

2018 VCE Music Performance examination report

General comments

The 2018 Music Performance examination comprised 18 questions across three sections and was worth a total of 100 marks.

The overall standard of student responses was reasonable. The majority of students attempted all questions, with a small number not responding to some questions in Section C.

The three sections of the examination focused on listening and analysing performers' interpretations, aural perception and understanding of music concepts.

Advice to students

- Section A – Listening and interpretation required students to listen to excerpts from pre-recorded musical performances and respond to questions about ways in which performers and/or conductors shape interpretations. This section of the examination was worth 30 marks. It was clear from student responses that further improvement is needed in the areas covered by this section of the examination. Regularly listening to musical performances and practising writing about them are vital to developing the listening skills required.
- Students are advised to read the questions carefully. Many students highlighted key terms or symbols.
- The study design, examination specifications and sample materials are only available from the VCAA website.
- When undertaking transcription questions, students are advised to complete their rough work on the blank manuscript paper provided and then transfer a neat, legible copy of their final response to the space provided for the answer.
- Students are advised to check that there is no ambiguity of the pitch when writing notes or accidentals on the staff. Many students used a sharp pencil for Sections B and C and this assisted in the presentation of a clear response.
- Where possible, students could access appropriate aural training software and a computer music 'sequencer', especially to program rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural practice. Regular singing of melodies and performance of rhythms can be very effective in developing the understanding of the connection of the sound and musical notation.
- When identifying the quality of a triad or chord, students should not use 'M' to signify major and/or 'm' to signify minor. Students should write the full words 'major' and/or 'minor' to avoid ambiguity.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Listening and interpretation

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	2	7	14	22	22	19	9	4	4.7

Students were asked to discuss how the performers used dynamics and blend of instrumental voices to achieve expressive outcomes.

Many students struggled with this question. The ability to discuss the blend of instrumental voices requires students to listen to a range of diverse music, discussing the various layers of instruments and their roles and how these can change within a piece of music. The highest-scoring responses were able to link the dynamics and blend of instrumental voices to expressive outcomes. Students needed to ensure that they addressed both parts of the question – i.e. use of dynamics and blend of instrumental voices. Some students made reference only to the use of dynamics.

Examples of points discussed in high-scoring responses included:

- The opening soft strings create stillness. The volume increases as the lower brass and timpani roll enter very softly.
- The opening high sustained strings create a bright sound that contrasts with the darkness of the sustained lower brass, creating an ominous, foreboding character.
- The timpani roll, along with the marked brass crescendo, adds to the tension, but this does not last long as it is followed by a tutti decrescendo.
- The orchestral tutti features the fortissimo tremolo strings and is underpinned by the forte lower brass chords. Percussion is added to the accompanying chords to increase the volume and give the music an almost military feel.
- Fortissimo tremolo strings change the tone colour to a brighter tone, but the dark brass layers still add darkness.
- Strings play two or three note fragments mezzo piano; the accents on the first note of each fragment add to the sighing quality. The silence between fragments creates contrast, adding to the tension.
- As the double basses sustain the very low pedal point that continues the underlying darkness of mood, a trill on the piano in its higher register and the subsequent entry of the flute change to a much brighter sound and lifts the mood ostensibly.
- The mezzo-forte entrance of the melody played by the flute and strings accompanied by the celeste-like instrument add a gentle quality to the ending. The double basses are no longer playing. The mid-range strings accompany the melody. The flute melody in the foreground adds a brightness to the mood. The decrescendo on the long final chord adds to the gentleness of the ending.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	19	35	29	15	2.4

This question required students to describe the ways in which tone colour was used to achieve expressive outcomes.

Students' understanding of tone colour was good. High-scoring responses included comments and terminology such as:

- contrast of tone colour between the didgeridoo (reedy) and the higher-pitched pure children's voices
- drone comprised of sustained didgeridoo offset against sparse and bright bell sounds
- warm, breathy tone of the shakuhachi contrasted with the sharper, reedy tone of the cor anglais
- the static drone introduction became the foundation for a dialogue between solo winds, and this was followed by a simple theme presented by the female voices.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	7	23	28	23	13	4	3.2

Students were asked to describe how performers used at least two elements of music (articulation, balance of music lines, ornamentation/embellishment/improvisation and dynamics) to achieve expressive outcomes.

When choosing the elements of music to describe, students are encouraged to use sub-headings, as at times it was unclear which elements of music were being written about. Students need to check the terminology that is associated with each of the elements of music. The fact that a passage of music may be played legato does not mean that there is no articulation. Students need to have a clear understanding of what the elements of music mean.

Examples of points that could have been made included:

- The shakuhachi and cor anglais are instruments in slightly different pitch ranges, with the cor anglais sitting lower than the shakuhachi. The high register of both instruments playing a musical dialogue is in direct contrast to the lower register of the accompanying drones (balance of music lines).
- The solo wind parts feature extensive ornamentation, in contrast to the static drones (ornamentation).
- The introduction of the female voices singing mezzo-forte lifts the mood (dynamics).

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	1	2	5	11	11	15	16	15	10	9	4	2	6.9

In their responses to this question, students needed to refer to at least three of: tempo, balance of music lines, tone colour and articulation, and compare the ways in which the two interpretations created different expressive outcomes through the use of these elements of music. The highest-scoring responses made a clear comparison between the two interpretations.

Examples of relevant points included:

Tempo

- Michael Jackson: Strong rhythm assisted by driving bass line. Moderately fast, appropriate for dancing. Regular, driving pulse throughout.
- Chris Cornell: Tempo throughout is much slower. Much freer in interpretation. There is also more variation due to rubato of the vocal line and expressive emphasis.

Balance of music lines

- Michael Jackson: Long introduction starting with drums, then bass, then added percussion, then keyboard and finally the lead male voice. During the verse, the voice is supported by overdubbed backing vocals in the background. During the bridge/pre-chorus there are more sustained sounds on strings and the vocal harmonies. There is also the added interest of a saxophone-like sound with melodic interjections. The chorus is thicker with a fuller sound, with all instruments and voices heard.
- Chris Cornell: Light guitar, drums and bass accompaniment at the beginning highlight the solo male voice. The guitar plays an arpeggiated figure. Gradually the accompanying instruments build in their complexity of lines. The voice becomes more prominent and insistent. Just before the chorus, the drum fill builds to a fuller sound, thus adding to the intensity.

Tone colour

- Michael Jackson: Michael Jackson's voice varies between the verses and the chorus sections. Initially the voice is in a tenor, low falsetto range, building to more intense, higher falsetto in the chorus. Overall the voice is soulful. Jackson uses body percussion and vocalisations, often high-pitched sounds that may be described as hiccups, interjections or squeals and finger snaps. The introduction of strings adds a pedal tone and sense of danger with a dark and sparse sound.
- Chris Cornell: Cornell's vocal range is much lower in the verse and is more mournful in expression. As the excerpt progresses it becomes rough-sounding, with a move into a higher range. There are often rough glitches, slides and other vocalisations. The instruments are used delicately at first. As the song builds to the chorus the band becomes more prominent. The drums play with a regular rhythm with heavy backbeat, and the guitars use stronger chords with reverberation.

Articulation

- Michael Jackson: The opening accented drum kit sets up the drive and energy. The opening staccato riff and parallel staccato synthesiser chords add to the energy. The short vocal phrases, with vocal descending glissandos at the ends of phrases, add to the intensity. The verse continues in short phrases with speech-like sighs. Jackson uses vocal effects to add to the intensity.
- Chris Cornell: Chris Cornell uses legato lines and singing through the long notes to create a yearning quality. The acoustic guitar playing arpeggios and gentle strummed chords adds lightness. Gentle strokes on the cymbal with a brush retains the gentle quality of the accompaniment. In the pre-chorus the drums play accenting the backbeat, and the guitars use stronger chords with reverberation.

Comparison: Jackson is much faster and brighter with an emphasis on a strong, driving rhythm appropriate for dancing. Cornell's version is much slower, more introspective and freer in its rhythm. Jackson uses a steady drum beat, insistent repeated bass riff and keyboard chords. Cornell's version is freer and mournful – a ballad with lots of emotion. Jackson uses a higher vocal range, using falsetto, with many extra vocal blips and finger snaps. Cornell has a wide vocal range, but generally at a lower tessitura than Jackson. Jackson uses more instruments and voices while Cornell uses fewer instruments that all have a freer role and more unexpected musical expression.

Students presented their comparisons in a range of formats. Some listed points evident in each interpretation. Others used a two-column format, aligning the descriptions of the specific features of each interpretation. The highest-scoring responses were able to link the use of the elements of music to the expressive outcomes.

Section B – Music language (aural)

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	12	22	22	18	25	2.2

1. perfect 5th
2. major 2nd
3. minor 6th
4. minor 7th

Many students were able to identify the first two intervals correctly, but the final two intervals proved problematic for some. Throughout the year, students must sing and identify all diatonic intervals to prepare for this type of question. To obtain full marks both quality and size needed to be correct. Students must avoid using M or m to indicate intervals as this is unclear. If the interval was not clearly identified, it was deemed incorrect.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	8	17	38	34	2.9

1. harmonic minor
2. major pentatonic
3. natural minor
4. major

To obtain full marks students needed to identify the specific pentatonic and minor forms with further information, for example, harmonic minor, natural minor and major pentatonic. Marks were not awarded for incomplete answers. Some students incorrectly identified the natural minor as Dorian mode.

Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	77	23	0.3

Mixolydian

Students are encouraged to be familiar with the differences between different scale/mode structures. For example, while the major and mixolydian both use a major 3rd and 6th, the mixolydian mode uses a minor 7th and the major scale, a major 7th. The students who were able to hear the lowered 7th compared to a major were able to correctly identify the tonality of the melody as being in the mixolydian mode.

Question 6bi.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	24	28	28	19	1.4

1. minor 3rd
2. major 6th
3. major 2nd

The interval in the middle of the melody proved to be problematic for many students. Practice in class at identifying intervals in short melodies and then increasing the length of melodies should assist. Students were required to identify both the quality and size of the interval to be awarded full marks.

Question 6bii.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	76	24	0.3

Dorian

Many students identified the tonality of the melody as harmonic minor. The Dorian mode has a raised 6th compared to the harmonic minor.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	17	14	19	39	2.6

1. dominant 7th
2. major
3. minor
4. major

Students answered this question quite well on the whole.

Students should not use 'm' to signify minor and/or 'M' to signify major. Instead, students should write the full words 'minor' and/or 'major' to avoid ambiguity.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	15	30	19	17	19	2

Harmonic grid 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

Bass note	G	C	D	G	D	E \flat
Quality	minor	minor	major	minor	dominant 7th (V7)	major (VI)

Students were generally able to recognise that the last two chords formed an interrupted cadence – one of the common cadences listed for study. Some students seemed not to be familiar with the chord structure for minor keys.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	7	12	14	13	14	12	11	7	9	3.9

Harmonic grid 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.

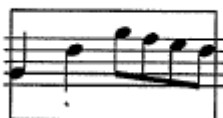
Bass note	B ♭	E ♭	F	G	E ♭	C	F	B ♭
Quality	major	major	dominant 7th (V7)	minor (vi)	major 7th (IV7)	minor (ii)	dominant 7th	major

Many students were able to identify the bass notes correctly, identifying the stepwise motion from chords 2 to 4, thus being able to identify the F and G correctly. The next two chords and bass notes were more difficult for some students. Many students did not identify the 7th chords correctly. On the whole there was a better understanding of the types of chords that were in a major key.

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	7	10	12	16	21	8	13	10	4.5

Bar 2 of violoncello part



Bar 4 of flute part



The violoncello melody of bar 2 was almost identical to that presented in bar 1, but it had some additional stepwise notes joining the B to the F sharp. Students must follow the music that is already given to see if there are any passages that are almost the same, as occurred in this question. The descending leap from the C sharp to the F sharp proved problematic for many students, but the ascending stepwise motion from the F sharp to the D should have assisted students. The melodic minor form was used in the 2nd beat of the last bar (G sharp and A sharp). Students should be aware of the harmonic structure of the given parts. For example, the final bar implied the dominant to tonic forming a perfect cadence. If this was noted students may have been able to hear the implied dominant chord being formed with the melody in the last bar leaping from C sharp to F sharp, with F sharp in the given bass part. Many students were able to hear the overall contour of the melody. Effective preparation for melodic transcription tasks should include singing, writing and identifying melodies.

Section C – Music language (written)

Question 13

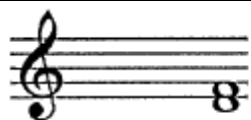
Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	8	24	65	2.5

- perfect octave (8ve)
- minor 3rd
- augmented 4th

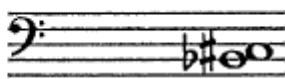
Most students answered this question well; however, the augmented 4th proved problematic for some. When identifying a written octave, students must include the quality and size of the interval. Tritone will not suffice, as the interval was written as C up to F sharp, which is an augmented 4th.

Question 14

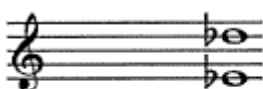
Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	14	22	23	30	2.5



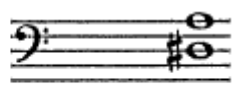
minor 3rd above D



augmented 2nd below C#



minor 7th above Eb



diminished 5th below A

On the whole this question was answered well by most students. However, some students appear to have misread the change of clefs, which affected the notes written on the staff. The diminished 5th below A was difficult for some students. A fifth below A will always be a D; D up to A is a perfect 5th, but to make the quality diminished the D has to be raised to D sharp. Students need to ensure that the accidentals required are exactly level with the note to which they relate.

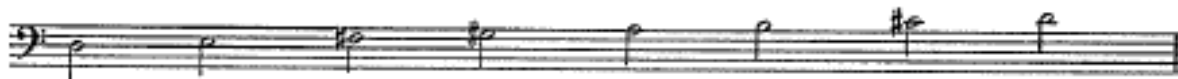
Question 15

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	16	16	67	1.5

This question was answered well by most students. The two minor 6ths were between the C sharp and A at the end of bar 1 and the G sharp to E in bar 2.

Question 16

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	13	21	7	59	2.2



Two marks were awarded for correct notes and one mark was awarded for correct stems and direction of scale.

Question 17

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	35	22	25	18	1.3

1.

2.

3.

4.

Diatonic function	tonic	supertonic (or ii or II or 2)	dominant (or V or 5)	submediant (or vi or VI or 6)
Quality	minor	half-diminished (7th) (or minor 7th b5)	7th (dominant 7th)	major 7th

This question required students to identify given chords as either a triad or 7th chord and the quality of the triad or 7th chord, identify the bass note and identify the function in the key of G minor. For example, chord number 2 was A C E \flat G. This is a half-diminished 7th chord and in the key of G minor, a chord built on A is the supertonic of G minor.

Question 18a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	32	68	0.7

major

Question 18b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	32	68	0.7

5

4

Question 18c.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	36	64	0.7

Concert Pitch Score
♩ = 76

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: flute, oboe, clarinet in Bb, horn in F, and bassoon. The score is divided into three systems of measures. The first system contains measures 1-5, the second system contains measures 6-8, and the third system contains measures 9-11. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 76. Several intervals are explicitly labeled as 'descending major 2nd' with boxes around the notes. In measure 8, a circled interval in the bassoon part is annotated with a handwritten note 'descending major 2nd'. In measure 9, the oboe part has a handwritten note 'descending major 2nds' above a box around two notes. In measure 10, the clarinet part has a handwritten note 'descending major 2nd' above a box around two notes. In measure 11, the bassoon part has a handwritten note 'descending major 2nd' above a box around two notes.

Some students incorrectly circled notes that were a minor 2nd apart.

Question 18d.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	16	84	0.9

perfect 4th

Question 18e.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	46	54	0.6

minor 7th

Some students incorrectly identified the interval as a major 7th because they did not check the key signature. The B was a B \flat , and hence the interval between the C and B \flat was a minor 7th.