



2006 VCE VET Music Industry GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

A great strength of the VCE VET Music Industry program is the way it employs the Industry Statement, which in turn concentrates on contrast within a style (as opposed to the VCE Music Group Performance model). Most students completed the Industry Statement and Performance Program Sheet before the examination; however, some students and their teachers/trainers seemed to be unaware of this requirement. It may be prudent for students to complete the Industry Statement when they first start to prepare for the examination, perhaps even a year in advance, as this will provide a solid framework and motivating focus for the year's work. The Industry Statement and Performance Program Sheet are made available to training providers by the VCAA.

The Music Industry performance examination should always reflect at least one year's work on repertoire, staging and presentation, and the performance must be clearly informed by each of the prescribed units of competence:

- CUSMPF04A Prepare self for performance
- CUSMGE01A Maintain self or group in music
- CUSMGE12A Maintain and expand music knowledge and critical listening skills
- CUSMPF06A Extend technical skills in performance.

Students should always play to their strengths and keep their programs stylistically true to their Industry Statement and personal musical vision. In this year's assessment there was often clear evidence of solid preparation for performance examinations, although in other performances some group members barely played more than the occasional chord.

Teachers and trainers should make sure that all students are thoroughly familiar with the examination conditions and criteria. These should be constantly referred to throughout the preparation phase. Trainers may be concerned that, by using this approach, students will become fixated on the examination as the primary goal and lose touch with the process of musical development; however, as the examination criteria clearly reflect industry conventions and practice, this approach should merely serve to reinforce proper focus and preparation.

There were a number of students who presented for assessment without memorising at least one piece (part of criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirements of the task). Memorisation is an essential part of becoming fully immersed in, and bringing one's own voice to, a musical performance. The efficacy of this practice cannot be overestimated. Ideally, and particularly in contemporary rock, jazz and folk idioms, **all** music would be internalised and memorised. This will bring students much closer to a fully realised, industry context performance.

Care should be taken when setting up the stage area and sound systems. Appropriate positioning of musicians is crucial to allow assessors to see each student. For example, bass players and drummers who set up at the back of the stage area are often visually obscured by guitarists and singers. More creative staging should be trialled during the initial phases of the course. Drum kits could be placed at the front or side of the stage area and/or bands could set up in a semi-circle or some other configuration that facilitates easy assessment and good communication between group members. Stage configuration can also adversely affect sound balance as the performance of students at the back of a stage area can be overpowered by those at the front.

A good balance of instruments is also achieved through clever arrangement of music. The work of each student who presents for assessment within a group should always be clearly discernible; however, some students' parts were masked by supporting instruments. Also, there is little value in non-assessed performers (including teachers/trainers) doing solos during assessments. The primary focus of examination performance should be to highlight the extent to which the **assessed** students can demonstrate their accomplishment of each of the criteria.

It is becoming more common for two or more performers, often guitarists, to play low, distorted unison lines. In these cases it is virtually impossible for assessors to tell the players apart during the assessment. When a part is duplicated in unison by another part, it would be wise to reflect on whether or not this has merit in terms of the total arrangement, or whether it would be better for one part to employ inversions of chords or some kind of harmony or contrapuntal movement.

It should be reiterated that good sound quality is an essential part of modern performance practice. There were many cases of performances being marred by poor sound quality or misused sound reinforcement equipment. Correct balance between amplified instruments and between amplified and acoustic instruments is crucial. The best way to achieve this is to do a thorough sound check before each performance with someone who knows how to use sound reinforcement



equipment properly. If the examination performance is truly the result of one year's work, appropriate sound quality should already have been realised. Where possible, students should practise under performance conditions throughout the year, in an appropriate performance venue and using the same equipment (or similar) that will be used for the examination.

If recorded backing tracks are used, these should be transferred onto a **single** CD and played through appropriate sound reinforcement equipment. Whatever backing is used must blend with and support the assessed performance, not detract from it, which can sometimes be the case when downloaded MIDI backings are employed.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Each student was assessed on the extent to which their performance demonstrated accomplishment of each of the criteria. The term 'extent' refers to the range of ways in which each criterion was met, and the degree of difficulty involved in meeting each criterion. It is important for teachers and trainers to work through each of the criteria with students and discuss how best to optimise their marks, analysing the relevant issues and considerations in each criterion.

Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirements of the task

Except for the memorisation issues mentioned above and an occasional student who was unaware of the Industry Statement and program documentation expectations, there was generally a very high level of compliance with the requirements of the examination conditions this year. There is really no reason to lose marks on this criterion. Students and teachers/trainers should refer to the VET Music Industry program page on the VCAA website for details about performance examination criteria and conditions.

Criterion 2 – Skill in using performance techniques relevant to the area of specialisation with accuracy and control

Students who scored well on criterion 2 demonstrated a very high level of precision in timing and rhythm, and, when appropriate, precision of intonation and clarity of diction. In general, student achievement in criteria 2 and 3 was not as good as in other areas (see below).

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

Students who scored well on criterion 3 demonstrated seamless instrument and/or sound setting changes, precise dynamic control and dexterity and fluency on their instrument(s). Criterion 3 seemed to be better addressed by students who were comfortable with the style of music being presented. At times the choice of program determined this.

Many singers appeared to have had very little solid vocal training. Appropriate training should be encouraged both for vocal health and for general technique, such as vocal range. Some vocalists had real difficulty singing more than one octave in range, and some students had difficulty holding a lower part – this was very limiting.

Criteria 2 and 3 deal with mechanical technique and accuracy, and expressiveness and fluency in performance, respectively. These criteria are interrelated and refer directly to the level of ability the performer has on their instrument or voice, thus differentiating and rewarding skilled or even virtuosic players. In some performances the skill level of students was not quite up to a standard that facilitated good accuracy and control and, therefore, the ability to be expressive and fluent. On the other hand, when a student had a high level of mechanical technique, accuracy and expressiveness and fluency in performance, they were also in a strong position to score well in subsequent criteria.

In some cases students could barely play or sing at all. The Music Industry program should not be thought of as a soft option, that is, a program for students who don't 'make the grade' for other music courses. Many of the true innovators and virtuosi in music have come from oral traditions, 'untrained' or informal music backgrounds and the like. The applied vocational focus is one of the Music Industry program's great strengths and primary purposes, and many of the innovators of the future could easily find their start in VCE VET Music Industry.

Criterion 4 – Skill in performing with musicality through creativity, individuality and originality

Criterion 4 focuses on creativity, individuality and originality in performance. High marks can be awarded if a student presents original compositions, but only if these compositions are **performed** with creativity, individuality and originality. It is not enough to simply present original work as this is not the focus of the criterion.

In 2006, a number of students constructed their performance around a fictitious event or scenario, and acted it out as if it was a drama performance. While becoming fully immersed in the industry context is to be encouraged, the examination



is a music performance, not a dramatic one. Excessive use of script, props and role-play can detract from the primary focus of the examination, which is the student's playing or singing, as well as **appropriate** music stagecraft. Also, as mentioned above, some students did not have the playing/singing skills to be able to play or sing creatively and with individuality and originality. Technical facility is the foundation of all other aspects of a professional performance.

Criterion 5 – Ability to place the sound of the instrument or voice within the performance environment and/or interact with other performers when appropriate

In the group context, students who scored well in this criterion demonstrated engaging (from an audience point of view) and intuitive interactions with other group members and an ability to balance the sound of their individual part with that of the group. It was difficult to fairly assess a student if the volume levels of the accompanying artists overwhelmed the performance that was being assessed.

Solo performers who presented with an accompanist were assessed in the same way. True solo performers achieved high scores by demonstrating consistent interpretations of each work and the ability to project well and maintain full control over the delivery of musical ideas in the performance environment.

Criterion 6 – Skill in presenting a cohesive program of music

This criterion was generally addressed well. The essential consideration here is that students must demonstrate their ability to structure a cohesive program of music and maintain the continuity of the program throughout. Students should use language suitable to address their target audience and should conduct themselves in an appropriate manner for their area of specialisation.

Students may include a variety of styles in their program and still present a cohesive set if their industry context is something like a musical review or a training master class on a specific instrument that surveys a number of different styles and techniques. That said, it may be easier to favour contrast within a more stylistically similar set in keeping with the stated target audience and area of specialisation.

Some students presented programs that were too long and were therefore stopped at the required time limit. The examination must be completed within the time limits as described in the examination conditions, which are outlined on the VET Music Industry Exam description and criteria page on the VCAA website.

Criterion 7 – Ability to communicate through the use of non-musical elements of the performance, such as stage management, visual appearance, performance etiquette, manner and/or movement, as appropriate to the performance

Criterion 7 focuses on the use of non-musical performance elements. Students scored well in this area if they presented a believable, well-structured and engaging performance within the context of their area of specialisation. As with last year, there were some outstanding examples of staging and stagecraft from some students. There were many performers who had well-developed stage personas and who appeared comfortable and in control (even under adverse conditions) on the stage. There were a few very unique performers who did something completely unexpected such as present extremely deadpan versions of light-hearted and upbeat pop songs. This kind of quirky interpretation serves students very well.

Lighting and other visual aids were rarely used, but some students effectively integrated PowerPoint slide shows and subtle fixed lighting into their performances. Any visual tools that are employed need to be controlled by the assessed performer(s), as additional crew are not permitted in the performance area during assessment.

Unfortunately, there were some students who presented for assessment having given little or no thought to this area of performance. A student who simply stands and sings along to a tape/CD/iPod, for example, will not score highly in this criterion.

Criterion 8 – Skill in OHS principles appropriate to the performance program

In almost all cases students performed well in this area. This criterion assesses the **application** of general workplace safety and there were some excellent examples of stage areas that were set up well, with all cables laid safely and taped down. There were virtually no volume concerns this year as most students performed at an appropriate, yet safe, volume.

This criterion also deals with specific health issues directly related to singing and/or playing technique. For example, singers were sometimes marked down if the assessors felt that there would be long term health issues due to problems of vocal forcing or poor posture that affected breath control.

2006 Assessment Report



As with the 2005 performance examinations, this year saw some truly outstanding young artists present highly competent, well planned and well executed performances that could easily pass for being 'professional'. In some cases students could have actually already been working in a professional context. There were some students, however, who appeared to be very poorly prepared and some who perhaps lacked the requisite skills needed to present for what should be a rigorous, albeit enjoyable, music examination within the context of applied vocational music education.