



2012 Music Performance (Solo/Group) GA 2: Performance examination

Solo Performance examinations

GENERAL COMMENTS

The performance examination is the major focus of VCE Music Performance and contributes 50 per cent of the study score. The overall standard of performance was high in 2012. Statistics reflect the high level of dedication and passion of a large number of students. There were many outstanding performances, and also a large number of performances that had been prepared with integrity. Performances that gained the highest marks fully explored the assessment criteria within the 25 minutes allowed. The programs explored the widest range of styles, genres, tonal effects, structures and techniques. Each work was performed in a different manner and in a different style, demonstrating unique techniques, structures and tonal colours through the use of a wide variety of articulation, phrasing, dynamic variation and appropriate tempo variation.

The highest-ranking students were also clear about the conditions of the task and the specific requirements for each instrument (which can be found on the VCAA website).

High-scoring students performed from the best editions of sheet music available, which was evident through accurate and authoritative performances. Outstanding use of presentation techniques was also evident. The students played within their level of stamina, and made appropriate and careful selection of works, which enabled them to both fulfil the criteria and to play to their strengths.

A high level of professionalism and preparation was evident in the accompanied works (where appropriate). Performances were well synchronised and well balanced, allowing the important parts to always remain prominent, whether in the solo or accompaniment. It was obvious that many students had gone to much trouble to choose the most competent accompanists, whose ability to play in appropriate styles supported the students' demonstration of stylistic understanding.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The following information provides guidance for the preparation of successful programs for particular instruments and may be useful for students and teachers. Some of these comments are made in relation to specific instruments but many have broad applicability for all instruments.

Equipment used in the exam room

Students and teachers should be aware of the equipment that will or will not be provided by the VCAA. The examination specifications and criteria document states that 'Students should bring to the examination all equipment required to present their performance including instruments, music stands, amplifiers, leads, PA systems and playback equipment as required'.

Some students presented for contemporary popular exams (for example, guitar, electric bass and drum kit) without amplifiers for either their instrument and/or playback equipment for backing tracks. Some didn't check that they had all necessary cables, including extension leads. It is the student's responsibility to provide this equipment. Often not enough silence was included at the end of the backing track, meaning that the next backing started before the student had stopped the player.

Presentation and exam conduct

Students are reminded that this exam should be treated as a recital. In that respect, students need to present their program to an audience. Appropriate stance in relation to the audience and accompanist is essential. In 2012, some students put their music stand between themselves and the audience (the assessors), making it impossible for the audience to see what the student was doing. Others addressed their accompanist, facing away from the audience. Students should make sure that the 'performance' is thoroughly rehearsed (and not just a compilation of pieces played without consideration for the movement from one piece to another).

Students are reminded that discussion with assessors about the assessment is not allowed under the general rules of conduct. It is also not appropriate for students to identify themselves to the assessors, either by introducing themselves or presenting the assessors with any document that includes their name or other information about themselves.

Students are permitted to use mobile phones to play their backing tracks. However, if this option is used, students need to show assessors that only the playback application is running, and that telephony is switched off.



Programs: timing and order

The maximum time allowed in the examination room for students presenting as a soloist is 25 minutes. To demonstrate the widest range of performance techniques, styles, tones, structures and textures, students are encouraged to prepare programs that maximise their capabilities within the time allowed. The highest marks were awarded to programs that had the greatest range (explicitly required in at least five of the 10 criteria). In the most effective programs, each work demonstrated a different aspect of style, technique, tone, structure and texture. In the best performances of such programs, these elements were clearly brought out so that each work sounded very different. Program order can help to highlight a wide range of the elements above.

Using an extra work or works as 'fillers' to simply make up more time in the program may not be advisable if the work is not known as well as other works in the program. It may also not be advisable if the student lacks the stamina to complete all works on the program to the same degree (this is especially pertinent to wind players and vocalists). Students should not perform repeats simply to maximise the time. If repeats are played, students should use this as an opportunity to demonstrate different stylistic elements through embellishment or improvisation as appropriate (improvisation in itself is not assessed, but may contribute to the demonstration of a higher stylistic understanding of the work or passage).

Compliance

Students and teachers are again reminded to check the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works for the current year on the VCAA website and to read it carefully to establish that the requirements have been met. The arrangement/edition used is critical, as arrangements other than the ones listed may constitute a different piece or version (for example, a simplified version) from the one prescribed.

Criteria

Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirement of the task

Most students were able to achieve full marks in this criterion. There were fewer compliance issues in 2012 than in previous years. Statistically, there were many more non-compliant performances from the contemporary instruments than the classical instruments. Some of the compliance issues included

- poorly timed programs where a required work was not performed or completed within the 25-minute time allocation
- performing without backing tracks (contemporary instruments) or accompaniment, or performing an accompanied work without accompaniment
- omitting a required category; for example, the unaccompanied work, vocalise, post-1910 work
- selecting a piece not on the current list of works, a different (usually simplified) arrangement to the one specified or a different opus/catalogue number to the one specified
- omitting a required movement or section (for example, where two movements are specified 'to be counted as one work')
- presenting fewer than the minimum number of required works.

Criterion 2 – Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

Students were expected to perform their works accurately and up to the required tempo range for each work chosen. Elements of accuracy included pitch and intonation, rhythm, dynamics, articulation and phrasing. Clarity of the passagework, as appropriate to the instrument, was also assessed.

Accuracy often reflected students' performance in relation to many of the other criteria, especially criterion 3. Students achieved a wide range of results in this criterion. Approximately 15 per cent of students managed to receive full marks. The relationship of this criterion to the others was clear when looking at the statistics.

Criterion 3 – Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency

To score highly in this criterion, students needed to have a program that allowed them to demonstrate a wide range of techniques. They also needed to have finely developed technical resources in order to perform these techniques with control and fluency. Fluent techniques were apparent when the work seemed to be performed effortlessly.

Fluency of performance was also expected. Control of passagework was demonstrated to the highest degree in performances that remained even and disciplined at the required tempo. It was also demonstrated through the ability to control tempo and/or dynamic changes, and through subtle pitch adjustments (where applicable).



Criterion 4 – Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities

This criterion assessed the quality of the students' tone, as well as the use of a range of expressive tonal qualities typical of the instrument and reflective of the range within the works on the prescribed list. The starting point for best practice in the use of a range of tonal devices, again, is the program itself. Students who performed best in this criterion performed programs that allowed them to demonstrate a wide variety of expressive tonal qualities. They were also able to perform these tonal qualities at a very high level to create a diversity of expressive tonal effects. Best practice was evident through a disciplined and thoughtful use of tonal effects throughout the performance.

Criterion 5 – Skill in expressive communication through articulation and phrasing

The most captivating performances are the ones that seem to say something to the audience. Students who managed to do this at the highest level used performance elements such as dynamics and tempo adjustments to shape the phrases. These performances were dramatic, poignant, moving, disturbing, challenging and/or whimsical. Students were able to take the notated score and make it their own, while still maintaining its integrity. In some cases, communication beyond the notation of the work included enhancing notated dynamics or tempo changes to build and release tension. In other cases, it involved particularly effective use of rubato or accent.

Criterion 6 – Skill in differentiating the musical lines

The highest-ranking students in this criterion performed a wide variety of textures. The parts and textures were particularly well balanced, and an empathy and synchronisation between the solo and accompaniment was clearly evident. This occurred in a variety of contexts. The most typical was between the soloist and accompanist. It was also demonstrated through a soloist's internal synchronisation and balance of parts within a single musical texture. Performers on solo instruments such as piano, harp and classical guitar demonstrated these elements internally by balancing the levels of the various textures. The best singers and instrumentalists demonstrated the various textures even in the unaccompanied work, as well as the accompanied works. It was evident that these students had rehearsed extremely well with their accompanist, were supported by extremely competent and sensitive accompanists, and were able to differentiate between the different musical textures.

Criterion 7 – Skill in differentiating the structures and characteristics of each work

This criterion assessed students' ability to perform a wide variety of structures, as well as their ability to differentiate these structures. The highest-scoring students performed a variety of structures reflected in the prescribed list of works, including short or extended structures, polyphonic, homophonic and monophonic structures, programmatic and free form structures, contemporary and traditional structures and so on. Clear musical direction was apparent through an appropriate use of tension and release. A variety of performance elements was also used, including expressive elements, nuances in tempo variation, dynamics and articulation.

Criterion 8 – Skill in presenting an informed interpretation of a range of styles

The highest-scoring students selected programs that reflected the range of styles in the prescribed list. They performed programs that were extremely well thought out. Each work in the program was in a different style and was performed in a different way. The highest-scoring students were also able to demonstrate an informed understanding of different styles by referencing current performance practice.

Criterion 9 – Skill in performing with musicality through creativity and individuality

The highest-scoring students performed in a way that showed something of their own personality within current stylistic conventions of performance practice. These students gave something of themselves in their performances, presenting with absolute confidence and security, while delivering their own interpretation of works presented. They had a clear concept of how to shape each piece, bringing elements of new insight into the performance.

Criterion 10 – Skill in presenting a musical program within appropriate performance conventions

The most successful students demonstrated great poise and focus. Their performance flowed well from one work to the next, and their performance exams were presented as recitals. This was equally true for classical as well as contemporary popular instruments. Students used appropriate and varied volume levels that remained within OH&S safety standards. They incorporated excellent performance elements throughout their performance, including a thoughtful programming order to create and maintain maximum variety and interest. Where much equipment was used (such as amplifiers, drum kits and percussion equipment), it was thoroughly prepared within the time allocated for set-up. Recorded backings were tested and the logistics of their use was well rehearsed (for example, starting, stopping and tracking recorded backings). Often these students also dressed appropriately, which assisted them in creating a sense of 'occasion' for the performance. These students arrived at the performance venue with plenty of time to spare and, in some instances, arranged for equipment to be delivered to the venue ahead of time. Where much equipment was



required for the performance, consideration was given to how the music was placed in the space, creating a sense of organisation and professionalism in the performance. Water bottles were used sparingly and discreetly.

Instrument-specific comments

Contemporary popular guitar, electric bass and drum kit

- Students in both electric guitar and drum kit often chose a limited number of works across the lists. Students and teachers are encouraged to explore a wider representation of works from the list.
- Electric bass students tended to be weakest in their pre-1910 work, and drum kit students tended to be weakest in their brushes piece.
- Students should ensure that volume levels are appropriate for the performance space and that the volume of backings is appropriately balanced. Students must not perform at levels that are occupationally unsafe.
- It may be advantageous to use some 'live' backing accompaniments to demonstrate a higher level of artistic interaction with the accompaniment.
- Drum kit students could aim to demonstrate a wider range of dynamic control and stylistic variation. This could be a good opportunity to include Latin, funk or perhaps odd-metre works.
- Drum kit students should ensure that the rudiments such as snare and brushes pieces are adequately prepared.
- Students should ensure that the CD backings are used as specified on the prescribed list.
- Some guitar students were not as well synchronised as they could have been in their use of effects pedals (on and off).
- The most successful students were able to synchronise with the backing tracks' fade-outs.
- Guitarists who used the most successful presentation techniques tended to perform standing up in a confident manner.
- If a student decides to talk in the performance, it should enhance, not detract from, the performance.

Voice – contemporary popular

- The vocalise (or pair of vocalises – as appropriate) should be sung as expressive song. This was the weakest part of the exam for many students.
- Appropriate keys need to be chosen to best suit the vocal range or 'fach' of the student.
- The accompanists need to be able to provide a stylistic backing, especially by making sure that the melody line is not present in the accompaniment.
- The role of an accompanist is to support the student. Many accompanists played too loudly, and this hampered the students' ability to score highly in a number of criteria.
- There was a tendency to use backing tracks that were too quiet for the performance space. This can make it hard for the singer or audience to hear, and difficult to demonstrate interaction with the accompaniment.
- The best way to demonstrate interaction with an accompaniment is with 'live' accompaniment, such as piano or guitar. Singers who included a live accompanist for at least one or some songs were able to score more highly for criterion 6.
- Some students who were not careful in their choice of the unaccompanied song failed to maintain an adequate pitch centre. Some students also failed to maintain an appropriate rhythmical pulse. If these are problems for a singer, it is not a good idea to perform a long unaccompanied work.
- Students should consider vocal health. To avoid forcing their voice, students are encouraged to choose their program wisely. The keys and technical demands on the young voice should be considered.
- When choosing an outfit for the performance, students should not disregard practical considerations such as their posture. For example, high stiletto shoes are not good for a singer's posture.
- Hand or body gestures in performance are best used in the context of the text.
- Slurping and over-use of water bottles often detracted from students' appropriateness in presentation.
- The 'country' category is the most misunderstood as students often don't perform works from this category in an appropriate or idiomatic style. Students who choose to perform works from this category are encouraged to become familiar with this style through extensive listening to referenced recordings.

Voice – classical

- Students should ensure that different styles are clearly understood (for example, scooping is only appropriate in certain contemporary styles).
- If using hand or body gestures, they should be appropriate to the text.
- The highest-achieving students ensured that their unaccompanied folksong and vocalise had as much attention to detail as the other works on their program.



- The highest-achieving students chose a wide variety of interesting repertoire suited to their voice. Students and teachers are encouraged to explore the wide range available in every category on the list.
- The highest-achieving students included different languages in their programs to extend the range of styles presented. The words were pronounced with clarity and meaning.
- Some pieces tend to be more demanding in terms of intonation than others. These should be selected carefully.

Piano – contemporary popular

- A number of students performed with a lack of disciplined preparation.
- A steady beat is essential, with a clear understanding and differentiation between a swung and straight feel.
- Many students need to develop greater control and discipline in pedalling technique.
- Students are encouraged to use a wide range of tonal colours and effects. Many students tended to be somewhat one-dimensional in this respect.

Pianoforte

- Students should ensure continuity of performance when turning pages. Assessors can assist with page turning if required.
- Although the prescribed list of works is comprehensive, the range of works selected by many students was often limited. Students who wish to showcase their capabilities might do well to explore the lesser-known works on the list.
- Students are advised to perform within their capabilities and avoid taking on programs that are too demanding for them. They should explore a range of styles, techniques and genres that are within their capabilities.
- In preparation for the performance exam, students are encouraged to practise performing on different pianos and in different environments. Students who may be considering performing their program on a grand piano are advised to practise playing on a grand piano as much as possible throughout their examination preparation.

Wind and brass instruments

- Students should ensure that they have enough stamina to perform their entire program and are able to fulfil the criteria to the highest level.
- Due attention should be given to concise articulation and phrasing.
- Constant gulping and slurping of water between works sometimes detracted from students' overall presentation.

String instruments

- Students who chose repertoire that was too difficult for them, or that didn't explore a range of performing techniques, often failed to maximise their score.
- Students are advised to be prepared for contingencies; for example, by carrying spare strings, rosin etc.
- Students should practise performing in a range of acoustical environments from flat to very bright. They should become accustomed to performing in different temperatures. This will make it easier to adjust to performance conditions.
- Cellists and double bass players should be prepared for either a hard or soft floor surface by bringing either a cello board or something similar to ensure that the instrument cannot slip on either surface.

Group Performance examinations

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2012 students were assessed using 10 criteria. Each student was assessed by two assessors, and there was a maximum of 10 marks available for each criterion. Many of the criteria were identical to those used in solo performance. Thus, students were assessed in both solo and group using either identical criteria or criteria having equal importance. Assessors marked each student on their performance according to the criteria, not globally. The criteria were applied equally to all students across all instruments.

Students who presented for the Music Group Performance examination performed with a diverse range of instruments, including voice, in the context of many different types of groups and ensembles. Students' ability to address the criteria varied and was influenced by their performance skills, understanding of the music styles being performed and experience in performing in a group context.



Students who attained high marks confidently exhibited a high level of musical, technical and interpretative skills and displayed excellent interaction with the other members of the group.

Students should be conscious of maximising their marks in the criteria that relate to group interaction and balance of the musical instruments. In many cases, students seemed to have focused on instrumental skills and had neglected to develop their skill at performing as a member of a group. Many students would benefit from consciously listening to and acknowledging the other group members and adjusting their musical contribution to enhance the overall group sound.

In some cases, the role (where appropriate for the group style) of introducing each item could have been shared more equitably in relation to the criteria of presentation. Students should allow time between items to check their tuning. A student may improve their results if they can demonstrate their ability to adapt positively to unforeseen situations; for example, if another band member forgets their part or breaks a string.

Students need to make decisions about the group composition and performance program that will be advantageous to the group as a whole. For example, it may be preferable to have two vocalists perform in separate examinations even though the rest of the assessed band will play for both singers. In this case, the instrumentalists will be assessed in the first examination, leaving them free to accompany the second vocalist in the second examination. Some of the songs from the first program can be repeated, along with additional songs suited to the second singer. As a result, the two vocalists avoid direct comparison and can present programs that are more suited to each individual.

It is important that groups choose keys for songs that are suited to the vocalists as well as the instrumentalists. The focus should be on selecting songs that support each student to maximise their possible score. At times, students should consider transposing the songs themselves to find more appropriate keys for all students. Students should be careful when using transcriptions from the internet – it is worth checking the original recordings for accuracy.

Students consistently met the requirement to perform two musical items from the Prescribed List of Group Works. A number of students performed additional works from the list, which is permissible. It can be difficult for groups with two or more assessed performers to address the criteria at the highest level if they only select two works from the list. In this case, students should consider performing more than two prescribed works to allow all of the assessed performers to meet the criteria.

Teachers and students should also be careful to ensure that they put together the strongest possible program for the assessed students when they are performing an entire program of items from the prescribed list. When determining the musical program for the examination, students should be careful about selecting a majority of original compositions; they need to consider their selections in relation to the criteria, especially regarding a range of musical styles.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Prescribed List

Students must include two works from the Prescribed List of Group Works in their end-of-year performance examination program. This is available on the VCAA website.

Assessment criteria

The criteria for awarding grades are applied to the whole program, not to individual works. There are 10 criteria covering all instruments and the performance of all works in the program. The document that lists the criteria also includes annotations about each criterion to help unpack each criterion into components more relevant to particular instruments. Comments made in relation to solo performances should also be considered by students who select to perform as members of a group.

Selection of instrument

The term ‘instrument’, as used in the study design, includes voice. Students may choose to perform on more than one instrument in their performance examination; however, students should consider the likelihood of scoring well in the assessment criteria when making this decision. For example, students may not maximise their marks if they try to assist the balance of their group by playing an instrument that they are not particularly competent with for a considerable part of the program. The student should be careful not to compromise the amount of time spent performing to their strengths.

An opposite example might be where the student is a strong performer on more than one instrument. In this situation, there are certain criteria in which the student may benefit from performing on more than one instrument, such as ‘skill in performing a range of techniques’ and ‘skill in performing as a member of a group’.

2012 Assessment Report



The examination

Assessed students perform as members of a group or ensemble, and are assessed in this context. The level of ability of other members of the group does not directly affect the assessed student's results. The assessors concentrate on the performance of the student being assessed and on how well they meet the criteria for assessment.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the assessed performer's ability to maximise their results is contingent on the context within which each individual performs. For example, a drummer who keeps irregular time or rhythm will affect the assessed performer's ability to maintain an even tempo and accurately interpret rhythm patterns, and will therefore indirectly influence the assessed student's ability to obtain their highest score.

Composition of the group

A group is defined as two or more students enrolled in a secondary school. Where a group comprises two performers only, that group may not have a non-student performer as a member. The musical parts should be arranged so that each performer is equally able to take a leading role during the performance.

However, the assessed performer(s) can vary the composition of the group during their performance as they wish, which may enhance the ability of the assessed performer(s) to demonstrate a variety of styles and techniques. Students must decide how best to organise their group contexts in a program to help them give their best performance.

Students should also be aware that non-students may only assist as part of the group within certain guidelines, as outlined in the above document. Teachers are advised that their role, if participating, should not distract from, or limit the ability of, the assessed performer(s) to present a program that will maximise their marks.

Assessed student performers should perform in a way that allows them to maximise their results in all criteria. Hence, non-assessed performers should not count in, conduct, tune, adjust instruments and equipment, lead or otherwise play a dominant or distracting role during the performance examination. This will only lessen the opportunities for the assessed students to address all of the assessment criteria.

Program selection

The program should contain at least four contrasting works, including two works from the Prescribed List of Group Works. Works should be selected from the currently published list, as it is revised annually. If selecting Section B works, it is important to ensure that students perform the actual section, movements, etc. that are listed.

The program selected by the student(s) is the foundation for achieving their best results. It is strongly recommended that students carefully consider the selection of works or songs for their program, on the basis that each work contributes to a program that meets the assessment criteria

All assessed performers should ensure that they participate significantly in presenting all of the works or songs in their program. Assessed performers should present the works selected from the prescribed list at a standard that is consistent with the rest of the program. This may involve arranging works to create appropriate parts and/or allowing opportunities for improvisation, as appropriate to the style.

When performing a work from Section A, or similar music styles, performers do not necessarily need to present accurate note-for-note transcriptions, but it is essential that the original integrity of the music be retained. Chord progressions and the main melody should be faithful to the original. Variations from this requirement may occur for a number of reasons, including if students have sourced transcriptions via the internet. While the internet can be a great resource, students must be aware that many transcriptions sourced from it are overly simplified or inaccurate.

Students should avoid only performing works from styles that they are most familiar with, as this may limit their ability to perform in a variety of styles. The assessed performer's primary focus should be on performing a program that is diverse in style and mood. However, it is acceptable to present a program that has a range of styles within a particular type of group, as contrasting styles can exist within particular genres, such as rock or jazz. Groups can perform music that has contrasts in styles; for example, a jazz group could perform swing, bebop, west coast and/or fusion. Students should not necessarily perform styles that are not associated with the type of group that they represent.

As well as scoring highly in the criterion that assesses their ability to perform a variety of styles, assessed performers who present a diverse program can also score higher marks in other criteria. For example, by performing a diverse program stylistically, the assessed performer(s) could also score more highly in the 'skill in using a range of performing techniques' criterion.

2012 Assessment Report



Students should demonstrate their ability to use a range of performance techniques. Each instrument is capable of producing different timbres, dynamics and effects, and has an inherent potential to allow the performer to apply a range of performance techniques. Students should be able to demonstrate their awareness of this in their performance. A guitarist, for example, could use plectrum, finger style, sliding, bends, double stopping, tapping and/or alternative tunings.

The assessed performer(s) should also avoid performing material that merely repeats material previously presented.

Time limits

The time allowed for the examination varies according to the number of assessed performers in a group (this can be found on page 46 of the *VCE Music Study Design*).

- groups of one assessed performer: 25 minutes maximum
- groups of two or three assessed performers: 30 minutes maximum
- groups of four assessed performers: 35 minutes maximum
- groups of five or six assessed performers: 40 minutes maximum

Assessed students are advised to make full use of the time available. Specifically, students should make sure changeovers between performances are well rehearsed to ensure that they make the most of their time. It is recommended that the prescribed works be performed early in the program to ensure that criterion 1 is met within the time limit.

Setting up at the examination venue

Students are advised to check their equipment carefully before leaving for the examination. They must remember to pack all the required equipment, including replacement strings where appropriate. They should also bring extra power boards and extension leads so that their planned set-up is not compromised by the placement of electrical switches at the venue.

Students are advised to arrive at the examination centre at least 30 minutes before their start time. Students will have access to the examination room at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the examination and should use this time to set up and adjust equipment, tune their instruments and warm up. Non-assessed students may assist in adjusting the equipment before the examination; however, once the examination has started, only the assessed performers may adjust their instruments and equipment. When setting up, students may need to restrict their volume if another examination is underway in a nearby room. All examination performances must be presented at safe volume levels.

During the year, students should practise in a variety of rooms in order to become accustomed to different performance spaces with varying qualities of acoustics and volume requirements.

Groups should plan how they will sit or stand during the performance. Assessed performers must ensure that assessors can observe all performance techniques and technical skills. This may mean setting music stands so that finger movement and breathing techniques are visible. The seating plan or group organisation may be varied across the program to achieve the best performance environment for each work in the program.