



2012 VCE VET Music GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

In the VCE VET Music performance examination, students give a live performance, either as a single performer or as part of a group.

Students are assessed in relation to the following units of competency.

- CUSMPF301A Develop technical skills in performance
- CUSMPF402A Develop and maintain stagecraft skills

Students are also assessed in relation to either of the following units of competency, depending on their coursework specialisation as either a solo or group performer.

- CUSMPF406A Perform music as a soloist
- CUSMPF404A Perform music as part of a group

Each student/group is required to perform an artistic and cohesive program consisting of at least three works.

In general, high-scoring performances in 2012 were characterised by preparedness, musicality, expressiveness, an element of individualism, technical and musical competency, an ability to adjust or adapt to the performance situation itself, and the delivery of a strong program – with all that this implies, including confidence, pacing, focus, energy, empathy with other performers, cohesiveness of the program, and so forth.

Weaker students were clearly underprepared. Some seemed not to have taken the assessment process very seriously and/or were unaware of how to optimise their marks for each criterion – indeed some seemed unaware of the assessment criteria.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Criteria

Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirements of the task

- Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) principles applied appropriately in the performance

Not as many singers were attempting to force (or ‘belt’) high chest notes in an unhealthy way, as has been the case in previous years. This could be partly because the extreme power ballads of recent years are now not as fashionable. Adele was one of the most popular musical choices for singers and her songs remain in lower and middle registers without high-intensity high notes. However, it should be noted that some artists are harder than others to emulate and that developing one’s own unique voice (on instruments as well) is preferable.

Sound levels were generally at an appropriate volume, although in a couple of cases rather too low for the energy of the music genre that was being played. It is true that OH&S principles demand a safe performing environment, but a metal or grunge performance needs a relatively high (yet safe) volume to support the requisite power of the music. Attempting to play Them Crooked Vultures, Metallica or System of a Down with muted volume detracts from the style and feel of the music. That being said, it is incumbent on performers to wear earplugs when these are appropriate.

- minimum of three works performed

All students presented at least three works. It is important to construct a program with a length as close as possible to the required timing for the specific solo or group configuration, in order to maximise the opportunity to demonstrate musical ability and stagecraft.

- at least one work performed from memory

Most students complied with this examination condition. However, when a student is reading from a music stand for most of the performance, it would be wise to make it obvious when they are playing from memory by moving the stand away from the line of sight. This way there can be no confusion for assessors.



- requirements for group and solo configuration and use of non-assessed performers (when needed) are met

There were no problems with the group or solo configurations.

- Performance Program Sheet completed and submitted prior to commencement of examination
- Statement of Intention completed and submitted at commencement of performance

In a number of cases, there seemed to be a lack of effort in the preparation of the Statement of Intention and Performance Program Sheet. In some cases, the Statement of Intention had been filled out with only one word in each section or was so generic that it did not clearly reflect the style of the performance, target audience or performance aspirations of the student.

It should also be noted that assessors mark according to the extent to which students demonstrate technical dexterity, flexibility, accuracy, artistic use of musical elements, projection of tone and so on. An industry context that involves the performance of some kind of background music does not absolve the student from demonstrating the extent to which they have mastered these skills.

- program performed in accordance with the Statement of Intention and the Program Performance Sheet

When sufficient information was provided on the Statement of Intention, programs were generally performed accordingly.

Criterion 2 – Skill in performing with accuracy and control

- accuracy and control of rhythm, pitch, articulation, timing and phrasing, tuning as appropriate to the instrument or voice and area of specialisation

Students showed a wide range of performance skills. It is always exciting to see performances by students at very advanced levels of technical ability, playing extremely difficult and advanced works. It was also apparent that some less advanced students had worked with great dedication and determination to prepare performances that were accurate and controlled, but at a lower level of difficulty. Students are advised to select music and create a program that showcases their skills, while minimising exposure to their weaknesses, in order to demonstrate the highest level of accuracy and control of pitch, tone production, tuning, timing, phrasing and articulation that their skill level and experience allow.

Criterion 3 – Skill in realising the potential expressiveness and versatility of instrument(s) (or voice[s]) or technology throughout the program

- includes performance techniques, such as maintaining a strict tempo, and artistic use of accent, crescendo, diminuendo, staccato, silence, legato, tenuto, rubato, ritardando, accelerando, pitch bending and other techniques as appropriate to the area of specialisation

Students who scored well on this criterion were able to demonstrate an effortless dexterity and flexibility of technique that enhanced the expressiveness and versatility of their performance. They were able to also demonstrate outstanding artistic use of accent, crescendo, diminuendo, staccato, silence, legato, tenuto, rubato, ritardando, accelerando, pitch bending and other expressive techniques. Often, high-scoring students also had a very expressive quality and projection of tone throughout the dynamic range.

Clearly, expressiveness and versatility in a performance is dependent on technical facility. As long as there is a good technical foundation, it is often better to play within one's means than to reach for something that has the potential to cause technical mishaps and, therefore, a break in the expressive flow of the performance. It should be noted also that simply being able to play fast and loud limits the ability to be expressive or versatile.

Criterion 4 – Ability to use a variety of rhythms, time signatures, beat patterns, rhythmic styles, scales, chord sequences and music systems relevant to the area of specialisation

- skill in using variety of duration (rhythm, metre, pattern) and/or melody and harmony (scales, chords, chord progressions) and music systems relevant to the area of specialisation

Most areas of specialisation include some variety of rhythms, time signatures, beat patterns, rhythmic styles, scales, chord sequences and music systems. Few students scored full marks in this criterion as there was either a lack of focus in the area of specialisation or, if there was a focused area, the variety was not explored thoroughly. Many performers played a full program of works in 4/4 time, with most songs employing a simple chord progression in a major or harmonic minor key (I-V-vi-VI progressions, for example), without exploring songs within the same style or area that use different beat groupings or compound time, a variety of keys and more unusual chord progressions, etc.



The key to this criterion is to explore the breadth and range of music possibilities within a selected style or genre. It is difficult to present a cohesive industry-standard program of music by presenting a number of works from completely different time periods and genres in an attempt to add variety.

Criterion 5 – Ability to phrase and shape music appropriately

- skill in phrasing and shaping music in a manner appropriate to the areas of specialisation

This criterion is self-evident. The melodic and rhythmic lines as well as the harmonic rhythm should be shaped through phrasing in a manner that is appropriate to the chosen area of specialisation.

Criterion 6 – Ability to demonstrate originality and innovative approaches in interpretation within the requirements of the group or as a solo performer

- skill in interpretation and expression, and the ability to demonstrate appropriate musical nuance, an individual style of musical expression and original and innovative approaches to stage performances relevant to the area of specialisation

During the VCE VET Music program, students are encouraged to write at least one song or musical work. It is valuable for them to have the opportunity to perform original works, but this should not be confused with originality. Many programs that contained only original music often presented more of the same on a particular theme and demonstrated limited originality. Presenting a cover song with an improvisation or a variation that the student has developed is an excellent way of demonstrating originality and versatility. The key here is performing with originality and innovative approaches, not simply performing original works.

Criterion 7

Group performance – Ability to listen critically to the performances of others and respond, interact and collaborate appropriately, adjusting the performance to achieve required outcomes relevant to the area of specialisation

or

Solo performers – Ability to listen critically to one's own performance and continuously adjust own performance to produce the required outcomes relevant to the area of specialisation.

Listening to the musicians with whom one is playing is critical in the production of a quality performance. Many groups work well together to create an ensemble sound, constantly listening, and adjusting to the dynamics of the group and the performance space.

Guitarists should check the volume levels of clean and distorted sounds so that both work in the same dynamic range. Guitarists also need to be very aware of their volume levels so that their parts can be clearly heard without drowning out others in the ensemble.

Some group performances demonstrated balance problems (especially with regard to the PA mix and EQ), which meant that it was very difficult to distinguish what individual students were playing. Also, some students were playing the same part (i.e. two guitars) with no differentiation – same chord voicing, same amp set-up, etc. – or one guitar, for example, drowned out the other guitar so that only one part could be distinguished. It can only be assumed that in this case the group was accustomed to not hearing that part or that perhaps it was heard on stage in foldback, even though it was not clearly heard in front of house. Good sound checks before the performance and being aware of the dynamic nature of other sounds being generated within the group is vital.

Solo performers have generally been able to listen to their performance and adjust to their performance space quite effectively, especially when accompanying themselves on guitar or piano. Students performing with backing tracks (often played from an MP3 player) still need to be aware of the relative volume levels, differences between tracks and the tonal qualities of the backings. Some students, even though the player and sound equipment was right next to them, failed to change volume levels although the backing was completely overpowering their voice (or instrument) or was so soft that it was hardly audible.

High-scoring students in this criterion demonstrated outstanding differentiation of structures and characters within the music performance, as well as outstanding balance, empathy and synchronisation between music parts.

Criterion 8 – Skill in presenting a cohesive program of music

- skill in presenting an authentic (in relation to the selected area of specialisation), dynamic and well-constructed program of music with appropriate sequencing of items and appropriate choice of repertoire



A number of students presented performances that were of a very basic nature and a number of others presented programs akin to an AMEB or VCE Music Performance program as opposed to a focused and clearly designated industry-style performance in a specific area of specialisation or genre, which is the expectation in VCE VET Music (see Criterion 4 above).

High-scoring students presented an authentic, dynamic and well-constructed program of music with appropriate sequencing of items and choice of repertoire in relation to the selected area of specialisation.

Criterion 9 – Ability to observe and maintain protocols appropriate to the area of specialisation

- skill in communicating effectively through original and innovative approaches to personal stagecraft, expressing appropriate dramatic nuance, while taking venue and style of performance into account

Many students applied an appropriate range of stagecraft skills, such that they were able to demonstrate an ability to engage with the audience through dialogue, movement or gestures. In the music industry, a performer's image and reputation are often linked to the innovative ways in which they approach performances, not just with their ability to play an instrument or sing.

Stagecraft skills may include a performer's interaction with the audience, make-up, hair and costume design, posture, movement, interaction with other performers, facial expressions, techniques for holding instruments or equipment, such as microphones, and effective use of the performance space and props.

In this criterion, high-scoring students demonstrated an innovative and original application of such stagecraft skills in order to express appropriate dramatic nuance, while also demonstrating a highly professional approach to adjusting to, and turning to one's advantage, changing or challenging performance conditions.

Criterion 10 – Skill in presenting a confident performance through consistent focus, energy and with pacing appropriate to the area of specialisation

- skill in applying a range of personal stage skills while performing a suitably paced and focused performance

Students need to be animated and 'sell' their songs or pieces. Students need to develop ways of owning the works and should avoid being fixed or riveted to one section of the stage. Programs should be delivered as if they were a professional show, with focus, poise, flair, energy and pacing, such that the audience (in this case the assessors) are thoroughly convinced of the authenticity of the musician and their story.