# 2019 VCE Music Performance performance examination report

## Solo performance examination

### General comments

Some performances in 2019 reached a highly professional standard. Others demonstrated achievement at a range of levels.

Most students came to the exam well prepared. Some made an occasion of it and dressed for performance, which may have helped them to get into performance mode. Most came to the exam with equipment in good condition. They had evidently rehearsed not only the playing, but also the setting up of the performance space. In some instances this required the setting up of their instrument, amplification, backing tracks, percussion equipment and the like. They were also well prepared with peripherals such as spare power leads, cables, backing tracks, strings, reeds and drumsticks. That meant when there were technical difficulties, they were able to take control of the situation and quickly return to their performance.

Generally, most students were well informed of the requirements of the performance task, which are clearly set out in the prescribed list of works for each instrument. It was evident from students' programs that many were aware of the assessment criteria. To maximise their marks, some had chosen programs which demonstrated a wide variety of performance techniques, styles, tonal effects, articulations and structures. Some students had also rehearsed comprehensively with accompanists and backing tracks.

#### Advice for students

The following advice is based on errors commonly noted in examination performances.

#### Avoid compliance errors

This has nothing to do with wrong notes, memory lapses or incorrect rhythms. Through the year of study, students should be in the habit of a weekly check of their performance program against the prescribed list of works. It should be a straightforward matter to achieve full marks for compliance.

#### Secure an appropriate and competent accompanist

Students should be assisted to engage the most appropriate accompanist for their situation and allow for adequate rehearsal time leading up to the performance exam. The accompanist should be identified early in the year. It is advisable to choose two or three possible accompanists and audition them (by having an early rehearsal) before the end of Term 1. An accompanist should be selected for the appropriateness of their skills for the style of music to be played, not just for their good general musicianship. For example, it is unwise to choose a classical musician to accompany a contemporary performance unless they are also highly skilled in that genre. Students should note that the accompanist must always plays a supportive role, not a leading role. Accompanists should not take solos in contemporary works (Solo and Group).

**Develop a varied program**

Students should not base a whole program on their favourite pieces. The program should stretch to a range of styles and performance techniques. Frequently students who perform whole programs of their favourite pieces offer only a restricted range of styles, techniques, tonal effects, articulations and structures. Students should focus on the key word in the criterion: *range.*

**Aim to perform from memory**

For most instruments, it makes little difference whether the performance is from memory or played from music, except for contemporary and classical Voice, where performance from memory is mandatory. However, being able to perform from memory is usually an indication of a thorough knowledge and understanding of the works, and can make a performance more secure, enabling the performer to focus on all of the criteria.

**Take all performance opportunities**

Performance in this examination should be as comfortable and rehearsed as possible. This is much more likely if students take and create as many opportunities to perform as they can – to friends, classmates, parents, siblings – any public audience available.

**Avoid trouble with equipment**

All equipment students intend to bring into their performance– amplifiers, playback equipment, strings, power boards and leads, Bluetooth connections, reeds, instruments, chair, straps, sheet music, program sheets, plectrums, extra music stands – should be checked in advance and be in top working condition. Students receive a list of equipment that will be provided by the VCAA, but they must check and cross-check their own equipment. Limited time is allowed for setting up and packing up, so this must be rehearsed as an integral part of giving a performance.

# Specific information

The following comments outline student performance against the Solo Performance assessment criteria in 2019.

**Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirement of the task**

Although there are performances on over 30 different instruments, the performance task is moderated by the Prescribed List of Works for each instrument as well as the performance requirements for each instrument. In 2019 most, but not all, students successfully consulted the Prescribed List of Works, or performed an approved alternative work. In doing so, they received full marks for this criterion.

**Criterion 2 – Performing accurately and with clarity**

As in previous years, most students who achieved a high mark on this criterion tended to do so on many of the other criteria. Being able to perform accurately at the referenced tempo requires a consistent and disciplined practice regime throughout the whole year. Students who were disciplined about learning the referenced material accurately, tended to work on all aspects of their performance in an integrated way, thus maximising their potential on this and other criteria.

**Criterion 3 – Performing a range of techniques with control and fluency**

The key term in this criterion is the word **range**. Students who lacked the skill to perform a comprehensive range of performance techniques, or who chose programs which lacked the need to use a wide range of techniques, could not access the highest marks. Those who did access the highest marks, not only chose works that displayed a range of techniques but were able to

demonstrate their skill in using these techniques. That technical skill gave them the ability, for example, to control dynamic changes using detailed articulations through rapid passages.

### Criterion 4 – Producing a range of expressive tonal qualities

The critical elements in this criterion are both the range of tonal qualities and the quality of tone throughout different dynamics and articulations. It may be, for example, easy to execute beautiful tonal qualities in a slow lyrical passage, but harder to maintain that quality of tone in a very loud or fast passage. Those who were able to achieve this scored highly on this criterion. It is most difficult on many instruments to maintain a rich tone at a very soft dynamic. Students who achieved this tended to be awarded the highest marks.

### Criterion 5 – Expressive communication through articulation and phrasing

Communication in a piece of music often occurs mainly through the articulation and phrasing. Students who simply went through the motions of playing notes without using phrasing and a variety of articulations scored less well on this criterion. Some students were able to execute the notes but had little understanding of articulations or phrase shaping. This resulted in performances that were bland and uninteresting. Where students did make something of articulation and phrasing, the music seemingly came alive, and was always engaging.

### Criterion 6 – Differentiating the musical lines

In a variety of contexts, the highest scores were gained by students who always had a clear understanding of the musical lines and balanced them appropriately. It was always evident where the main themes were in the musical texture. At times this occurred through modifying the level of those themes and other times through modifying the accompanying (or less important) material. At times musical lines came into and out of prominence within a texture. Where students had given less consideration to the differentiation of the musical lines, the music was less coherent and effective. Often the highlighted passage was simply the one with the most notes, these at times being the accompanying figures. The basis of the choice seemed to be the level of control students were able to execute in a given passage.

### Criterion 7 – Differentiating the structures and characters of each work

Where some criteria focus on the detail within a musical performance (micro), the focus of Criterion 7 is the structural elements within a composition (macro). In a literary work this could be called the plot. In music it is achieved through understanding the global direction of a work, such as the major climactic points, or the tension of a modulatory passage that leads from or towards such a point. The performer needs to have a clear understanding of the structure of each work, as well as performing a variety of structures within the whole program. The highest-scoring performances demonstrated this to a very high level, taking the audience on a musical journey through highlighting the global points of tension and release. Those who received lower scores typically missed the opportunities within the music to create tension and release. Students who nervously rushed through their programs did not provide the space the music demanded. Some students scored poorly on this criterion as their level of general preparedness for the performance was low, so their overall technical facility wasn't able to take up the opportunities presented in the music.

### Criterion 8 – Presenting an informed interpretation of a range of styles

Access to high scores on this criterion depended largely on appropriate programming choices. Students who excelled in a particular style may have scored well but those who scored most highly maximised their performance time and chose each work from a different style. They had also researched the unique elements of each style, and this was evident in their performance.

### Criterion 9 – Performing with musicality through creativity and individuality

Students who scored highest on this criterion were self-assured in their performances, highly skilled technically and understood performance conventions, which demand something of a performer's personality to be exposed. Depending on the genre, this might have been demonstrated in a range of manners, from slight nuances to quite unique interpretations. In every case the reference (score and/or source) and conventions were clearly evident. However, the best performances did not simply mimic other performers, but presented something unique. Students who replicated particular performances did not score as highly as those who brought their own personalities to the music. Some students' performances were technically excellent but did not demonstrate this high level of creativity or individuality, so did not receive full marks on this criterion.

### Criterion 10 – Presenting a musical program within appropriate performance conventions

Many students understood the use of appropriate performance conventions. Unfortunately, students who were least prepared for the exam, tended to focus only on getting though the mechanics of the performance. Often poorly prepared students made errors of convention such as failure to address the audience through facing the wrong way or being obscured from audience view by a piece of equipment. In some cases, the flow of the performance was hampered by technology failure (e.g. Bluetooth backing tracks that did not connect). However, students who were well prepared were able to create a smooth and seamless flow from one work to the next. They were able to make sense of the flow in the performance through creative ordering of the program.

# Group performance examination

## General comments

In 2019, 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 2019, there was a high standard of preparation for the performances 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 achieve high marks on 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.

Students and teachers should consider a range of individual skill areas to best approach the composition of groups and program development. It is important to place students within a group context that best allows them to meet the requirements of the criteria.

For example, when a class contains more than one vocalist the group composition and repertoire will be informed by the individual characteristics of each student. Elements such as vocal range, tone, timbre, ability to harmonise, dynamic range and a grasp of stylistic authenticity should be determining factors in decisions regarding instrumentation and repertoire.

The two vocalists could either present separate programs reflecting their individual strengths or 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 select 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 performance examination program. This list is available on the VCAA website and updated annually.

### Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria were applied to the whole program, not to individual works. There were 10 criteria covering all instruments and the performance of all works in the program. The examination specifications and criteria for this examination also included annotations to help unpack each criterion into components more relevant to particular instruments.

In 2019, the requirements of Criterion 1 concerning 'compliance with the requirements of the task' were achieved, with very few exceptions.

**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 on the assessment criteria when making this decision. For example, students may impact their marks by playing a second instrument that they are not particularly competent with for part of the program. Students should also be careful not to compromise the amount of time spent performing to their strengths. An opposite example might be where a student is a strong performer on more than one instrument. In this situation, there are certain criteria on which a 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 performed as members of a group or ensemble and were assessed in this context. The level of ability of other members of the group did not directly affect the assessed students' results. Assessors concentrated on the performance of the student being assessed and on how well they met the criteria for assessment.

**Composition of groups**

A group was defined as two or more students. Where a group comprised two performers only, that group could 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) were able to 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 enable them to achieve to the best of their ability. 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 best address all of the criteria.

**Program selection**

The program should contain 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 present 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.

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 bass guitarist, for example, could use a plectrum, finger style, slapping, muting, double stopping, tapping and/or alternative tunings.

**Time limits**

The time allowed for the examination varies according to the number of assessed performers in a group (this information 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 ensure that changeovers between pieces are well rehearsed to allow them to make the most of their performance time. It is recommended that the prescribed works be performed early in the program, with full participation from assessed performers, 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. All examination performances must be presented at safe volume levels.

In 2019, 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.