrast

- functional division – different tone colours were linked to motivic ideas
- contrasting sectional structure
- contrast created through differing phrase lengths
- contrasting dynamics work to define sections
- contrasting rhythm – 'on the beat' versus syncopation, according to section

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	0	0	5	6	19	20	14	18	12	6	5.7

This question required students to analyse elements of music aurally and to respond critically to the excerpt – in this case by explaining how three elements were used to create tension in the excerpt. It was evident that students found the excerpt combined with the 'explain' stem of the question challenging. As with any subjective critical response, students could have disagreed with the premise of the question (that the excerpt worked to create tension) without penalty provided subjective responses were justified through objective, analytical information evident in the music. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following.

Rhythm

- A slow rate of change in the melodic line was punctuated by bursts of quick notes in different instrumental groups. This built tension by contrasting expected change with unexpected interjection.
- The repetition of rhythmic elements functioned to raise expectation – tension grew from an expected, 'inevitable' climax.
- The extended note in brass towards the end of the excerpt created tension related to an audience's 'physiological empathy'; the length of the note was longer than a typical breath for a brass section, and tension could have been created as a result of the audience 'breathing' with the ensemble.

Tone colour

- Extended passages of high tessitura in the wind and brass caused tension through traditional, functional associations (a clarinet in its middle and low registers sounds less intense than in its high register). Added to

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this, higher pitches generally correspond with shorter air columns; this issue of acoustics contributed to the issue of tension.

- The addition of instruments worked to gradually transform the tone colour, adding to the sense of ‘inevitable’ climax.

Melody

- The stepwise ascent of the primary melodic line built tension through the expectation of climax.
- The overlapping of interval groups worked to create the impression of a continual ascent.
- The high note in the trumpet prolonged the tension that resulted from the gradual build-up of the melodic line.
- Non-melodic/non-idiomatic interjections from winds created confusion/tension.

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	0	0	1	9	36	55	4.5

- piano
- drum kit (snare – tap on side + strait snare and bass drum). (Parts of the kit could be identified as separate instruments)
- shaker and trombone (followed quickly by string bass)
- high brass – tutti
- whistle (followed quickly by saxophones)

Students were required to construct a specific, ordered list in identifying the order in which the instruments/sound sources entered the excerpt. If students did not know the name of a particular instrument, they could give a description of the relevant sound sources for full marks. While some students provided much more information than was needed, the majority of students performed very well, with many receiving full marks. Students needed to identify at least one of the harder to hear aspects of instrumentation – the string bass and saxophones – in order to receive full marks.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	4	7	14	14	15	12	9	10	13	6.2

Students’ responses to this question displayed the prevalence of high-order aural analytical skills in the cohort. Many students were able to create a detailed description of the structure of the excerpt as well as identify the specific character of the 12-bar blues progression used. In a generic 12-bar blues progression, the third last chord is typically the subdominant (chord IV). This piece employed a variation on this generic progression that used the dominant (chord V) in its place. A significant number of students demonstrated an impressive level of aural acuity by being able identify the 12-bar blues progression as well as the variation on the generic pattern. Answers to this question included, but were not limited to, the following.

Structure

- five iterations of a 12-bar blues progression framed by an 8-bar intro and outro (with fade-out) on the tonic
- 12-bar blues was expressed as I – I – I – I – IV – IV – I – I – V – V – I – I. Responses were able to correctly identify this as six chord changes – I – I – IV – I – V – I

Detailed structure (presented here as a table, but could also be expressed through dot points or prose)

Section	Instrumentation	Features
8-bar intro	Piano solo (4 bars) followed by kit	Harmony entirely around the tonic
12-bar blues section 1	Add low brass (trombone) + string bass and shaker at start of section	Low brass emphasised a florid bass line Harmony employed the 12-bar blues progression as listed above
12-bar blues section 2	Addition of high brass	Low brass and bass continued in bass-line role. High brass introduced ‘stab’ chords
12-bar blues section 3	Entry of whistle and saxophones	Drum kit fill demarked section Saxophones and whistle worked in a call and response pattern
12-bar blues section 4	Full ensemble	Call and response between whistle and saxophones continued; addition of high-brass stabs
12-bar blues	High brass drops out after first bar;	Sustained high brass chord demarked section

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section 5	section proceeds as for section 1	
8-bar outro	Piano and kit only	Drum fill demarked section Harmony entirely around tonic Fade out

Harmony

- 12-bar blues as listed above
- chord construction – seventh chords with extensions
- blues scale – apart from changing scale form over different chords of the progression, the piece did not modulate

Section B

Section B consisted of four questions and was worth 35 marks. The questions were linked to the works students had studied in Units 3 and 4 and addressed issues of context, characteristics of music style and compositional design. One work in Unit 3 needed to be an Australian composition and one work in Unit 4 needed to have been created since 1910.

While most students chose appropriate works to respond to questions in Section B, the choices of repertoire across the cohort continued to narrow. For example, in meeting the Australian composition requirement of Unit 3, three composers featured strongly – Peter Sculthorpe, Nigel Westlake and Stuart Greenbaum – with most students studying a work by Sculthorpe. Australian works chosen in Section B included (but were not limited to):

- Stuart Greenbaum: *90 Minutes Circling the Earth*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Earth Cry*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Port Essington*
- Nigel Westlake: *Antarctica*.

A problem that consistently arose with regard to the information that underpinned the contextual issues surrounding these Australian works was the use of dated and unreliable source material. Particularly with regard to the works of Peter Sculthorpe, many students were drawing on information from academic literature that was over 20 years old. Many of the contextual issues that surrounded Sculthorpe's music (particularly those that deal with the influence of Indigenous musical materials in his work) have been examined in a fresh light in more recent literature. For example, many students wrote in detail about the purported Indigenous tune *Djilile* and its use in a range of Sculthorpe's compositions. The use of dated source material resulted in students writing a range of naive and often culturally insensitive observations about the application of this melody in Sculthorpe's music. In addition, many students presented a composer's analysis of his or her own work as the authoritative source for factual material and contextual issues: in reality, a composer's opinion of his or her work is merely one lens through which a work can be viewed; a view which has the capacity to be biased and unscholarly. It is recommended that students and teachers draw on material to support learning in this area that stems from more than one recent scholarly source.

A much wider range of works was presented in fulfilment of the Unit 4 requirement that mandated the study of a work composed since 1910. Works composed since 1910 included, but were not limited to, the following.

- Bela Bartok: *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, first movement
- Terry Riley: *In C*
- Dream Theatre: *Erotomania*
- Shostakovich: *Violin Concerto No 1 in A minor*, third movement
- Radio Head: *Idioteque*
- Oum Kalthoum: *Enta Omri*.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	1	2	4	8	9	10	12	9	10	13	8	13	7.8

This question required students to synthesise material they had learnt regarding issues associated with the characteristics of music style(s) and the contextual issues associated with the selected work. This synthesis was focused on a quote that stated 'there is no such thing as an "Australian" music style'. Students were free to construct discussions that agreed or disagreed with this quote and either approach was acceptable. There were many higher-order responses that presented significant insight into characteristics of the music style of the selected work and associated contextual issues. Mid- and lower-order responses were characterised either by a lack information to support the discussion about characteristics of

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the music style of the work and associated contextual issues and had difficulty constructing a discussion or presented a simple a description of various characteristics and issues.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	4	1	5	10	14	20	9	13	12	13	5.6

This question focused on music style and required students to refer to three elements of music from a list of six. The most successful responses dealt primarily with characteristics of music style and used three elements as examples of the operation of the identified style. Many students constructed answers that simply described the use of three elements in their chosen work. Where this type of response did not adequately deal with the characteristics of music style, full marks were not awarded. Low-scoring responses tended to neglect the issue of music style and focused solely on the elements.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	3	12	13	22	18	26	4

Students capably demonstrated the capacity to describe variation in relation to the structure/form of their chosen work. Diagrams were used effectively and the majority of students included detailed examples in their responses that indicated a multi-faceted familiarity with the works studied. Students who struggled with this question tended to lack a clear understanding of the device of variation (taking into account the range of ways in which this device can be understood) and simply presented a generic structural description of their chosen work.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	4	6	15	11	18	13	12	16	4.9

Students broadly demonstrated a pleasing understanding of the treatment of tone colour in their selected works; however, the same could not be said for the element of tonality. Many students struggled to describe how tonality operated in a meaningful way, with some students writing about other elements such as melody or structure. Students and teachers are reminded that tonality, according to the *VCE Music Styles Study Design*, can be seen in terms of not only common-practice tonality, but also in terms of modality, polytonal constructs, chromaticism and atonal systems. As such, no particular work selection disadvantaged any student.

Section C

Section C consisted of one question in two parts and was worth 21 marks. This section required students to account for a composition/arrangement/improvisation completed in Unit 4 by explaining how the composition/arrangement/improvisation was created from the original idea to the finished product, and to reflect on the application(s) of a creative process to a context provided by the examination.

Question 9a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	1	1	1	8	10	19	13	20	16	10	6.1

The word 'explain' in the question gave students the opportunity to select the significant aspects of their composition and the creative process that underpinned their music and to 'tell the story' of how the piece was conceived and developed. Most students were able to give a detailed account of how their composition came about. The most successful accounts included specific musical examples and demonstrated the capacity to reflect on the choices they had made throughout the creative process.

Question 9b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	4	3	4	3	5	9	10	15	13	11	8	8	8	7.2

This question required students to describe a creative process that could be used to fulfil the requirements of an imaginary commission for a concert. Some students chose to use the work they had composed/created/improvised in Unit 4 as a starting point to fulfil the commission; others devised a new scenario to answer the question. Either approach was acceptable. Some students struggled with the requirement to refer to two elements of music, a compositional device and practical factors that would influence the composition. Rather than focusing their responses on the requirements of the question (to describe a creative process), these students wrote extensive reflections on the circumstances of the commission. The question elicited a range of good responses, many of which were characterised

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by a detailed description of creative process. Such responses demonstrated that a many students had excellent insight into issues surrounding pre-compositional planning and the processes that inform the discipline of composition.