

2019 VCE Music Style and Composition examination report

General comments

The 2019 VCE Music Style and Composition aural and written examination was consistent with the *VCE Music Study Design 2017–2021*, the sample examination material published in April 2017 and had a similar structure to the 2017 and 2018 examinations. The examination consisted of two sections worth a total of 100 marks. The questions in Section A focused exclusively on Area of Study 1, 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, 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. Every attempt has been made to replicate the visual representations that were included in some of the sample 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 of music from a range of styles from a variety of cultures including 1980s pop, Australian blues, trip hop, contemporary world music and mainstream twentieth-century symphonic music for orchestra. Many responses demonstrated 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. Low-scoring responses were less detailed and used language in a less effective manner. Fewer observations about the characteristics of the excerpts were included in such responses. Questions that required students to explain the treatment of structure and rhythm in the excerpts proved challenging for many students.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	0	1	5	10	14	22	16	11	15	6	6.6

Generally, students responded very well to this question. Most students were awarded six or more marks out of the maximum of 10. Students were usually able to incorporate observations about both of the compositional devices mentioned in the question and communicate the interrelated nature of these. The highest-scoring responses described the repetitive nature of the progressively introduced ostinati. This was often paired with observations about the contrast that was achieved by the increasing diversity in texture, tone colour and rhythmic interest. High-scoring responses also made observations about the contrasting nature of elements of music that were simultaneously presented. Commentary on the differences in tone colour between the vocal part and the instrumental accompaniment was commonly used.

The following high-scoring response highlights many of these attributes.

Contrast is heard in the reverberant and warm timbre of the bass playing in the lower range and the shrill timbre of the trumpet

Repetition is heard in the repeated ostinati in the drums which create a drive and forward moving along with the repeated clapping ostinati

There is also a repeated descending scalar bassline which establishes tonality

Contrast in articulation is heard in the sustained legato chords of the synth which create an echoing, slow decay on each note and the staccato articulation of the repeated bass ostinato, creating a quick attack and slow delay on each note.

The short even and repeated phrases of the vocal melody contrast with the uneven phrase lengths of the trumpet melody at the end of the excerpt.

Repeated treatment of articulation is heard at the end of phrases in the voice; often the last note of each phrase is sustained and creates an organic sounding decay which fades naturally

Rhythmic contrast is heard between the short note lengths such as semiquavers used in the repeated bass line and sustained semibreves in the synth played simultaneously

The mellow timbre of the upper range yet comfortable register of the panpipes riffs in between vocal phrases contrasts with the aspirate timbre of the voice in a low register creating a “whisper like” vocal effect

The repeated breaths in the introduction provide an atmospheric wash

Repeated use of sudden decrescendo at the end of vocal phrases on the last sustained note creates a sense of continuity on the music

A repeated motif is used in the horns towards the end of the excerpt to create a build up to the eventual trumpet solo. This motif is also consecutively repeated down a second to create a descending sequence

Contrast in dynamics is created through the forte dynamics of the harsh timbre of the trumpet solo in the upper register and the mf dynamic of the aspirate voice singing in the lower range with legato articulation

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	6	5	Average
%	0	2	13	36	26	19	5	3.7

This question proved more challenging. It is recommended that students determine the level of depth required in their responses by the marks available. In this instance, simply including an identification of the chord progression used – 12-bar blues – was insufficient to score highly. Details of the differences between the introduction, the individual choruses and coda should have been included for a more thorough analysis. Aspects of the work that could have supported a description of the structure include:

- An introduction followed by a strophic structure comprising six verses punctuated by a four-bar prelude featuring tonic harmony and concluding with a brief coda. Each of the verses employed a 12-bar blues chord progression:
 - Instrumental introduction featuring a dominant pedal point and a chordal upper structure
 - Verse 1 (sung)
 - Verse 2 (sung)
 - 4-bar vocal prelude with stop-time accompaniment featuring tonic harmony
 - Verse 3 (sung)
 - Verse 4 (instrumental)
 - Verse 5 (instrumental)
 - Verse 6 (sung, stop-time repeat of verse 3)
 - 4-bar outro.

Students included other observations such as:

- the 'responses' played by solo instruments in the fourth, eighth and twelfth bars of many of the vocal verses
- solo instruments 'trading fours'
- the drum solos.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	0	4	8	14	18	9	15	10	8	5	5	2	6.3

This question required a description of both harmony and rhythm/time. Observations that could have been included in responses are as follows.

Harmony

- Repeating harmonic pattern

I	IV7	I	I7
IV7	IV7	I	I
V7	IV7	I	I

- All verses follow the above harmonic pattern, with the exception of verse 3, which has four bars of stop-time on chord I before commencing the verse structure. The introduction features a dominant pedal point (drone).
- An ensemble of clarinet, trombone and trumpet provides sustained harmonies under the voice.
- There is the occasional use of chord extensions and added notes to colour the harmony.

Rhythm/Time

- The song is in a medium tempo swing or Dixieland jazz/blues style. During the verses the rhythm section of bass and drums play a four-to-the-bar swing-style accompaniment, while the piano provides harmonic support through a mixture of sustained chords, syncopated rhythmic stabs and improvised countermelodies.
- The singer works in contrast to the rhythm section. A more relaxed approach to time is employed, singing behind the beat.
- The short solo breaks are rhythmically quite free against the accompaniment, but still based on swing rhythms.
- The instrumental soloists tend to use a larger variety of rhythmic patterns in their lines, contrasting longer notes with semiquavers, triplets, syncopation and 'swung' quavers.
- During the stop-time verse and prelude the instruments strongly accent the first beat of the first two bars before reverting to swing time. The vocal line is more rhythmically strict at this point, before reverting to a freer approach to rhythm.
- During the trading fours section, the drummer develops variations of swing quaver rhythms, with frequent use of syncopation.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	0	1	4	9	18	19	16	13	8	8	3	1	6.7

This question required students to explain how interest was created through the combination of texture and tone colour in the excerpt. Students employed many different approaches to their responses with equal success. In some instances, students took a chronological approach to their explanations, highlighting significant changes in texture and tone colour across the excerpt.

Some students were unable to complete an explanation that included both of these elements of music in combination. In other cases, students could not find appropriate terminology to describe the less common electronic and synthesised sounds featured. Some points that may have been included in responses are as follows.

- The excerpt opens with a gradual fade-in of ethereal, bell-like, shimmering synth sounds supported by sustained moving tones in the middle and upper register. There is no sense of meter as yet.
- This texture is disrupted with the arrival of a mid-register sample of a non-western string instrument. The ensuing loop features a short dotted rhythmic motif coloured by microtonal pitch movement. This is supported by a percussion groove based on cymbals and hand drum sounds. The fast duple meter is intensified by the addition of a brisk tambourine pattern, and then the entire texture is suspended with the arrival of a short non-western-sounding sample.
- This leads directly into a more relaxed groove, which is less frantic and has a seductive character, driven by low, dry toms and sub bass. A squelch bass ostinato pattern is added, which builds to another iteration of the initial non-western sample. The vocals then enter. The lyrics of the first verse are chanted rhythmically over the percussion groove, which is intensified by the re-entry of the squelch bass ostinato.
- The chorus has greater pitch movement in the vocal part, and the rhythm is further intensified with the addition of driving drums, giving a sense of acceleration and crescendo. The vocal part splits into two at this point, filling a more prominent role within the texture. The non-western string sample reappears in the background. This section climaxes with an abrupt 'break down' that features a cut of all parts and the introduction of jangling, treble strums on an electric guitar. A squelch bass in contrasting rhythm is added and a short burst of the string sample leads into the previously established texture of the verse for the next vocal entry.

- There are many points of tonal contrast in this excerpt, achieved in different ways. The voice parts are low and dry, combining well with the dry percussion while contrasting strongly with the strident string samples and jangly electric guitar. The two types of bass (sub and squelch) complement each other while providing contrast in tone in the bass register.
- Interest is created by contrasting the gradual build-up of layers with the sudden unpredictable shifts of texture, usually involving the more mysterious sampled sounds. These sounds themselves add a level of mystery, as the sound sources are hard to clearly define and are suggestive of exoticism and unpredictability through their strident tone colours and contrasting rhythmic cells. There is also contrast between the driving rhythmic episodes and the more unsettled moments such as the opening. The opening itself seems illusory, as it sets up a vague, dreamy texture, which is quickly replaced by the arrival of a clear rhythmic pulse.

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	2	9	18	27	19	9	11	4	4.4

Some very fine responses were completed in response to this question. The open nature of the question allowed some students to respond with great detail, describing the nature of the melody in an evocative manner while also incorporating technical details. Issues of tonality, contour, phrasing, range, register, instrumentation and rhythmic freedom were all explored in a satisfying manner.

The following high-scoring response featured a number of these attributes. Note that the solo instrument was identified as cello rather than the five-stringed electric violin. This was not an issue in marking and misidentification of this instrument was considered inconsequential due to the obscurity of the instrument.

The melody is characterised by a morose, sombre, melancholic character at the beginning, but then moves to a more playful, joyous feel as the tempo accelerates.

It is in a minor key and has a singable (small range and linear, stepwise motion) quality

The style established in this section is Romantic 19th C due to

Much vibrato in Cello

Long lyrical lines

Minor 7th chords

Harmonic suspensions

Steady, plodding tempo to reflect the sombre mood

The intervals used in the melody are small which also provides strong linkage to a song – it's as if the cello were singing

The register that the cello is playing is comfortable indicating a cantabile (sung) feel, as it too would fit the range of a baritone/tenor male voice.

This section is clearly homophonic with cello melody and others on acc. – this is contrasted in 4b.

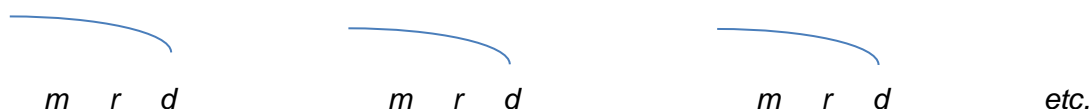
Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	0	2	5	17	22	16	14	13	6	3	5.8

Few students scored above eight marks out of the 10 available for this question. Many were able to identify the more basic details such as changes in tempo and register; however, many of the more sophisticated aspects of melodic contour and articulation were not addressed.

The following high-scoring response expressed the development of the melody from the excerpt used in Question 4a. in a satisfying manner.

The development of this melody comes through its interval repetition:



which contrasts with the more through-composed internal structure of the 4a part.

The melody is too enchanged by a more lively tempo

It is developed through the addition of duet-like surrounding counter-melodies

The character is also developed from morose to dance-like and joyous.

The style also shifts too from Romantic 19th century classical to a Jewish/tango like dance. This shift is primarily characterised through

Trills, abundance thereof!

Squeaky tone colour of accordian (not present in 4a.)


Driving bassline - _ - _ (i, V, i, V etc.)

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	0	1	4	7	15	19	19	13	8	6	6	1	6.8

Many students responded to this question in a positive manner. The open nature of the question allowed students to identify many musical characteristics that contributed to the ‘dramatic mood’. Observations commonly included the dynamic change across the excerpt, the use of an asymmetric time signature of 5/4 and the variety of dramatic tone colours employed.

The following high-scoring response backed up the assertion of dramatic mood by incorporating a description of the elements of music and compositional devices.

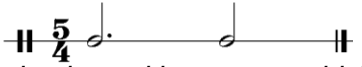
The small swells  *in bass instruments = intensity = character*

Mood = ominous, sinister, warlike

The combined rhythm  that begins in the bows of the string section creates a dry tone colour is what's developed and exploited throughout resulting in sinister character.

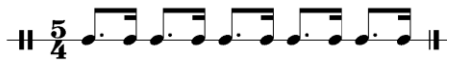
The interplay between the brass (tpts.) creates an intense call and response = sinister character.

The mood/character is chiefly created and correlated to dynamic change: louder dynamics = more intensity of character = ominous mood.

The second iteration of this passage  in brass is harmonised in triads which creates an antagonism and polytonal language = thicker texture and greater harmonic intensity = development of warlike character

The tritone plays a crucial role in character, it being the most harmonically distant from the tonic = harmonic intensity = development in mood/intensity

The echoing of this rhythm around the orchestration creates an intensity = warlike character

The predominance of triadic (parallel movement)  is what creates rhythmic drive in this excerpt = war character

Holst uses a very large orchestra for this suite which is on full display during this climax of this excerpt. This is used to outline/depict the majesty of the equally large planets in the solar system.

The unusual (uncharacteristic) tone colour employed at the beginning (through *marteleo* technique) is novel thus leading to depiction of intensity of character

The steady tempo also gives imagery of interstellar martians as it is steady, relentless (coupled with the slightly lopsided 5/4 time) which is part of the overall character.

Section B

Section B assessed students' understanding of the Outcome 2 works 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
- characteristic of 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, with the highest-scoring showing an in-depth knowledge of the works chosen for study. In these cases, students made many direct references to the works using appropriate music terminology. However, some students had difficulty responding to questions in this section of the examination. Questions on style posed particular challenges for

students. Some of the contentions around style were problematic. The characteristics of style referred to must be correct and clearly observable in the work chosen for study. Thorough research is recommended.

A broad range of works was chosen for study. Along with works from the liturgical, jazz, contemporary popular and western art music traditions, students also studied works from a range of styles including rap, R&B/hip hop and avant-garde. Selection of works is critical to students' success in this section of the examination. It is important that there are sufficient resources available to thoroughly study the context and style of the works chosen. It was heartening to see that students who chose works not previously selected for study had in general thoroughly analysed and researched the context and style of works.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	14	86	0.9

Students were required to answer this question in relation to the Australian work they had studied in Unit 3. In order to be awarded the mark, students were required to be accurate. In a small number of instances, inaccurate identifications of style were given. It is important that students are able to clearly and accurately identify the style of the work studied. This 'surface knowledge' is essential to a more in-depth description of the style of the work. Responses to this question were assessed separately from any information given in responses to Question 1b.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	16	30	34	17	2.5

This question called for a description of two characteristics of the style of the work. A vital aspect in responding to this question was depth. An evaluation of the level of depth required should be based on the number of marks available. Many students fulfilled the requirements of the question by making three or more assertions per characteristic. These characteristics could have been compositional devices, elements of music or indeed broader observations about aspects of the work.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	6	25	33	20	10	2.8

Although high marks were generally awarded for this question, it was challenging for some students. When explaining the presence of one of the stylistic characteristics described in Question 1b., students were required to provide evidence. Unfortunately, some responses lacked depth. In these instances, more evidence from the work could have been included. Some responses contained inaccurate information. As mentioned, a thorough disambiguation around style must be carried out. If examined without sufficient depth, students could incorrectly attribute the use of the elements of music and compositional devices to styles.

Another issue that became apparent was related to works from particular geographical areas. The study design does indicate that geographical locations can contribute to style; however, works from the same country or geographical location are often influenced by a number of styles and compositional movements. These are not necessarily specific to all composers from that place. Students' responses should be based on a thorough study of stylistic influences. This should not

stop at the treatment of a limited analysis of the elements of music and compositional devices. Students should ensure they do not communicate a flawed classification of the work. Acknowledging multiple stylistic influences could prevent this and is often appropriate. Incorrect assertions about style could result in few or no marks being awarded. Fortunately, many students accurately and thoroughly responded to this question and accordingly were awarded high marks.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	4	6	18	27	23	7	9	2	4.2

Question 2 called for an explanation of how two elements of music were used to create contrast. In this instance students were asked to examine contrast on global, macro and micro levels in relation to the 'other' work studied in Unit 3. Generally, this question was answered well. Many students chose to describe contrast through diagrams. Other high-scoring responses included tables, subheadings, dot points and prose. There was good use of traditional notation and other methods of written communication that evoked sound.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	4	2	1	4	10	14	15	14	12	8	9	6	2	6.5

For Question 3 students were required to complete a response about the post-1950 work studied in Unit 4.

This question proved challenging for many students. The main challenge related to the question prompt. Many students did not engage with the quote and seemed to deliver a previously prepared response related to one or more of the options included in the question. High-scoring responses took a variety of approaches to answering. Some included an introductory statement that addressed the question and prompt and then went about discussing the selected area or areas with evidence from the work. Others included references to the prompt throughout the response, closing each paragraph with a reference to the prompt. Conclusions at the end of the response were also common among high-scoring responses. Supplying a summation is a valid way of concluding such a discussion.