



2011 Music Style and Composition GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2011 examination consisted of two sections and comprised 100 marks. Both sections of the examination were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published in the examination specifications. The question style and the length of the examination were consistent with the published sample assessment material.

While generally well prepared for the examination, a significant number of students struggled to use appropriate music terminology, language and, particularly in Section B, relevant and well-constructed music examples to support analysis and discussion. The use of appropriate terminology is a key skill for each outcome of the study and should infuse every aspect of a student’s experience of the subject. Students who relied on metaphor and extensive prose descriptions in place of appropriate terminology did not score as well as those who had a command of discipline-specific vocabulary. The ‘Advice for teachers’ document that accompanies the study design for Music Style and Composition lists an extensive range of relevant terms for music analysis. While the study design does not mandate any specific term or style of terminology, the list as a whole represents a vital resource for students and teachers.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Section A consisted of five questions and was worth 54 marks. An audio CD lasting 59 minutes and 13 seconds accompanied this section of the examination. The length of the CD corresponded to the weighting of Section A as set out in the examination specifications.

Students are advised to read questions thoroughly before forming a response. Students who approached each question by only constructing listening diaries often presented a significant amount of extraneous information that was not relevant to the question and therefore did not score any marks.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	0	0	0	2	4	12	21	21	20	21	6.9

Students generally answered this question effectively, with high-scoring responses demonstrating a clear understanding of the relationship between the role of an instrument and the texture of the excerpt. Low-scoring responses tended to confuse the role of an instrument in the ensemble with issues of tone colour. High-scoring responses focused on, but were not limited to, details of the role of instruments and the texture of the excerpt such as:

- piano – it had a ‘comping’ role that reinforced the harmonic scheme. It served as part of the ‘rhythm section’ rather than taking on a melodic role. Unusually, the piano doubled the bass guitar, giving the excerpt an idiosyncratic sound
- bass guitar – served a bass-line function with the addition of florid interjections
- percussion – ‘rhythm section’ function with a standard rock rhythm. The hi-hat and snare drum emphasised beats 2 and 4 of common time. The kick drum generally featured a double shot on each down beat. It functioned to embellish the texture with regular ‘fills’
- rhythm guitar – played a supporting role to the piano and emphasised the harmony on beats 2 and 4. Not particularly prominent early in the excerpt but took on more significance as the excerpt unfolded
- brass – functioned as the primary countermelody to the vocals. Marked by a florid descending line that framed the structure of the lyrics
- vocals – began with a solo voice that later operated in harmony with a second voice. After the introduction, the vocals became the prime focus of the piece in terms of melodic content.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	24	52	21	1.9

Students handled this question well, with the majority focusing on one of the primary melodic sources for the excerpt, namely the brass and the vocals. The sound source used to respond to this question may or may not have been previously described in Question 1a. without penalty.

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Students could elect to consider any sound source at any point in the excerpt and could consider the entire length of a particular sound source's melodic contour or a small section; both approaches could score full marks for this question. The most successful responses had an understanding of contour as a factor of horizontal pitch arrangement: these responses were marked by discipline-specific terminology and possessed a good degree of detail. Diagrams, including pitch-contour graphs, were acceptable and were often well used.

High-scoring responses included, but were not limited to, discussion of melodic contour focusing on issues of conjunct and disjunct motion; bell-shaped and inverted bell-shaped contours at different points of melodic motion; examinations of sequential phrases; climax-driven phrase structures; and issues of melodic embellishment at various points in the excerpt.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	27	53	18	1.9

Students were again free to choose any sound source to answer this part of the question, regardless of whether they had considered it previously. As with Question 1b., students could consider the entire length of a particular sound source's rhythm or a small section; both approaches could score full marks for the question. High-scoring responses included, but were not limited to, an examination of the rhythmic pattern expressed by the drum kit (a standard rock rhythm with the hi-hat and snare drum emphasising beats 2 and 4 of common time and the kick drum generally featuring a double shot on each down beat) and the syncopation embedded in the brass, piano and vocal parts.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	1	7	18	31	29	15	4.3

Students responded very well to this question, with many making good use of the terminology included in the question prompt. The most successful responses constructed a detailed melodic analysis; low-scoring responses tended to make isolated observations about melody without backing up the response with examples from the excerpt or providing adequate detail for a capable description. For example, some students referred to an 'arch-like' melody without expanding on or qualifying this concept.

Detailed melodic analyses included, but were not limited to, the following observations about the melody of the excerpt:

- florid melodic line marked by pitch bends and irregular vibrato
- descriptions of the scale form – *hirajoshi* or altered minor scale (note that students were not expected to be familiar with the specific name of the scale)
- much melodic activity centred on the tonic or 'final' note, with this note acting as a melodic anchor for multiple phrases
- repeated phrase structure that emphasised the leap of a fourth
- a regular, repeated climax point that was repeated across several of the phrases.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	1	4	9	14	21	17	20	6.6

This question was very well answered, with the majority of students receiving five or more marks. The most successful answers were characterised by coherent explanations that clearly linked the issue of contrast with the two elements of music under examination. Lower-order responses were often simply descriptions of the two elements. Answers included, but were not limited to, the following:

Tone colour

The excerpt was a sound scape built from a variety of sampled, synthesised and recorded sound sources. As a result, there was a huge variety of tone colour, which contributed to the contrast inherent in the work. Metaphor was necessary and appropriate here, and responses that effectively employed metaphor to describe the various tone colours at work in the excerpt were generally those that scored full marks.

Texture

The texture of the work consisted of multiple strands of music, including a regular iteration of the phrase 'it's a jungle out there' and a synthesised rock ensemble including a piano that took on a melodic role, a tenor voice and 'synth' pads. The rock ensemble created a homophonic texture that supported the melodic idea in the piano. Call and response (that,



at times, verged on polyphony) was demonstrated routinely in the interactions between the tenor voice and the piano part.

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	3	12	29	29	17	9	3.7

Many students used diagrams to answer this question. The most successful responses described the structure of the excerpt using melody as the element that delineated form. (Other elements, such as harmony, do, of course delineate form, and while students who mentioned the harmonic scheme did receive credit for their responses, the question required students to interact with melody on some level.) Low-scoring responses tended to describe structure and melody independently of each other.

Features of the music referred to in high-scoring responses included, but were not limited to, matters such as: The excerpt was in two parts and, while it can be understood as binary form, the excerpt itself was part of a sonata-form exposition (students were not expected to know this). A generic identification of a formal structure (such as binary form or sonata-form exposition) represented only a starting point for answering the question – a more detailed description was required. The first section of the excerpt involved a minor-key melody and contrasting passage marked by interplay between the string parts. This was a repeated binary structure with unequal repetition of phrases. The second iteration of the minor key motive saw the idea passed to the bass instruments. The second section of the excerpt was introduced by a new motive, which was treated contrapuntally and led eventually to a melody with a major tonality but set with chromatic harmony.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	1	2	5	10	14	22	16	17	9	5	5.4

Students were required to construct a discussion around three aspects of variation evident in the excerpt. Variation refers to a change in an established pattern when heard again. Many students constructed effective discussions around issues related to re-orchestration of melodic ideas as well as the contrapuntal treatment of melodic ideas. However, a number used the changed dynamic profile of a fixed melodic idea as a process of variation. In terms of a compositional device, simply altering the dynamic is more a function of contrast than variation. Students who took this approach did receive marks but could not achieve full marks.

High-scoring responses referred, but were not limited, to discussions around the following issues:

- phrase extensions
- changed harmonisation of melodic ideas
- the passing of motivic ideas around the ensemble
- the contrapuntal treatment of motivic ideas
- reorchestration of melodic ideas.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	1	2	17	23	26	16	10	4	4.8

Students were required to describe how rhythm and harmony were used in the excerpt. Responses related to rhythm were generally very good: students were able to accurately describe both the rhythmic profile of the work and the processes that informed the development of rhythm through the excerpt. However, many students struggled to describe the harmony in the excerpt. Students and teachers are reminded that harmony is an element mandated for study by the study design.

Answers included, but were not limited to, the following:

- allegro (lively) rhythm featuring a regular quaver pulse (motoric rhythm)
- the primary rhythmic motive in the excerpt (which was used to build almost all thematic material) featured a simple augmentation process (following a quaver rest, two semiquavers are extended to two quavers, which were then extended to two crotchets)
- harmony was primarily minor in orientation but featured unusual chord successions that were broadly outside the lexicon of common-practice tonality
- minor triads interspersed with augmented triads: most harmony was triadic in origin
- extensive horizontal presentation of harmonic ideas (arpeggiated figures).



Section B

Section B consisted of four questions and was worth 46 marks. The questions were linked to the works students had studied in Units 3 and 4 and, as for previous examinations, addressed issues of context, characteristics of music style and compositional design. One work in Unit 3 needed to be an Australian composition and one work in Unit 4 needed to have been composed or created after 1910.

Students selected appropriate works, with selections from a wide range of Australian composers. Some students relied heavily on quotes drawn from the composer of a work as the only source of information related to contextual issues for those works. Students and teachers are reminded that contextual issues can relate to a range of social and cultural phenomena, and that the statements of a composer are only one subjective source of information. Ideally, modern musicological study should inform the theoretical framework that underpins the enquiries around the works studied for Section B of the examination. As such, students should understand that a composition is a cultural object that is ultimately independent of the composer. Once a work enters the public domain through performance, the composer no longer has authority over it; they cannot control or prevent performances of the work and, importantly, cannot substantially influence how the work is heard, received or understood. Furthermore, composers are notoriously unreliable judges of and commentators on their own work. For example, years after the composition of *The Rite of Spring*, the composer Stravinsky claimed that no Russian folk music was used in its composition and all the melodic material was of his own design; this was later proved untrue.

In the same way, the statements of Australian composers about the function and construction of their work should not be the only source of information that informs the study of contextual issues. There is a wealth of information available to students and teachers through the Australian Music Centre and through a range of publications related to music making in Australia. Students and teachers are encouraged to examine these sources in addition to the comments made by a composer about his or her own work.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	3	1	1	3	10	16	19	21	13	11	6.1

This question required students to contextualise their understanding of the Australian composition they had studied through a composer's attempts to sustain the audience's interest in the work. Importantly, students were free to disagree with the premise of the question – namely that the composer was attempting to sustain audience interest. Contemporary art music often possesses artistic aims that eschew issues of how an audience may or may not react to a composition; many students discussed these issues using language and concepts of a pleasingly high standard. The most successful responses to this question demonstrated a clear knowledge (including specific, targeted music examples) of the work that had been studied, with this knowledge shaped to discuss the issue of sustaining audience interest. Weaker responses tended to present prepared answers that were not tailored to the question.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	4	1	2	3	4	4	8	11	15	17	17	7	8	7.9

This question focused on music style and required students to refer to three elements of music. The most successful responses dealt primarily with characteristics of music style and used three elements as examples of the operation of the identified style. Many students constructed answers that simply described the use of three elements in their chosen work. Where this type of response did not adequately deal with the characteristics of music style, full marks were not awarded. Low-scoring responses tended to neglect the issue of music style and focused solely on the elements.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	2	2	3	5	9	19	14	23	10	9	6.6

Students were again free to disagree with the premise of this question and could argue for or against the proposition of the question prompt without penalty; both approaches could score full marks. This question gave students the opportunity to construct a discussion around the contextual issues that surrounded the work composed or created after 1910. Higher-order responses were characterised by an overt interaction with the question prompt; lower-order responses tended to ignore the prompt in favour of prepared answers that sometimes contained irrelevant information.

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Question 9a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	7	19	27	18	25	3.2

This question required students to describe a significant characteristic of the music style of the other work they had studied in Unit 4. Many students did not properly read the question and rather than describing one significant characteristic of the relevant style, instead described the style more broadly. Students and teachers are reminded that information studied for the examination must be tailored to the question asked. In this instance, students who simply recited a prepared answer around the issue of style scored lower than they would have if they had written a description of a significant characteristic of the said style.

Question 9b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	2	3	5	11	9	14	16	13	12	10	6.2

This question required students to synthesise a range of information around both compositional devices and elements of music. Many students performed well on this question. The most successful responses made clear the link between the compositional devices and the elements, whereas lower-order responses tended to describe each device and element in isolation.