

# 2017 VCE Music Performance performance examination report

## General comments

In 2017, a revised study design was introduced. Students whose overall presentation suggested that they had done some research into performance practice were more likely to fulfil the examination criteria, especially criterion 3 (Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency), criterion 4 (Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities), criterion 7 (Skill in differentiating the structures and characters of each work), criterion 8 (Skill in presenting an informed interpretation of a range of styles) and criterion 10 (Skill in presenting a musical program within appropriate performance conventions).

Through the performances, it was clear that students had done varying amounts of research. Many students used a limited range of expressive performance techniques. The use of incorrect or inappropriate techniques often resulted in limited control and even accuracy. A lack of research was often evident through the inappropriate use of tonal effects, or a poor quality of tone.

Research is vital when considering the structures and characters of each work. A clear analytical understanding of each work gives the performer an insight into the appropriate shaping of the work as a whole (such as highlighting climactic tension, creating appropriate mood in quieter sections or knowing when to use tempo and dynamic variation to highlight structure and character). Copying a particular performer's interpretation is quite different to having an understanding of a wide variety of interpretations. An understanding of a variety of styles will allow the student to make informed decisions about interpretation and will, in turn, have an impact on the extent to which an individual performance is musical and creative (criterion 9).

It is recommended that students consider the following, along with the instrument-specific comments in this report:

- **Accompanists:** The use of competent accompanists is highly encouraged. Rehearse thoroughly and, if possible, try to do several practice performances in different acoustic situations. Make sure that you and the accompanist are given feedback about the balance between the instruments as well as about accuracy and synchronisation.
- **Backing tracks:** First, make sure the playback equipment is both portable and of good quality. Then, rehearse with the backing in a variety of acoustic situations, making sure you have someone who is available and qualified to discuss issues of balance. (Note: the use of Bluetooth technology may not be as reliable as a cabled connection.)
- **Performance etiquette:** Make sure that your examination is a performance that addresses and communicates to an audience (in this case, the assessors).
- **Program, choice and order:** There is a maximum of 25 minutes for the task. Choose works that exhibit a range of skills and techniques relevant to each of the criteria. Consider that a long program might cause you to tire and a short program might limit the range of techniques, etc. that can be demonstrated. Also, the chosen program order can maximise the impact of a well thought-out program.

# Specific information

## Solo performance examination

### Assessment criteria

#### Criterion 1 – Compliance with requirements of the task

In 2017, the majority of students received full marks for this criterion. This meant that they performed the required number of works from the Prescribed List of Notated Works and from the required categories. They completed the performance of each work and fulfilled the requirements of unaccompanied performances and performances from memory where specified in the Prescribed List of Notated Works.

#### Criterion 2 – Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

In general, students performed strongly in this criterion. Students who scored the highest marks seemed to have prepared thoroughly throughout the year, as the discipline in their preparation was evident in their performances. Even when there were errors in their performances, their accuracy and clarity were still high. Accurate performances presented under tempo and performances that lacked clarity or accuracy did not score as highly.

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

Students who researched a range of techniques and used them with control and fluency scored the highest marks for this criterion. Students who ignored that research could not score the highest marks. Skill in performing with control and fluency is typified by evenness of passagework, clarity of articulation and fluent performances uninterrupted by stops and starts.

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

The quality of a performer's tone is particularly challenged at the extremes of the dynamic range. It requires much refinement of technique and a depth of musical understanding to perform with a rich tone at the full dynamic range, always maintaining a presence and richness of tone. Students who understood (through research) something of the range of expressive tonal qualities excelled in this criterion.

#### Criterion 5 – Skill in expressive communication through articulation and phrasing

The use of a variety of articulations and an ability to phrase well were rewarded with high marks. Students who lacked research in this area were limited in their use of appropriate articulations and could not achieve high marks.

#### Criterion 6 – Skill in differentiating the musical lines

In relation to this criterion, three scenarios were considered:

- accompanied works (live) – synchronisation with the accompanist, as well as appropriate balance between the soloist and accompanist
- accompanied works (pre-recorded) – balance and synchronisation with the backing track
- unaccompanied works – internal synchronisation and rhythmic stability, and the creation of a variety of implied lines where appropriate.

### **Criterion 7 – Skill in differentiating the structures and characters of each work**

Higher-scoring performances were interesting performances that highlighted the structures and characters of the works. These performances clearly demonstrated the research students had done. A lack of structure in some performances resulted in a lack of a sense of overall musical direction.

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

Students who used research to inform the choice of a program that included works in very different styles through research scored highly. They were able to demonstrate their understanding of the differences in each work. Students who lacked a stylistic understanding of their works limited their ability to achieve high marks.

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

In general, results were higher in this criterion than in others, demonstrating that many students played with passion and feeling. This criterion allows, and in fact requires, students' own personalities to be evident in the performance, within the stylistic conventions of the works performed.

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

Many students performed their programs within appropriate performance conventions. Through attending live performances, watching each other perform and watching performances on a variety of media, many students had a good awareness of the conventions of performance. In many instances, they were able to communicate that well. Students who presented their program as a complete performance rather than a play-through of a collection of works scored best in this criterion.

## **Advice to students**

- Make sure the program complies with the conditions published for your instrument (criterion 1).
- Choose the correct arrangements or pieces. For contemporary instruments particularly, the edition is vital – a different edition from that cited in the Prescribed List of Notated Works is probably a different arrangement and may be considered a non-compliant work.
- Use the opportunity to demonstrate a diversity of styles, techniques, tonal qualities and structures within the 25 minutes allowed (criteria 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).
- Try to craft your program so that every chosen work sounds different and enables you to focus on showing different skills (criteria 3, 4, 7 and 8).
- Fill out your program sheet clearly and use the titles and movements as published in the Prescribed List of Notated Works. Cite the composer, the correct title (including the identifying number) and the correct category.
- Choose pieces within a range of technical difficulty that you can manage.
- Take opportunities to include embellishment or improvisation (as appropriate to the style) if repeats are performed (criterion 8).
- Be prepared for contingencies – bring extra leads, cables, extension cords, strings, reeds and sticks, as you would for any particularly important performance (criterion 10).
- Contemporary instrument students are encouraged to perform at least one work with a live accompaniment (for example, a second guitar or a bass) (criterion 6).
- Except for drum kits, equipment brought into the examination room must be able to be taken in and removed quickly. Aim for quality and portability when selecting equipment for use in the examination.

- Amplifiers and drum kits must be used within occupational health and safety standards. Sound must not exceed safe listening levels.

## Instrument-specific comments

### Contemporary guitar

- If using an acoustic guitar, it is best to rely on performance technique rather than amplification to project the tone.
- Make sure the notated solos are played.
- Work particularly on developing finger-style techniques throughout the year.
- Make sure that you listen extensively throughout the year, not only to the works you are performing but also to a wide range of styles.
- In the set-up time, make sure that you listen to the sound/balance from where the assessors are sitting.
- Place the backing track speaker so that it can be clearly heard by the performer and the assessors.

### Drum kit

- Explore as wide a variety of styles as possible.
- The brushes piece and drum solos tend to be the weakest areas in drum kit and students are advised to develop these techniques throughout the year.
- While being mindful of excessive levels, avoid playing too softly as articulations get lost when playing without intensity.
- The use of fully enclosed headphones makes it difficult to balance the kit with the backing. It is best to cover only one ear if using headphones.

### Voice – contemporary popular

- In Music Performance, Solo, a microphone may **not** be used.
- If using belting techniques, make sure the correct techniques are used, so as to not damage the vocal chords.
- Take the 'vocalise' category seriously – sing it as an expressive song and avoid the use of improvisation in this work. Many singers did not access the highest marks for criteria 4 and 5 because they had not prepared the 'vocalise' category adequately.
- Be aware of the category that each song comes from, and sing it in the appropriate style.
- Consider how to stage the performance – use the performance space and always address the audience.
- In considering the use of an accompanist, it is often a good idea to think beyond just using a pianist. Perhaps consider a guitar or other instrument for some songs.
- Make sure you tell the accompanist that they should **not** play the melody line, as you are singing it.

### Contemporary piano

- Many students demonstrated little knowledge of how to use the sustain pedal. Students are advised to develop their knowledge of how to use the sustain pedal effectively.
- Some programs were performed with a lack of discipline, suggesting a higher degree of preparation is needed.

### Pianoforte

- Students are advised to not take on programs that are too difficult for them to master.
- Sometimes the sustain pedal was poorly understood.

## Wind and brass

- Make sure that articulation and phrasing are given due attention.
- Consider the stamina required if performing a long program. Some students tired before the end of the performance.

## Strings

- Avoid the temptation to take on works that are too difficult for you.
- Intonation was often the area of greatest weakness in performances.
- Consider performing some of the more avant-garde works as well as some of the Australian works found on the list.

## Group performance examination

In 2017, students were assessed against 10 criteria. Each student was assessed by two assessors and a maximum of 10 marks was available for each criterion. Many of the criteria were identical to those used in the Solo Performance examination; thus, students were assessed in both Solo and Group using either identical criteria or criteria of equal importance. Each student was assessed on their performance according to the criteria, not globally. The criteria were applied equally to all students across all instruments. In 2017, there was a high standard of preparation for the performance and confident use of a diverse range of stylistically appropriate techniques that contributed to many engaging performances.

Students who presented for the 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 ways they can maximise their marks in the criteria related to group interaction (criterion 8) and the balance of the musical instruments (criterion 6). These criteria require the conscious listening to and acknowledgment of other group members. They also require students to adjust their individual contribution to enhance the overall group sound.

The strong presence of poise and focus (criterion 10) was evident in many high-scoring performances. This involved the sharing of introductions, awareness of arrangement, stage etiquette and/or movement as appropriate to the group context. Other elements included adapting positively to unforeseen situations – for example, when another band member forgot their part or broke a string.

Decisions about the group composition and performance program need to be advantageous to the group as a whole. On some occasions in 2017, there were ensembles with two or more singers splitting each song's lead vocal solo, line by line, phrase by phrase, even bar by bar, without any reference to the use of vocal harmonies. This approach is not helpful to the assessed students and is likely to compromise their marks for a number of criteria, including stylistic considerations.

Students should be informed about the best approaches to the composition of groups for the examination. It may, for example, 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 can present programs that are more suited to each individual. Conversely, these two singers could

work within the same ensemble, exploiting the criteria with a demonstration of sharing skills that include a combination of lead vocals and harmony singing.

It is important that groups choose keys for songs that are suited to the vocalists and are also within the technical abilities of the instrumentalists. The focus should be on selecting songs that support each student to maximise their score. Students should consider transposing the songs themselves to find more appropriate keys. Students should be careful when sourcing tablature transcriptions from the internet; it is worth checking the original recordings for accuracy.

Students are advised to use a range of resources such as YouTube and alternative (live) versions of works as references when they are planning arrangements and interpretations. Ideas from their listening can be used to exploit their available instrumentation. Successful acoustic and a cappella versions of both prescribed and non-prescribed works were observed, as well as augmentations such as extra solos, harmonies and breakdown sections.

Students consistently met the requirement to perform two musical items from the Prescribed List of Group Works. Some students performed additional works from the list, which was permissible. It can be difficult for groups with two or more assessed performers to address the criteria at the highest level if they select only 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.

Students should ensure that they put together the strongest possible program when they are performing an entire program of items from the 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 of Group Works**

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

### **Assessment criteria**

The assessment criteria 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.

In 2017, almost all students fulfilled all the requirements of criterion 1 concerning 'compliance with the requirements of the task'.

The examination specifications and criteria for this examination also include annotations 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, they 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 with control and fluency' (criterion 3) and 'skill in performing as a member of the group' (criterion 8).

### **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. 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 student's ability to maximise their results depends on the context within which each individual performs. For example, a drummer who keeps irregular time or rhythm will affect the assessed student'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. 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 using different combinations of non-assessed performers during their performance as they wish. This 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 achieve the best outcome.

Students should also be aware that non-students may only assist as part of the group within certain guidelines, as outlined in the examination specifications. Teachers and other non-assessed performers are advised that their role, if they are participating, should not distract from, nor limit the ability of, the assessed performer(s) to present a program that will maximise their marks. Assessed 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 reduce the number of opportunities for the assessed performers to address all of the criteria.

### **Program selection**

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

The program selected by the student(s) is the foundation for achieving their best result. It is strongly recommended that students carefully consider the selection of works 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 works 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 may occur for a number of reasons, particularly if groups have instrumentation different to the original work.

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 within a broader genre or style; 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 (criterion 7), 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 performing a range of techniques' criterion.

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 a 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. This may require development of arrangements or the use of improvisation, embellishment and ornamentation.

### **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 44 of the *VCE Music Study Design*).

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

Assessed performers 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 performance 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 if appropriate. They should also bring extra power boards and extension leads, so that their planned set-up is not compromised by the placement of power points 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 performers 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.

In 2017, some ensembles set their mix of instruments and voices based on the sound balance heard in and around the performance area only. Students are advised to set and check the overall dynamic balance of the presentation from both the performance/stage area and the approximate positioning of the assessors. During the year, students should practise in a variety of rooms in order to become more adept at setting and checking appropriate dynamic 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.