

2016 VCE Music Investigation performance examination report

General comments

Music Investigation is framed on the delivery of a live performance in which repertoire is selected in light of a Focus Area determined by the student. At the time of the performance examination (October), each student is required to submit a Focus Statement that outlines the scope of performance development that has taken place during the year. The purpose of the Focus Statement is to articulate the stylistic context(s) and performance techniques that are to be evidenced throughout the performance examination.

Students are required to perform a minimum of four works, of which at least one work must be selected from either the Prescribed List of Group Works or the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works as published on the VCAA website.

Within a group examination context:

- one assessed performer has a maximum of 25 minutes performance time
- two or three assessed performers have a maximum of 30 minutes performance time
- four assessed performers have a maximum of 35 minutes performance time
- five or six assessed performers have a maximum of 40 minutes performance time.

All solo performers have a maximum examination time of 25 minutes.

Specific information

In 2016, many students were able to demonstrate a sophisticated practical understanding of the stylistic and technical focus that underpins the design intention of Music Investigation as a study of performance. Few students presented programs that were not connected by an articulated performance focus.

Contemporary vocalists should be mindful of identifying (and sticking to) a specific performance focus. Several students presented a program of songs that did not appear to be tied by a central performance focus. A small number of students presented programs that were framed solely on the demonstration of very generic performance techniques (being in tune, time, etc.).

It was evident that many students had carefully considered the examination criteria in preparing for the examination. In particular, demonstrating a range of tonal qualities and interpreting of form/structures within works was evidenced very well. There were occasions, however, where a small number of technically proficient students appeared not to have considered the criteria but rather presented a concert performance rather than an examination performance. Students and teachers are advised to carefully read the VCAA assessment criteria used by assessors.

Few students appeared to rely solely on 'getting the notes right' to demonstrate their level of ability. Students should be reminded that in a study such as Music Investigation 'getting the notes right' alone will not secure access to higher marks. Central to the study is the sophisticated demonstration of style, interpretation and nuance.

Students who achieved high marks across several criteria were typically able to include variation and contrast within their demonstrated performance program. This was achieved through the inclusion of a wide range of performance techniques and musical characters.

Variation was also evidenced in terms of ensemble interaction. In both solo contexts (with accompanist) and group settings (with other students) the level of interaction and demonstrated preparation varied greatly. Students are advised to rehearse regularly with their co-performers throughout the year. Students who achieved higher scores were able to demonstrate a sophisticated ensemble understanding of rubato, dynamics, groove and rhythmic/melodic interaction. Students who received lower marks often simplified parts or appeared not to understand the performance conventions of the repertoire they were performing.

Assessment criteria

Key terms to consider across the broader criteria are 'skill in', 'range of' and 'relevant'. Teachers and students are advised to highlight these terms when considering the criteria.

The following advice should be read with the examination criteria.

Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirements of the task

Students were able to achieve full marks for this criterion if they selected a work from the appropriate Prescribed List of Works and submitted a Focus Statement on the day of the assessment.

Criterion 2 – Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

Students were scored on their ability to perform repertoire at the appropriate tempo, evidencing precision and accuracy in relation to pitch, rhythm, dynamics and articulation, and clarity of passage work in terms of timing, tone production, phrasing and articulation.

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

Central to achieving a higher score for this criterion was the purposeful selection of works that contained a wide range of performance techniques relevant to the nominated performance focus. Students who achieved the highest scores throughout the program were able to demonstrate secure execution of a variety of performance techniques while maintaining a high level of dexterity and security throughout the program.

Students who were limited in their scoring were typically overly repetitious in terms of the number of performance techniques being evidenced. In some cases it was evident that techniques central to the performance conventions contained in repertoire were edited, simplified or missed in the delivery of the examination program.

Criterion 4 – Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities relevant to the Focus Area

Several students who demonstrated a high level of skill in criterion 2 and criterion 3 were awarded lower scores for criterion 4 due to a failure to evidence a range of expressive tonal qualities. While it is accepted that musicians have a primary or core tonal character that is central to their performance identity, efforts must be made to evidence variation.

A sophisticated and well-developed demonstration of both tone and tonal variation that was appropriate to the nominated performance focus was fundamental to achieving the highest marks within this criterion.

Criterion 5 – Skill in articulating and phrasing

Students who scored higher marks within criterion 5 were able to demonstrate nuances of melody and rhythm through the refined manipulation and control of articulation and phrasing. These students were able to highlight the stylistic qualities of repertoire through the purposeful and artistic shaping of tone, rhythm and dynamics (within the context of articulation of phrasing).

Criterion 6 – Skill in differentiating the structures and textures within each work of the Focus Area

Many students appeared not to have adequately considered this criterion in their selection of a performance program, study throughout the year or the delivery of the final performance examination. In its simplest application this criterion relates to the demonstration of how form, or repeated sections, within a composition are interpreted and delivered in performance.

Many students were awarded significantly lower scores in this criterion as there was no clear evidence that the student was able to demonstrate differentiation of the structures and textures contained in repertoire scores.

Criterion 7 – Skill in differentiating the musical lines in the selected works as appropriate to the Focus Area

This criterion relates to a performer's ability to understand and demonstrate the function and significance of individual musical lines contained in repertoire.

Students who achieved the highest scores in this criterion were able to evidence:

- empathy between soloist and accompaniment (accompanied solo students)
- use of rubato or other variations of tempo; for example, in unaccompanied works
- synchronisation and establishment of groove within a rhythm section (group students)
- dynamic control and effective use of balance to highlight tension and release central to the stylistic conventions of the presented repertoire.

Criterion 8 – Skill in presenting an interpretation of the works that is informed by historical and/or contemporary practices and conventions relevant to the Focus Area

Fundamental to achieving high scores for criterion 8 was the ability to evidence a practical understanding of performance practices used by expert performers such as those from the broader professional performance world.

Students who chose to overly focus on 'doing their own thing' in terms of interpretation and execution of performance techniques tended to achieve lower scores on this criterion. Students who demonstrated/evidenced that they had researched the performance practices of leaders within the nominated focus area tended to achieve higher scores.

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

Students who demonstrated the highest levels of creativity and individuality were able to mask the technical demands of repertoire, shifting their performance focus to issues of nuance, intent and sophistication.

Criterion 10 – Skill in demonstrating how the musical works in the program are representative of the Focus Area

It was not always clear how items within a student's performance program connected to the Focus Statement provided to assessors. Some students who presented technically accomplished performances were not awarded high scores for this criterion due to a lack of relevance/connection to the provided Focus Statement.

Students are advised that where a connection across the program could be perceived as tenuous, efforts should be made to make clear (through the Focus Statement or introducing repertoire) how repertoire is relevant to the nominated Focus Area.

Criterion 11 – Skill in the presentation of a cohesive program relevant to the Focus Area

Many students appeared passionate about the performance focus they had selected for study throughout the year. Not only could this be visually recognised by assessors but it could also be heard musically. In particular, these students presented programs where each work presented an obvious connection to the Focus Area. The program order reflected a considered approach with each piece revealing new and different aspects of the Focus Area. These students were typically excited to share their music and were highly organised about the delivery of the program.