

2019 VCE VET Music Industry performance examination report

General comments

In the 2019 VCE VET Music Industry performance examination, students were assessed in relation to the following units of competency:

- CUAMPF301 Develop technical skills in performance
- CUAMPF402 Develop and maintain stagecraft skills.

Students were also assessed in relation to one of the following units of competency, depending on the elective they had undertaken:

- CUAMPF404 Perform music as part of a group
- CUAMPF406 Perform music as a soloist.

The performance examination focused on an understanding of the performance and knowledge evidence, as described in the elements and performance criteria, and the assessment conditions set out in the assessment requirements documentation for each unit of competency.

Each student was assessed on the extent to which their live performance demonstrated accomplishment of the assessment criteria. In this context, the term ‘extent’ refers to the range of ways in which each criterion is met and the degree of difficulty involved in meeting each criterion.

The study provides great scope for students to develop musical performance skills and non-musical performance skills that enhance their musical performance, in the industry context of their choice. It differs from other VCE music studies in that students have complete freedom of choice in selection of repertoire, area of specialisation and performance context.

Sound reinforcement issues, including the assessors’ ability to clearly hear the assessed performers, were a concern, as noted in previous examination reports. In some instances, assessed performers were ‘drowned out’ by other performers (assessed and non-assessed, including teachers) – vocalists in particular, often through the ensemble being too loud, especially the drums. The assessment venue and acoustics must be taken into account when setting up the sound reinforcement. Drummers may not be able to provide an appropriate level of ‘drive’ if they attenuate their acoustic volume. Therefore raising the levels of vocals in the mix may be a more appropriate strategy to enable vocalists to be heard.

A thorough sound check is vital to ensure the balance of musical parts, especially when students are assessed in a venue that is not their usual performance space. Placement of front-of-house speakers should be optimised with consideration given to the assessors’ ability to hear the performance clearly and monitor speakers set up to allow the performers to hear themselves.

Instrumental amps should be raised and angled to allow the instrumentalists to clearly hear the tone and volume being produced.

Another issue of concern, again noted in previous examination reports, is non-assessed performers, including teachers, taking a dominant/leading role in performances for assessment,

including taking superfluous solos and directly instructing students during the examination. This both contravenes the guideline that ‘non-assessed accompanists/group performers must contribute only in a supporting role’ and may be to the disadvantage of the students being assessed.

Although there is no requirement to use all of the allotted time, students whose programs were significantly short were typically unable to meet the criteria at a high level.

The option for assessed students to present their program on more than one instrument, including voice, should not be interpreted as a recommended strategy. Students are advised to perform their programs on the instrument(s) that allows them to meet the criteria at the highest level possible and to prepare for the examination accordingly. This may differ from the approach taken to delivering their coursework. Frequent instrument changes may impact negatively in Criterion 7, if this significantly impedes the flow of the program.

The Industry Statement should contain enough detail to allow assessors to have a clear picture of the intended market.

Where an assessment involves more than one student being assessed on the same instrument, it is important that assessors can clearly identify each performer’s ‘voice’ early in the program. This is particularly important in examinations that involve multiple vocalists. There should be consideration of how this can be achieved through careful arrangement of the first piece in the program.

All assessed members of a group should have opportunities to be featured within the program and doubling parts should be avoided. In some instances, guitar players were playing the same parts and vocalists were singing in unison.

Students should ensure that they can be seen by the assessors and are not obscured by equipment or other performers.

Specific information

Criteria

1. Compliance with the requirements of the examination

- Minimum of three works performed
- At least one work performed from memory
- Performance configurations (solo or group) met and use of non-assessed accompanist(s)/group performers, when needed
- Performance Program Sheet and Industry Statement Form completed and submitted prior to commencement of examination
- Program of works performed in accordance with information contained in the Performance Program Sheet and Industry Statement Form
- Work health and safety (WHS) principles applied appropriately in the performance.

Most students complied in all areas and received full marks in this criterion.

Where sheet music/charts are used, students are advised to move the stand away or clearly remove all sheets from the stand for at least one work, to ensure they are not penalised.

A few students were unaware that they were required to provide an Industry Statement and Performance Program Sheet. Students should ensure they are aware of the compliance requirements well in advance of the examination.

2. Skill in performing with accuracy and control

- Accuracy and control of the rhythm, pitch, articulation, timing and phrasing, and tuning, as appropriate to the instrument/technology/voice and area of specialisation.

In this criterion marks are awarded for accuracy and control, taking degree of difficulty into consideration. High marks cannot be awarded to students who perform a program with a low degree of difficulty. Equally, students who perform challenging material with poor accuracy and control will not be awarded high marks.

Although expressive tonal quality is assessed in Criterion 3, lack of **control** of tone production will affect the marks that can be awarded in this criterion.

Teachers are advised to guide vocalists to select appropriate repertoire and keys to suit their range. Vocalists who had frequent pitching errors across their program and/or the inability to sing in the selected key for a significant portion of the program did not score well in this criterion. Some vocalists successfully presented unaccompanied / *a capella* works; however, other vocalists had difficulty maintaining accuracy in this context. Vocalists should only present their work in an *a capella* / unaccompanied context if they can maintain accuracy in pitch, tempo and rhythm in the absence of instrumental accompaniment.

Vocalists whose control suffered through straining or ‘forcing’ their voices also did not score well in this criterion.

Accuracy of instrumental intonation was a problem in a few assessments, which could have been avoided if instruments had been tuned correctly prior to performance.

3. Skill in realising the expressiveness and versatility of instrument(s)/technology/voice throughout the program

- Use of performance techniques such as phrasing and shaping music, 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 were assessed on the degree to which they created and maximised their opportunities to demonstrate expressiveness and versatility, including adjusting their tone appropriately. Students who scored highly in this criterion chose a program of works that provided opportunities to use a range of appropriate approaches, and took advantage of those opportunities.

When creating a program for a group with more than one assessed performer, each assessed student should have the opportunity to demonstrate expressiveness and versatility in a variety of ways, through the selection of appropriate repertoire and arrangements.

The relationship between Criteria 3 and 4 is worth noting, as programs that lacked variety in musical elements and conventions typically limited opportunities for students to demonstrate versatility. For example, students who consistently used similar approaches to embellishment and ornamentation (such as drum fills and vocal melismas) both in repeat sections and across their whole program, were unable to score well in this criterion.

Vocalists who strained or forced their voices when attempting expressiveness and versatility did not score well in this criterion.

4. Ability to demonstrate variety in musical elements and conventions relevant to the area of specialisation

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

Although students were required to identify an area of specialisation, to access higher marks it was necessary to demonstrate a variety of musical elements and conventions within the chosen area of specialisation, by choosing contrasting works. This may present more of a challenge in some areas of specialisation than others. Alternatively, students could choose to broaden their area of specialisation to allow more opportunities to demonstrate variety in musical elements and conventions.

Students who presented a program of similar works that used a limited range of keys, tempos and time signatures, and similar approaches to beat subdivision, did not score well in this criterion.

5. Ability to demonstrate originality and innovative approaches in interpretation within the performance configuration (solo or group)

- Skill in creativity and interpretation, 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.

Students who scored well in this criterion delivered convincing personal interpretations through the use of appropriate expressive devices and, in some cases, approaches to arrangement. A recommended strategy is to listen to a range of versions of the selected pieces, where available, to assist with developing informed personal interpretations.

Marks were not awarded for unsuitable innovative approaches, which detracted from rather than enhanced interpretation.

Students may include original works in their program; however, this should not be considered a recommended strategy. Students are not awarded marks for composing an original work. Although an original work may offer opportunities to demonstrate original and innovative approaches to interpretation, notably so in some performances, inclusion of an original work(s) may result in lower marks in other criteria if the original work is included at the expense of a more appropriate work, especially with regard to the selected industry context, and the presentation of a cohesive program (Criterion 7).

6a. Ability to listen critically to one's own performance and continuously adjust one's own performance to produce the required outcomes relevant to the area of specialisation (Solo performance)

or

6b. Ability to listen critically to the performance of others and respond, interact and collaborate appropriately, adjusting the performance to achieve required outcomes relevant to the area of specialisation (Group performance)

Solo performers who made sophisticated adjustments and who demonstrated synchronisation with and responsiveness to accompaniment met this criterion at a high level.

Students who scored well as a member of a group created numerous opportunities to demonstrate their ability to respond and interact musically with other group members and adjust their playing appropriately. This was often achieved through sophisticated arrangements that involved changes of tempo, time signatures, dynamics, band accents, and stops and starts within pieces, as well as giving and receiving cues.

Students are advised to ensure the volume levels of each instrument are appropriate, and adjust as necessary throughout the program. For example, some students maintained the same volume throughout the program, regardless of the volume of other instruments or dynamic and textural changes.

7. 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.

Students who scored well in this criterion delivered a set that was cohesive and had an overall sense of momentum and contour through the appropriate choice and sequencing of items, and had clearly planned how they would move between items, including organisation of equipment, to maintain the flow.

Students are advised to consider instrument and tuning changes when sequencing items, and to ensure that equipment such as instrument stands are available and placed in a suitable position.

Students who use backing tracks or any pre-recorded audio or video material are advised to ensure it is well prepared and that playback equipment is reliable and easily accessible, and develop strategies to avoid disrupting the flow of the program that can be caused by stopping and starting the backing track/video. For example, students who used backing tracks that ran continuously with timed and appropriate gaps between songs and/or segues were able to demonstrate cohesion, as were students who had their playback equipment to hand and did not need to walk across or leave the performance space to adjust it.

In some cases, overly long spoken introductions to pieces detracted from the presentation, especially when introductions before each piece were similar and repetitive.

Criteria 8–10

These criteria relate specifically to CUAMPF402 Develop and maintain stagecraft skills. The key concepts to consider are communication and audience engagement.

Students who scored well on these criteria presented their work as an ‘event’ and created a sense of occasion that went well beyond just playing/singing their pieces.

Students should be assisted to create a professional performance space that enables them to gain a sense of delivering a performance in a professional environment.

To maximise their marks students should ensure that they are familiar with the relevant performance conventions.

8. 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 performance into account.

Students who scored well presented a performance that demonstrated a clear understanding of relevant performance conventions, including innovative approaches in some cases, and a strong sense of crafting their performance for the target audience and industry context they identified in their Industry Statement. They demonstrated a sense of dramatic nuance and spontaneity that appeared natural, effortless and engaging. Students should study the work of other artists within

similar industry contexts and incorporate and personalise appropriate elements into their own stagecraft.

Students who chose an industry context that provided limited opportunity to demonstrate dramatic nuance did not score well in this criterion.

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

- Skill in applying a range of personal stagecraft skills to engage audiences while performing a suitably paced and focused performance.

Students who scored well in this criterion demonstrated throughout the whole performance, including between items, a high level of engagement and a confident demeanour that had clearly been honed through regular live performance practice before audiences.

The relationship between Criterion 7 and Criterion 9 is notable as students who presented programs where a high level of organisation and preparedness was apparent typically demonstrated higher levels of confidence, poise and composure.

Students are expected to have adopted appropriate ways to address/minimise performance anxiety as part of their coursework.

10. Ability to demonstrate key stagecraft skills in relation to the selected area of specialisation and market appropriate for the program of music

- Skill in applying a range of stagecraft skills to present a coherent and appropriate image that enhances performances
- Effective use of non-musical elements in performance including movement, facial expressions, way of holding instrument(s) or equipment and effective use of the performance space.

Students who scored well in this criterion presented performances that were enhanced by a convincing and well-developed image, which was informed by and relevant to their area of specialisation. This included all aspects of their visual presentation, such as facial expressions, effective use of the performance space, and effective utilisation and interaction with props and/or equipment.

Students who did not score well often appeared to have put little thought into their visual appearance and use of performance space, and presented their work with a minimal sense of audience communication.

In a number of instances carefully considered use of technology enhanced performances and provided appropriate context; for example, the use of stage lighting. However, in other cases, poor use of technology detracted from the performance; for example, displaying as a backdrop YouTube videos that were interrupted by advertisements.