



2004 Music Performance Solo GA 2: Solo Performance Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Overall, the level of performance in the Music Solo Performance exam continues to be very good, with most students appearing very well prepared for their assessments and choosing an appropriate repertoire. The programs reflected the diversity of choices available from the Prescribed List, and most students seemed to present pieces that showed their strengths. Students generally presented programs that were of a suitable duration and displayed a wide range of styles and characters within the 25 minutes allowed. Most students' programs demonstrated the criteria and were assessed on the full marks available; however, a small number presented programs that did not fulfil the requirements, so marks were deducted accordingly.

Many students in the lower range demonstrated a lack of performance experience and understanding of styles. Students should gain as much performance experience as possible in their preparation, not just on their examination works, but also on less technically challenging works. This would help students to gain confidence in how well they can handle performance pressures and different performance conditions. They would improve their ability to maintain focus and not be distracted by surrounding conditions. Different performers have different ways of achieving a successful performance, and these should have been explored and tried out in Unit 1.

The 2006 Prescribed List is available online at the VCAA website. This list cannot be used in 2005 unless prior approval has been given under the Alternative Works approval process.

This report should be read in conjunction with the 2003 Assessment Report.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

All Instrument Lists

Choice of works from the Prescribed List

The wide range of works in one list allowed students to present a program that showed their technique at its best. Most students were able to present a program that they seemed to enjoy; however, there were still instances of poorly chosen programs. There were several examples of players who may have been able to perform at a higher level, but who struggled through one or two technically challenging works. There were also several examples of students who presented easier, well-constructed programs, which were performed at an excellent standard; these students subsequently received high marks. It is difficult to predict whether a challenging piece can be achieved within the time available in the semester to prepare a program; the student, in consultation with their teacher, is the best person to make this choice. The student's discipline in maintaining an effective practice routine probably has the greatest influence on such a decision.

Students are expected to successfully demonstrate that they have achieved the work – that they have learnt all the notes and rhythms in each work and can perform it at the appropriate speed and with the expressive qualities indicated in the score. For a higher grade, students are expected to demonstrate interpretation in performance.

Incomplete works

Almost all students performed the prescribed or approved works in their entirety – a performance can only be complete if the work is performed without missing out any bar or section. The standard of the prescribed work is determined by the performance of every bar of solo music as notated. A few students did not perform complete works and a penalty was applied. However, it is permissible for an accompanist to delete accompaniment passages where the solo performer is not playing; for example, extended passages (such as introductions) where the student does not need the time to recover.

For some works in the Prescribed List, only a particular passage of a complete work is specified – in this case the student should only perform what is specified, no more. Care should be taken to perform the correct movement(s) of a work which has more than one movement. If the incorrect movement is performed, a penalty may apply. If one of two (or more) movements is omitted from a required work, then a penalty will apply. When performing Baroque works, it is optional to perform the Da Capo repeat (if there is one), though it may be advantageous to do the repeat with added embellishments in the appropriate Baroque style.



Incomplete programs

Although virtually all students performed the required number of works, some did not perform the minimum required within the time allocated. In these cases, a penalty was applied. For most lists, the minimum number of works required is four, but some lists required more. The assessors understand that a student may not perform the required number of works for a variety of reasons; however, none of these will prevent a penalty from being applied. Some students did not perform a work because they were not ready to perform it. Future students should aim to begin the selection of their final program in Term 4 the year before, and finalise their program early in February. This will allow more time to prepare each work and also gives some leeway, just in case one work does not work out or 'sit well'.

In other situations, students were unable to perform their last required work – they simply ran out of time. Again, a penalty was applied. Students should accurately time their program in performance conditions and allow at least a minute leeway (depending on technical matters that may require attention during a performance). The examination lasts only 25 minutes. Students who aim to use up the whole 25 minutes should try out their program months before, so they can juggle the choice of approved works to fit within the time allowed and have time for the final 'polishing' and experimenting with interpretations.

It appeared that some students may have left their best work to last but, because they ran out of time, it was not played. A work not performed in the time allocated cannot contribute to the final mark. If the work not performed was a required work, for example one of the required two 20th century works, a penalty was applied. Careful forward planning would avoid such issues, and students and teachers should prepare the program as a whole, including changeover, rather than preparing the works individually. Students should practise performing the whole program at home and also in concert conditions, as this would help in deciding the best way to use the 25 minutes available.

Importance of the accompanist

Accompanied works for single line instruments, including voice, formed the majority of works in the Prescribed List. An accompanied work means that the musical meaning is spread across two performers, and in this context the solo performer has a particular role to play in presenting the work. A few students performed accompanied works without an accompanist. In these situations a penalty was applied (although an exception is granted for works from the Voice list), as the performance of an accompanied work without an accompanist is incomplete. A student cannot demonstrate their understanding of performing the main musical or accompanying ideas if their associate performer is missing.

The student, and their teacher and family, should plan well ahead to book the best accompanist and prepare the work thoroughly before rehearsing with the accompanist. Top accompanists are excellent coaches who will help illuminate the structure and style(s) represented by the work, and assist in the development of interpretation. Their work is complementary to other music specialists. This is an additional expense and can be a logistic challenge; however, some specialist music teachers, or the class music teacher in the student's school or a nearby school, may have excellent accompanist skills. Music associations such as VMTA can provide lists of accompanists in particular areas.

Throughout the student's VCE course, teachers should ensure that students gain experience in rehearsing and performing with an accompanist. If the initial works performed are well within the technical ability of the student, this may allow them the opportunity to adjust to their associate artist in a variety of ways in order to develop a musical partnership. In the VCE Music Performance Study Design, the relevant key skill is 'show cooperation and empathy with an accompanist as appropriate to the instrument and the work performed'.

When booking an accompanist for the examination, students should ensure that full details are agreed to; for example, meeting time at venue, duration of warm-up rehearsal, payment and the scheduled starting time of the examination. A few times the student and the accompanist had different times, which resulted in an unnecessary level of anxiety at the examination centre. Students and their teachers should be thorough in all aspects of planning for this examination.

What time?

Every year the Examinations Unit at the VCAA publishes students' individual examination times at least a month before the actual date. The dates are now circulated through the VASS network to the students' schools, or their main school if they take subjects from more than one registered VCE school.

Students should be careful if the examination date is scheduled on a changeover day to daylight saving. In the past, unaware students (and accompanists) have arrived one hour late, or just in time to walk into the examination room without a warm-up!



What style?

The style in which the student is expected to perform a particular work is determined by the Prescribed List. The student must demonstrate that they have achieved the complete work in the style as listed in the Prescribed List, and a penalty will be applied if the work as cited in the Prescribed List is not recognisable. The category heading in which a work is placed determines the style of performance, particularly in contemporary popular music. For example, a tune in the Jazz category can only be performed in that style. In the 'Jazz Era' category in the 'Voice Classical' list, there are some songs that are music theatre songs. These should be performed in a jazz style, not a music theatre style.

Pre-recorded accompaniments and backing tracks

This comment is particularly relevant to students performing works from the 'Voice – Contemporary Popular' and 'Guitar – Contemporary Popular' lists. The quality of the recorded accompaniments and the way they are incorporated in the performance can often be improved. First, students should review the advice given in the introduction to the Prescribed List, the VCE Music Performance Study Design, the 2003 Assessment Report and the VCE Bulletin No. 160 December 2000, Supplement 1 – Sample material for end-of-year Solo Performance examinations. In addition, students and teachers should consider the following advice.

- Commercial quality backing tracks should be used wherever possible.
- Where students use more than one backing track, all backing tracks should be compiled onto the one recording medium – CD or MD, etc. – depending on what audio playback equipment is being used by the student. This avoids delays and fiddling when cueing the next track. Where possible, backing tracks on cassettes ought to be transferred to CD.
- At the end of the track, some extra silence should be added so that there is sufficient time to pause the playback if required. A panicked move to turn off the audio playback can spoil a poignant moment created at the end of the performance of a work. Furthermore, the student should always be in control of when the next work will commence. There are other ways of achieving a smooth flow between items in the examination program.
- Care must be taken to ensure the dynamic balance (volume) of the backing track playback does not overshadow the dynamic range of the solo, and the tone of the playback equipment complements the solo – that it is neither too harsh nor too thin in tone. Students should be sure that the dynamic balance (volume) is correct if there is more than one track, so they do not have to make any adjustments during the performance other than pressing 'play'. Students should use equipment they are familiar with and preset the volume and tone controls as much as possible so that only a little adjustment is needed after the equipment is moved into the examination room.

Program range of styles and characters

Students are encouraged to review the range of styles and characters represented in their performance program. Guidance is given in the Study Design, Prescribed Lists, Assessment Reports, the VCE Bulletin No. 160 December 2000, Supplement 1 – Sample material for end-of-year Solo Performance examinations, and the criteria for the award of grades. In addition, in fulfilling the requirement of including two 20th century works in the program, students who want to score highly are encouraged to perform two contrasting works. A greater contrast of works in the program enables the student to fully demonstrate a wider range of techniques and interpretations.

Program order

The order of works in the program is important and requires careful planning. Besides the mechanical aspects of the program order, changing equipment and settings, the artistic aspects can improve the recital program as a whole. This includes strategies to optimise stamina. Students should finalise their program order weeks before their final examination and practise the execution of the program under performance conditions. Some students forgot their program order, particularly voice students who all do their program from memory. Students should make a copy of the Program Sheet that they hand to the assessors as they enter the examination room, and should use this instead of asking the assessors what is their next work. The accompanist should also have the program order in writing, with an added note when he or she needs to leave the examination room when the student is performing unaccompanied.

Position in the examination room

Students should present their recital performance in a way that best communicates with the audience. Some students did not face the two assessors, or hid behind the music stand so their face and hands were hidden from view. Some students crouched over their instrument in such a way that the audience was not included in the experience. Effective music performance also involves communicating visually with the audience – in this case, the assessors. Of course, the position of the student should also be optimum for communicating with the accompanist (when used).



Selected Instrument Lists

The following paragraphs are comments pertinent to particular instrument lists.

Guitar – Contemporary Popular

Playing own arrangement

Students are expected to demonstrate that they have studied and learnt the work as cited in the Prescribed List. Sections of a work where the student extemporises and makes their own arrangement will not be considered in assessing any areas other than the ability of the student to play in style. A penalty will be applied if the work as cited in the Prescribed List is not recognisable. The student has to demonstrate that they have achieved the complete work in the style as listed in the Prescribed List. Whilst industry practice encourages extemporisation, this particular examination does not. Students who wish to emphasise extemporisation should present for VCE Music Group Performance Units 3 and 4 instead.

Other arrangements or editions

No arrangements or editions can be used other than the particular arrangements and editions for songs listed in the Prescribed List. The particular work that caused concern was 'Blackbird' – the version required is a solo guitar version, not the original as performed by The Beatles.

Flute

This year, assessors of flute students were disappointed in the narrow range of styles and characters represented in their performance programs and the limited preparation of those programs. This seemed to be in contrast to past years.

Pianoforte

Shoes

A few performers took the liberty of playing the pianoforte without shoes. This can be an issue in regard to presentation (criterion 11), but there are also other matters to consider. The control in using a pedal on a pianoforte is critical to artistic performance. The lack of a stiff sole makes it harder to be precise with the change of pedal; for example, notes from the previous chord may hang on and blur with notes of the next chord. Also, the height of the heel of the shoe changes the leverage onto the pedal. Both shoes without a heel and shoes with high heels may result in less control. Sound performance technique, rather than fashion, should dictate footwear, and students are encouraged to practise performing in the same footwear they intend to wear in the examination. The grand piano typically has a heavier pedal mechanism that, unless operated correctly, will make an unnecessary thumping sound. Students should practise pedalling without noise.

Students presenting on Organ – pipe and Organ – electronic should also take these matters into consideration, but their performance traditions seem to cover this issue.

Bach Fugues and Malaguenas

A few pianoforte students presented both the Prelude and Fugue. There are no Fugues by Bach in the (1998–2002 extended) Prescribed List and therefore this should not be performed. This may have occurred because students had also presented their program for another examination authority and looked for works that were common to both. The assessors did not consider the performance of any work that was not approved; therefore the performance of works that were not approved was a waste of the student's valuable performance time. Students and teachers should fully understand the requirements for this performance examination.

The Prescribed List provides a great deal of precision so that each entry refers to one work. For example, if the composer has written two Malaguenas then the catalogue number cited will distinguish between them. Some albums, in particular for pianoforte, do not publish the full identification details of each work. Students should be careful when identifying which work to prepare and present in the examination; there is only one work that is approved, even though others may have the same title. Great care has been taken by the Music Selection Committee, aided by the retail music suppliers, to precisely identify each work.

Students may need to consult other editions to verify that the work they are studying is correct. This can be done by visiting a library with a sheet music collection, a music retailer that sells sheet music, or by asking other students and teachers who have other editions of works by the same composers.

Voice – Classical and Contemporary Popular

Arrangements or editions

2004 Assessment Report



No arrangements or editions can be used other than the songs in the Prescribed List. Particular care should be taken when purchasing songs from the following categories: 'Jazz Era', 'Theatre and Films Music' and 'Popular Music'. Assessors noted that 'Pie Jesu' was a song that often caused problems.

Water consumption

While students are encouraged to take measures to avoid dehydration during their recital, the frequent and conspicuous consumption of fluids takes away from the presentation of the performance as a whole artistic experience. Voice students in particular should consider this issue when planning their performance.

Foreign Languages

In the performance of certain works in the 'Voice Classical' category, students are required to sing in the foreign language as specified in the title, unless otherwise stated in the Prescribed List. This is part of the versatility expected of voice students. Students who perform a work in the incorrect language will be penalised.

Recitatives

Some students who sing recitatives could show better understanding of the style. It is suggested that careful listening to a variety of recordings of recitatives from the same musical stylistic era would provide guidance. This of course needs to be done in consultation with their voice teacher.

Unaccompanied Songs

Some voice students did not seem to understand the nature and purpose of the unaccompanied song in the program. Students should discuss this with their voice teacher. Some students seemed to have dropped the accompaniment at the last minute, hoping that this would hide insufficient preparation or the lack of ability to hold pitch. Some unaccompanied songs have several verses; all should be sung.