

# 2018 VCE Music Investigation performance examination report

## General comments

VCE Music Investigation offers students an opportunity to extend their musical knowledge and performance skills through practical research undertaken within a specific area of musical interest. This chosen area of performance interest is referred to throughout the *VCE Music Study Design* as the student's 'Investigation Topic'.

Students presented for the 2018 performance examination across a stylistically diverse range of traditional and contemporary disciplines. Many students incorporated high levels of technology within their performance programs.

The study prescribes that students present a live performance of no fewer than four works that evidence a fundamental connection to the Investigation Topic. Crucially, this connection, or link, underpins the performance research and rehearsal undertaken throughout the year.

Students nominate to present as either a soloist or as a member of a group.

At least one work in the performance program 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.

On the day of the performance examination students are required to provide assessors with a Performance Program Sheet and a Performer's Statement. The Performer's Statement outlines the Investigation Topic and its relationship to the selected performance program. The Performer's Statement must be typed, and two copies are to be provided to assessors prior to commencement of the assessment.

A small number of students presented for the examination without the required VCAA paperwork. In addition to a Performance Program Sheet and Performer's Statement, students must present to the examination centre coordinator on arrival at the examination venue their Advice Slip that details the student's VCAA number, enrolled instrument, time/date and location of examination. Students should also bring photo ID.

Conditions for the examination are varied across instrument types (including voice) within solo settings. Conditions within group settings also require careful attention, particularly in regard to the size of the group and the use of non-assessed accompanying performers.

Where arrangements beyond those prescribed in the VCAA guidelines are required to facilitate a student's performance, permission is required prior to the day of the assessment.

### Performer's Statement

While the Performer's Statement is not formally assessed, the document plays a vital role in providing assessors with the intention of the program and the scope of work that was undertaken by the student throughout the year of study.

Investigation Topics were audited in March 2018 to provide guidance to teachers and students. This process sought to ensure topics chosen were appropriate, clearly articulated and would enable the student to present a coherent program in relation to the published VCAA examination criteria. In some cases, recommended changes/advice to schools appeared not to have been taken into account, resulting in the presented Performer's Statement being inappropriate or limited.

Students who achieved the highest scores across the majority of the criteria evidenced a high level of nuanced stylistic and technical control that consistently and clearly linked the presented repertoire to the Investigation Topic articulated within the Performer's Statement.

Those who achieved lower scores typically demonstrated a lower level of musicianship, limited artistic purpose and/or performance technique control being evidenced throughout the performance program. In many of these instances students also did not demonstrate a clear performance link between the Performer's Statement and the repertoire presented for assessment.

The Performer's Statement should clearly outline a statement of intent for which the student seeks to evidence through the demonstration of refined practical ability. The Performer's Statement should detail relevant and characteristic performance techniques together with an explanation of the chosen musical context (style, period, performer, etc.).

The Performer's Statement should not reference information that will not, or cannot, be featured in a performance setting. Some students chose to include lengthy descriptions of compositional devices or contextual issues that were not directly relevant to a performance examination.

The Performer's Statement can be used to list each musical item alongside specific performance techniques and relevant stylistic content. This information should be linked to the Investigation Topic.

### **Assessment criteria**

Assessors use the criteria to determine the depth and sophistication demonstrated by the student.

The assessment criteria for Music Investigation is not identical to that used in Music Performance. Music Investigation uses identical criteria for solo and group contexts (this is not so in Music Performance).

#### **1. Compliance with the requirements of the task**

To attain compliance it was necessary that no fewer than four contrasting works, that were representative and characteristic of the music style, tradition and/or genre being investigated, be presented for assessment. The majority of assessed students met this fundamental requirement.

Students who scored full marks for this criterion also met the core requirement of selecting one work from either of the VCAA Prescribed Lists of Works.

#### **2. Skill in performing accurately and with clarity**

A significant level of variation in terms of stylistic understanding (performance conventions/traditions) and instrumental accuracy (practical control of the 'elements of music') was demonstrated within this criterion. Within a diverse scope of repertoire (stylistically and in terms of complexity), students evidenced varying levels of 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. It was not evident that students who scored highly were performing a complex piece because they performed skilfully with accuracy and clarity.

#### **3. Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency within the context of the Investigation Topic**

Students who achieved high scores in this criterion demonstrated a variety of performance techniques within the presented program. It was clear that at the planning stage of the performance program students had endeavoured to make obvious the number and range of performance techniques that were being evidenced throughout the assessment. High scores were achieved by students who demonstrated seemingly effortless control of their instrument in terms of fluency and dexterity.

Students who scored less well typically demonstrated very few identifiable performance techniques beyond playing the pieces.

#### **4. Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities relevant to the Investigation Topic**

Students who scored highly in this criterion demonstrated refined control of tone. Several technically and stylistically accomplished students did not evidence a range of expressive tonal qualities. While it is acknowledged that musicians typically endeavour to develop their primary, or core, tonal character, efforts must be made to evidence variation in order to access higher scores in this criterion.

#### **5. Skill in the interpretive control of articulation and phrasing within the context of the Investigation Topic**

Students who scored highly used deliberate, yet subtle, control of articulation and phrasing to highlight the inherent sophistication contained within the Investigation Topic. This was typically achieved through the purposeful and artistic manipulation of dynamics in conjunction with the nuanced delivery of phrase shaping.

#### **6. Skill in differentiating the musical lines in the selected works as appropriate to the Investigation Topic and as appropriate to the instrument and/or instrumental context (i.e. solo or multi-instrumental contexts)**

Despite demonstrating developed instrumental control, some students underachieved in relation to this criterion. In order to achieve higher scores in this criterion, students were required to evidence how melodic lines can be delivered with interpretative purpose.

#### **7. Skill in differentiating the structures and textures within each work as appropriate to the Investigation Topic**

Students who scored highest in this criterion recognised the importance of selecting a program that featured a variety of textures relevant to the Investigation Topic. These students demonstrated the ability to demonstrate a practical understanding of compositional techniques and how they can be treated/interpreted in performance. Students who were awarded lower scores typically repeated sections/form without variation or evolving artistic purpose.

#### **8. Skill in presenting an interpretation of the works that is informed by historical and/or contemporary practices and conventions relevant to the Investigation Topic**

Students who were awarded the highest scores in this criterion were able to evidence, from a practical performance-based perspective, their outstanding depth of stylistic knowledge contained within the nominated Investigation Topic. Attention to detail played a key role with regard to demonstrating how experts from the field perform repertoire set within the scope of the Investigation Topic.

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

Students should endeavour to demonstrate individuality and creativity within the chosen performance program, as appropriate to the nominated Investigation Topic. In order to access higher scores, the performance should convey elements of personal interpretation set within the

stylistic framework of the selected repertoire. Once students have grasped the technical demands of their repertoire, they should be encouraged to develop their individual interpretation.

### **10. Skill in demonstrating how the works in the program are representative of the Investigation Topic**

While the Performer's Statement is not assessed as a criterion in its own right, the relevance of the selected program to the Performer's Statement, and more broadly the Investigation Topic, plays a key role in framing the context of the selected program and subsequent criteria-based assessment. While repertoire was often performed to a very high level, the connection between repertoire and the Investigation Topic was limited. Where repertoire appeared to have only a tenuous link to the provided Performer's Statement, scores were limited.

### **11. Skill in the presentation of a cohesive program relevant to the Investigation Topic**

Students are advised to carefully consider presentation conventions relevant to the program being presented for assessment. Students are advised to review video recordings of numerous works, set within a range of contexts, to determine what aspects of performance presentation might be appropriate for the assessment.

Several students chose to script dialogue that was delivered between items in the program. This rarely contributed to the awarding of higher scores. Often dialogue directed at assessors was disjointed or clumsy.

## **Specific information**

While the published VCAA conditions of assessment make no prescriptions regarding program length, aside from a minimum of four works be performed and the maximum length (see maximum performance times for differing contexts, such as solo or group [which is dependent on the number of assessed performers]), many programs were too short in light of the time available. Students should use as close to the maximum time available to evidence a breadth of work studied over the course of the year.

The level of difficulty (technical and stylistic) for the repertoire selected for the year of study should be considered. While prescribed levels of difficulty are not articulated in the published criteria, the level of sophistication and complexity evidenced within a performance program directly contribute to the potential for access to higher scores across the criteria.

Where performance programs evidenced a limited level of technical and/or stylistic difficulty, access to high marks was reduced. In terms of program selection, it is important to acknowledge that while virtually every performance style, genre or period may have the potential to provide access to the highest possible scores, not every program selected within those styles, genres or period will.

### **Solo performance examination**

Students who enrolled in Music Investigation as a soloist presented across a wide variety of classical, contemporary and world music performance styles. Contemporary popular voice, guitar, drum-kit, strings, piano and saxophone attracted the highest number of enrolments.

While it is not mandated that Music Investigation solo students perform an unaccompanied work, where students chose to do so it often provided further opportunities for students to address the criteria.

In 2018, students who presented contemporary performance styles typically chose to perform large portions of their program with recorded backing tracks. When performing with a recorded backing

track, students need to consider the quality of the recording and the balance of their part/voice in relation to the accompaniment. On many occasions the levels of backing tracks had not been balanced, or normalised, to ensure dynamic coherence across the broader program. In some cases the soloist could not be heard above the backing track. Where backing tracks were too soft it seemed that assessed performers experienced an unnecessary level of discomfort while attempting to perform at dynamic levels lower than appropriate for the repertoire or register being presented.

In a small number of examinations, students performed with, or along to, a unison melodic or rhythmic line that was audible in the recorded accompaniment. Not only did this lessen the stylistic integrity of the performance, but it often made it difficult for assessors to determine what was actually performed by the soloist, and subsequently the skill level that could be attributed to the student.

### **Group performance examination**

When planning a group end-of-year examination program in Unit 3, based on several students being assessed within a single group, the program length should be re-evaluated should a student(s) elect to withdraw from, or be rescheduled out of, the original group configuration.

Within a group examination context, the maximum performance times are as follows:

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