

2018 VCE Music Style and Composition examination report

General comments

The 2018 VCE Music Style and Composition aural and written examination was derived from the *VCE Music Study Design 2017–2021* and consistent with the sample examination material published in April 2017. The examination contained two sections worth a total of 100 marks. The questions in Section A focused exclusively on Area of Study 1, in Units 3 and 4, Responses to Music. This section featured five questions based on short excerpts of music from a wide variety of geographical and historical backgrounds and was worth 70 marks. Section B featured three questions related to Area of Study 2, Units 3 and 4, Organisation and Context, and was worth 30 marks.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual 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

Section A featured excerpts from a range of music styles from a variety of cultures. Many students completed responses that showed great insight and showed students' ability to analyse the elements of music and compositional devices found in these previously unheard excerpts of music. High-scoring responses communicated observations about the technical aspects of the music and where appropriate subjective observations about matters such as mood and character. Responses often showed higher-order thinking and in many cases impressive use of language that evoked the sound of the music. Responses that did not score well relied on less insightful analogies that contained imprecise use of terminology and language. Fewer direct references to characteristics of the excerpts were included in such responses. Of particular challenge were the questions that called for students to explain the treatment of structure and harmony in the excerpts.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	1	4	12	17	30	23	15	6

This question afforded students a variety of ways of responding and, in general, responses to this question were of a high standard. Students linked their explanation of drama with characteristics such as:

- a ponderously largo tempo
- simple rhythmic durations such as crotchet, minim and semibreve lengths
- the instrumentation features brass, cymbals, timpani, double basses
- a melodic line is mainly descending, scalar and features a minor key
- a texture that features unison and octaves
- the work is characterised by an enormous weighty feeling created by dark brass tone colour and the very loud volume
- a molto crescendo at the end of the excerpt prior to the two final chords that repeat the opening chords.

Some students referred to the use of compositional devices, particularly repetition and contrast. In framing their explanations many students chose to refer to general characteristics of music that are often associated with drama. Drawing parallels with others works from film, theatre and dance was a successful strategy employed by many students.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	1	10	24	23	20	13	8	0	4.3

As a whole, students did not respond well to this question. Students found it challenging to identify the consistent pulse that was present throughout the excerpt. Further, many students found it challenging to identify the clear change in the division of the beat that occurs around the 18-second mark in the excerpt. The opening portion of the excerpt employed a division of the beat into three. A metric modulation to duple meters followed. Many students were able to express the ambiguity and/or complexity of the meters across the excerpt, but, in order to score highly more specific and accurate observations were required. A small number of students successfully used graphic representations of rhythm such as standard notation and systems of strokes as well as prose.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	3	7	17	23	20	17	8	5	4.6

Students were required to discuss the use of tone colour in excerpt 2b. Excerpt 2b featured all of the music that was the basis for Question 2a. as well as another one minute and 11 seconds of music. Many students responded well, incorporating an overall evaluation of tone colour and specific technical observations. However, other responses utilised emotive or descriptive language without substantiating these assertions with adequate direct references to the work. Some observations that may have been successfully used included the following.

Tone colour:

- scored for marimba, flute, clarinet, violin and cello
- predominantly middle registers used, no brightness or harshness created by extremes of register
- generally simple, traditional playing techniques used

- begins with solo marimba
- violin and cello add contrast in tone colour, adding a more strident tone colour
- sting parts feature double stopping. This can be heard on the tonic chord

Tone colours change with alterations of instrumentation across the structure:

- Section 1: solo marimba
- Section 2: flute/clarinet enter with melodic interest while strings punctuate ends of phrases
- Section 3: begins with solo strings, melodic interest taken up by flute/clarinet with marimba accompaniment and string punctuations similar to Section 2
- Section 4: begins with flute, clarinet and marimba, as with Section 2
- Section 5: similar to section 3

Most high-scoring responses described the tone colour as warm, dark and dense due to the limited instrumentation and relatively narrow register.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	4	10	22	24	13	13	9	1	1	5.2

This question required students to describe the structure of this excerpt. Further, a requirement to refer to melody was included. Many students completed responses that lacked accuracy and/or detail. Many students struggled to identify the phrase structure of the work and what musical characteristics delineated each section. An empirical identification of the structure of the excerpt was not necessary to achieve full marks. Full marks could have been achieved by supplying a logical contention about the structure backed up by factual observations about the similarities and difference between the sections. High-scoring responses identified the excerpt as having two, four or, in some rare instances, three sections. Examples of accurate information that may have been offered in support of an analysis of form included:

- structure could be seen as two or four sections
- orderly progression of diatonic harmony throughout all four sections, strong evidence of cycle of 5ths
- ABAB structure featuring variations that could be identified as binary form
- clear cadential points prefaced by a lengthened penultimate note from the recorders, signalling the end of the section

Some students were able to make some successful references to melody within their responses. The highest-scoring responses linked the use of melody with the structure of the work. Some features of melody that may have been mentioned included:

- Two treble recorders play the melody through most of the excerpt, harpsichord and viola da gamba (Basso Continuo) play incidental melodic roles and accompany.
- Melodic rhythm is in a gigue-like feel possibly in 'inéégale' style rhythm featuring a double dotted rhythm.
- The recorders often play in 3rds or 6ths.
- Use of descending sequences often leading to cadential points.
- Recorders are sometimes in unison and at other points antiphonal.
- Antiphonal sections reflect the stylistic effect of Baroque improvisation.
- Melodic material is derived from the harmonic underpinning.
- Each phrase is short and references the harmonic structure.
- The melody is scalar and diatonic.
- Each phrase has an arch-like shape but always ends at the cadence.

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	3	13	22	27	13	13	7	1	4

Students described the treatment of harmony within this excerpt using a variety of appropriate methods including prose, dot points and symbols such as Roman numerals. Many students were unable to fully express the harmonic features of the excerpt. A major point of confusion was caused by the bass line. Many students mistook the change in scale degrees in the bass line with change in harmony. Other students misidentified the chord progression used as 12-bar blues or a variety of other common chord progressions. The chord progressions referred to were similar in that they predominantly used the primary triads of I, IV and V, but a more accurate description was required to score highly. The harmonic progression used is as follows:

Verse

I I I I I I I I I I I I I I (4 bars)

I I I I I I I I I I I I I I (4 bars)

IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV IV (4 bars)

I I I I I I I I (2 bars)

V V V V V V V V V 7 V 7 V 7 V 7 V 7 V 7 V 7 V 7 (4 bars)

iv (minor) iv iv iv iv V V V V I I I I I I I I (4 bars)

Bridge

V V V V V V V V I I I I I I I I (4 bars)

V V V V V V V V vi vi vi vi V V V V (4 bars)

IV IV IV IV V V V V I I I I IV IV IV IV (4 bars)

I I I I V V V V I I I I IV IV IV IV (4 bars)

I I I I IV IV IV IV I I I I V V V V (7) I I I I I I I I (6 bars)

Some students included more sophisticated observations such as identifying the use of the simple mixture shown by the use of minor chord four. In high-scoring responses identification of the dominant seven chord was also present as well as the movement of chord five to the minor chord six that had similarities with the sound of a traditional interrupted cadence.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	0	11	15	21	20	15	9	5	1	5.6

In general students responded to this question well. Some high-scoring responses referred to fewer elements of music and compositional devices with more depth, others made brief comments about more elements of music in less detail. Both approaches had merit. In rare cases students disagreed with the contention and argued that interest was not maintained. This was a perfectly valid approach on which to base a response. This approach permitted students to express their understanding of essentially the same musical characteristics and this was central to achieving a high mark. Some musical characteristics that may have been included were:

- an idiomatic lullaby, the combination of slower tempo and unforced, darker tone colour generates interest by creating a restful character
- simple country style using voice and guitar
- little or no vibrato used in the vocal part
- longer syllables embellished with additional pitches a semitone or tone above then returning to the main note
- a use of an extension of the vowel. For example 'day' becomes 'day-ee-ay'. Further descent of pitch on 'way-ay'
- guitar accompaniment features simple strumming to maintain interest through repetition
- bass line made more prominent when chords change, by stepwise walking pattern

Structure:

- The structure creates interest. The excerpt is the verse from a song, leading to a bridge. A major point of contrast is a shift in pitch that creates heightened interest.
- The coda extends with a series of echoes.
- There is a greater rate of harmonic change in the bridge.

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	1	6	19	28	23	13	8	1	4.4

Mostly students responded well to this question. Many students were able to describe the variety of aspects present in the excerpt. Students who answered well had a clear understanding of texture and commented on the way that musical layers interacted. Some students chose to include a formal identification of textures by using terms such as monophonic and polyphonic and then followed with an appropriate explanation of how these textures were achieved. Responses that did not score well lacked detail or indicated some confusion about texture. In some instances, students made comments about the sounds present rather than the nature of the layers present. Student responses may have included comments on the following aspects of the excerpt:

- a female vocal solo answer by male voices at the start of the excerpt
- use of 'ah' and 'eh' vowel sounds
- murmuring male interjections
- drums of multi-pitches and regular clapping beats are combined to increase the density of the texture
- male voices at one point move to take a 'foreground' role. The melody ascends and descends clearly in a five-note minor scale pattern
- in general the layers become more complex as the excerpt continues
- a pitched accompaniment is introduced near the end of the excerpt

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	0	1	6	12	19	25	15	13	5	2	6

This question required students to discuss the contrast between excerpt 5a and the remainder of excerpt 5b. Many students completed good responses to this question. Many students correctly used sentence and paragraph structures and other appropriate literary conventions to form a discussion. Many students were able to make many direct references to characteristics of the work. Some students successfully used columns to deliver observations as part of their discussion. Some of the contrasting aspects of the second section of excerpt 5b included:

- accompanying figures in 5th outline the tonal centre more strongly

- lots of text now, whereas vocal parts in the earlier part did not contain as many words
- while the rhythms of the first section are still present, they are continually developed and modified, as are the melodic ideas
- a number of sequences create melodic contrasts
- high flute near the end is added for contrast of pitch
- the original text of the main section is repeated and the idea extended near the end by further repetition
- drum solo is much more complex than the early section, and gradually fades

Section B

Section B assessed students' understanding of the Outcome 2 works that they studied in Units 3 and 4. In this section students were required to respond to questions that focused on:

- use of compositional devices, globally, and at micro and macro levels
- contextual issues
- style
- composers' use of the elements of music.

These questions related to students' chosen Australian, 'other' and post-1950 works. It should be noted that if a response is completed about a work that does not fit the parameters for a question, no marks can be awarded. In nearly all cases appropriate works were referred to in the responses completed in Section B.

Many high-scoring responses were completed. The highest-scoring responses showed an in-depth knowledge of the works chosen for study. In these cases, students made many direct references to the works. These references were used to evidence pertinent and specific assertions about the works and were referenced by the use of bar numbers or the mention of specific structural points. There were fine uses of music terminology in many responses. However, some students struggled to respond to questions in this section of the examination. Questions on context posed particular challenges for students. At times tenuous assertions were made. It was very important that students were able to clearly show the impact of an issue on the creation of a work. Responses that did not score well lacked clarity, detail and cogency.

A broad range of works were chosen for study. Along with works previously chosen for study from the jazz, contemporary popular and western art music traditions, students also studied liturgical works and music from stage and screen genres. Selection of works is critical to students' success in this section of the examination. In general, the works selected supplied an appropriate level of rigour.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	3	12	85	1.8

In response to Questions 1a. and 1b., students were required to answer in relation to the Australian work that they had studied in Unit 3. In order to be awarded two marks for this question students were required to be accurate and answer with sufficient depth to ensure clarity. Assessors marked this question prior to any clarification that may have followed in Question 1b.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	0	8	11	20	17	21	15	5	4.8

This question called for an explanation of the influence of the previously identified contextual issues on the work. Reference to the use of the elements of music was also required. High-scoring responses clearly linked issues with a range of examples from the work. Most students responded to this question in a very effective manner. The responses that did not achieve high scores showed confusion about the influence of the contextual issues on the work and/or did not make sufficient reference to the work to demonstrate the importance of the contextual issues.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	1	3	4	15	13	14	17	15	10	4	6.1

Question 2 called for a discussion of how compositional devices were used to create structure in the 'other' work studied. Many students chose to describe the structure of the work through diagrams with or without annotations. Other high-scoring responses included tables, subheadings, dot points and prose. Low-scoring responses were characterised by inaccuracy and lack of detail.

The following response is of an excellent quality. It comments on all three compositional devices and delivers a cogent and clear explanation of how these compositional devices create structure. It is rich in references to the use of the elements of music. The work refers to 'Treat Her Right' composed by Roy Head and Gene Kurtz.

The form of the 1965 hit 'Treat Her Right' by Roy Head and The Traits is quite simply structured as intro, verse, chorus, verse and chorus. Compositional devices play a key role in stipulating where these sections arrive, particularly contrast. On the other hand, variation demonstrates differences between verses and between choruses and repetition provides an underlying stability to all sections heard.

Variation

- *Verse 1 varies to verse 2: call and response initially males responded by females whispering. 2nd verse, roles swap as well as male vocal calling more than singing in the second verse (more spoken than sung).*
- *Varied representations of 4/4 time sig.: 2 and 4 emphasis in verse and emphasis on all in chorus.*
- *Screaming intensifies in 2nd chorus, more than the first chorus.*

Contrast

Verse	Chorus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Mp dynamic</i> - <i>More whispery tone colour, less vocal strength</i> - <i>Melody held by male vocal (range of roughly an 8ve)</i> - <i>More melodic forms, due to</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>F dynamic</i> - <i>Use of screaming, yelling and wailing in vocals</i> - <i>Melody held by horn section (range of major 2nd – vocals now unison range).</i> - <i>Rhythmic focus due to smaller range</i>

<p><i>wider range and longer intervals such as 3rds, 4ths and 5ths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Rhythmic accentuation on beats 2/4</i> - <i>Warmer/whispering TCs dominantly, sometimes dry from edge of snare drum and due to low-mid register, whispering and soft attacks</i> - <i>Female vocals whisper in verses</i> 	<p><i>and heavy accentuation on all beats of bar (4/4)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Rhythmic accentuation on all beats of the bar</i> - <i>Mostly brassy/bright/harsh tone colours due to addition of brass and now extremely harsh articulations in all parts.</i> - <i>Female vocals yell through subtle glissandi ascending in chorus</i>
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Repetition

- *Repeated 12 bar blues pattern throughout*
G7 G7 G7 G7
D7 D7 G7 G7
C7 D7 G7 G7
- *Repeated mp vs f dynamic between verse and chorus.*
- *Repeated use of call and response throughout verse and chorus.*
- *Repeated unison/pitches on 'hey hey hey hey' in chorus, male vocal.*

Question 3

For Questions 3a. and 3b. students were required to complete responses about the post-1950 work studied in Unit 4.

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	5	19	76	1.7

This question was generally very well handled. On the whole students were able to clearly identify two characteristics of style from the work they studied. Most students gave an appropriate level of depth to achieve full marks.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	2	6	13	20	22	15	11	8	4.8

This question created an issue for a small number of students and highlights the importance of reading the question carefully. The question called for a discussion based on two elements of music; however, some students wrote about more than two elements of music, in these instances only the first two elements of music mentioned in each response could be assessed. All references to subsequent elements of music were ignored regardless of the quality of the work. High-scoring responses showed a great clarity and depth of understanding about the style of the chosen work and the connection to the elements of music that were discussed in the response.

The following response is of an excellent standard. The writing is clear and concise and makes a number of direct references to the work. Further clarity is added by including a small piece of traditional western notation. The response makes reference to pertinent traditions and styles and shows that like many works this piece of music can trace its origins to more than one point of origin. The response is about 'Misa Criolla' by Ariel Ramirez.


This work, Missa Criolla, is a South American folk mass. In order to illustrate the music style of this work as a South American folk mass, I will discuss instrumentation and rhythm.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation of this work is typical of South American folk mass in the sense that it uses traditional South American instruments. Instruments in this work that are traditional to South America include the Charango, Bolivian panpipes and tom toms. These instruments offer a unique tone colour that contributes to the instrumental blend and gives the music a bright, vibrant sound. The Charango with its bright, crisp tone colour gives the music an energetic quality and the tribal effect typical of South America is created by the airy aspirate sound on the Bolivian Panpipes which feature at the end of the Kyrie when the Gloria is about to begin. Additionally, instrumentation in this work is flexible illustrating how in South American music instrumentation was based on the availability of players.

Rhythm

- In this work, driving rhythms are predominantly created by the charango, which play a*

syncopated rhythm called the carnavalito {  } – This rhythm is commonly used in traditional South American folk music.

- The Kyrie recitative section highlights a more spiritual, religious meaning behind the work. The rhythmic values are sustained and the music generally shows similarities to Renaissance 'chant-like' music which was heavily choir focused. This shows how South American traditional music was also focused on unifying individuals beyond their ethnicity and beliefs, creating a happy and healthy community.*