



2008 Music Solo Performance GA 2: Performance Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The standard of performance in the Music Solo Performance examination continues to be high, with many students providing inspirational performances similar to those heard in a professional context. Many programs reflected the diversity of choices available from the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works*, and most students successfully presented pieces that fully displayed their strengths. A large number of students presented programs that were of a suitable duration and displayed a wide range of styles and characters within the 25 minutes allowed.

In the lower range, some students were lacking in performance experience and understanding of styles. All students would greatly benefit from taking as many opportunities as possible to practise performing their entire program to gain confidence as performers, not only as players. Generally, all musicians will harbour some nerves in performance but experience in performing enables students to benefit from a level of nervousness.

Some students were not enrolled in the correct instrument, particularly with piano, guitar and voice. Piano can mean pianoforte or contemporary piano, and voice can mean either voice – classical or voice – contemporary popular. Guitar can mean one of two instruments, contemporary popular or classical, and bass can mean double bass, contemporary double bass or electric bass. In some cases students needed to be assessed by different specialists and this caused the examination to be rescheduled. While no student was penalised for enrolment errors, it caused much disruption to assessors and students on the day.

Students and teachers are encouraged to fill out their program sheets with as much detail as possible (for example, 'Prelude by Bach' is insufficient) so that they can be correctly checked for compliance by the assessors. Accurate timings need to be given as confirmation that the program has been planned to comply with the requirements of the task.

An appropriate warm-up routine is recommended. Some assessors commented that some wind students 'blew themselves out' before the start of their performance and that they then had little breath left for the actual performance. If the program is long, the student should not overtax themselves in the warm up.

Students, instrumental music teachers and classroom teachers are encouraged to go through the prescribed list carefully to ensure that the works being played are on the prescribed list and are the best choice for the student. They should contact the VCAA for further clarification if they have any queries.

The 2009 *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* is available on the VCAA website and is the only list that should be used in 2009. Students and teachers should ensure that they consult this list for any changes from the 2008 list.

This report provides insight and advice about the assessment in relation to each of the published criteria for the award of grades. The examination is assessed against the following eleven criteria, so a thorough understanding of them will maximise a student's opportunity to gain the highest marks possible. This report may be read in conjunction with previous Assessment Reports.

Criteria

1. Compliance with the requirement of the task

The majority of students fully satisfied this criterion and were awarded full marks. Some typical issues included:

- poorly timed programs where a required work was not performed within the 25 minute time allocation
- use of CD backing that was not the one prescribed (some contemporary popular [CP] instruments have a specific backing that is required)
- students performing an accompanied work without accompaniment (or omitting an unaccompanied work)
- the wrong piece selected (a different arrangement to the one specified or a different opus/catalogue number to the one specified)
- a required movement or section omitted (for example, where two movements are specified 'to be counted as one work')
- the minimum required works not presented (there was some confusion for electric bass students who performed the required minimum for guitar – contemporary popular)
- singers using sheet music when memory was required
- voice – classical singers omitting the required recitative and performing only the aria



- playback equipment not brought to the assessment or not tested with the student's burnt CD (in some cases this meant students did not perform any required accompanied works).

2. Differentiation of a range of styles and characters in the program

There was an even spread of marks in this, and the remainder of, the criteria. Generally students were able to select programs which reflected the range of styles in the prescribed list. Many students who did not achieve a high mark in this criterion failed to adequately explore the range of styles in the list. This, at times, was equally detrimental to both stronger and weaker students. Some students who presented only 'virtuosic' works could have achieved a higher mark in this criterion by demonstrating more stylistic variety. Other students, because of technical limitations or simply by poor choice of repertoire, were not able to receive high marks due to the program failing to explore a wide enough range of styles. Some of these programs were constructed of simple pieces all in a similar style. Students who achieved the highest marks performed programs that were extremely well thought-out. Each piece had a different style for the performer to explore (for example, polyphonic, lyrical, extended form such as a sonata movement, jazz or contemporary, *avante garde*).

Some students chose works of varying styles, but performed them all in a similar style (for example, all in a 'romantic' style, or in a very dry and clinical manner). Apart from having the most varied programs, students who achieved the highest marks in this criterion also approached each piece in a unique way. These performers obviously had a keen aural awareness of different styles, perhaps through listening extensively to both live and recorded performances. They approached each work in a unique manner, using a range of different performance techniques to demonstrate their ability to play in different styles.

3. Accuracy and clarity in performance of the works as notated

Accuracy of the performance is a very important criterion and affects other criteria. This criterion is specifically concerned with students performing the correct notes, rhythms and so on, as notated in the score. There were some students who performed with exceptional accuracy and some who performed quite inaccurately. Some instrumentalists who memorised their performance (required for singers and optional for all other instruments) failed to perform with the highest accuracy. Others played from memory and displayed a high level of discipline with regard to accuracy.

Students should remember that the Music Solo Performance examination is a recital task, that is, the recitation of notated music. For some contemporary popular instruments, an amount of improvisation is allowed in demonstrating a stylistic understanding of the music, however this is not an assessed part of the performance. Students should ensure that they keep to task and focus on the preparation of the notated material. There were a few students (particularly in the contemporary instruments) who took too much liberty with the notated work. The students who scored highest in this criterion clearly demonstrated their disciplined approach to practice.

4. Fluency and control in a range of performance techniques

Although it is closely related to Criterion 3, this criterion focuses on both fluency in performance and fluency of technique demonstrated through control. The students who scored more highly managed to choose varied programs in which they could demonstrate numerous performing techniques at the highest level. At the same time, many of these programs were also able to demonstrate a good range of styles, tonal colours, structures and so on. Students needed to control passages at a strict tempo and with a uniform articulation, and to also control tempo changes, articulation, dynamics, subtle pitch adjustments and so on. Some students chose pieces that explored contemporary techniques, such as multiphonics (reed instruments), a range of distortions (electric instruments), contemporary bowing techniques (string instruments) or many of vocal effects and techniques (voice). Others explored a wide range of traditional techniques, including virtuosic, lyrical, and various period techniques.

Students who did not gain high marks were often lacking opportunity to display a wide range of performance techniques through limited programs. Some also displayed much hesitation in performance. Others, while maintaining basic fluency, clearly lacked fluent technical resources and displayed a low degree of control in performance. This became particularly evident in attempts to alter tempi to create tension or release and through unevenness in the playing. Poor fluency in technique was also reflected in a limited range of dynamics used, as well as performances that were clearly under tempo.

5. Characteristic tone, artistic variation of tone and expressiveness in tone

One of the most important aspects of this criterion is the students' ability to perform a wide range of tone, reflective of the works in the prescribed list. The starting point for best practice in the use of a range of tonal devices is the program itself. For example, a voice program that consists of a diverse range of styles, genres, tempi, keys, periods and locations, will create opportunities for a singer to use many tonal effects. For example, a drum kit player, a program of rock, jazz,



Latin and blues will enable the performer to use many more tonal effects than a program of all rock. Sample programs published with the prescribed list provide a guide to choosing an appropriate range of works. Also, the effective use of distortion pedals in the guitar – contemporary popular works and the use of an acoustic guitar for one work would enhance the students' ability to score well in this criterion. Students who performed best in this criterion performed programs that consisted of a wide variety of styles. They also gave thought to the appropriate use of range of tonal effects.

The other aspect of best practice in the use of tone is related to having a refined technique that enables a performer to create the best tone possible across a variety of different tonal effects. For string players this is controlled largely in the bowing, for pianists it is to do with a keys' speed of attack and its relationship to the rest of the keys played, for wind and brass players it is in the embouchure with relation to breath control as well as appropriate use of vibrato, for percussion best tone is created through absolute control of the mallet used. Students who most fully satisfied this criterion were able to control the tone of their instrument to the highest level and were able to create the greatest diversity of tonal effects. 'Best practice' was evident through a disciplined and thoughtful use of tonal effects throughout the performance. This discipline was so integrated into these students' performances that, with a finely developed aural sensitivity, students were able to adjust to the performance conditions. For example, the most successful drum kit students were able to perform with many different tonal effects that were both at a level that was appropriate to the performance space and utilising tonal effects at all dynamic levels. They did this without creating harshness at the loudest levels, and maintained sonority at the softest levels. This was often the defining aspect of students' best practice (all instruments) in the use of tone.

6. Skill in shaping and expressively communicating music ideas, as appropriate to the style of each work in the program

The most captivating performances are the ones that seem to say something to the audience. Students who managed to do this, expressively created shape in phrases in much the same way as a good orator will tell a story. Tension and release was created through a variety of elements such as changes of dynamics, articulation and tempi, as well as the use of elements such as silence, surprise, as well as predictability. These performances were dramatic, poignant, moving, disturbing, challenging, and whimsical. Students were able to take the notated score and make it their own while maintaining its integrity. In some cases communication beyond the notation of the work included enhancing a dynamic or tempo change indicated to build tension. In other cases it involved particularly effective use of rubato or accent. Best practice in the use of these elements involved enhancing the score within stylistic conventions.

Students who failed to score high marks in this criterion often simply played the notes without much expression or nuance. Musical phrases often lacked direction or more importantly, lacked a particular point of climax. This is one of the most basic concepts of pronunciation in a language, and should not be overlooked within the language of music. Some students performed as if they were afraid to try to use any variation. Without an aural awareness of the musical styles being performed, they failed to engage in the task of communication and expression.

7. Differentiation of the parts of the structure and characteristics of each work

The works on the prescribed list are all works with very deliberate structures, and as such are clearly notated. Students who managed to effectively demonstrate this sense of structure obviously had a clear understanding of the structures. They were able to follow themes and motifs with sensitivity, perhaps through the use of a consistent articulation or dynamic level. They were also able to create a clear sense of the major climax(es) within a work through the use of dynamics, forward motion, and/or variation. Different types of musical structures create different challenges for the performer. The programs performed by these students consisted of a wide variety of different types of musical structures, giving performers the opportunity to address each of these different challenges.

Students who did not achieve high marks in this criterion generally had difficulty demonstrating ability in differentiating the parts and structures in their works. Important themes were not particularly highlighted and there was little attempt to create any sort of tension and release in the performance. They also tended to have little variety of structures in their performance programs, often choosing the shortest works from the list, omitting any extended 'meaty' work(s) in which they might have the opportunity to demonstrate an ability to develop a sense of structure in a performance.

8. Artistic interaction, balance and coordination between the parts, the solo and the accompaniment, and between the main melody and accompaniment, as appropriate to the instrument and style of each work

With regard to instruments which require accompaniment, the ensemble created by two musicians is a most exciting form of music making. Students who approach their work with an accompanist are able to fully celebrate this



interaction in their performance. Students who demonstrate the tightest ensemble with their accompanists gained the highest scores in this criterion. The role of each performer at any given point in the work was clear. Excellent balance was created where the main theme had appropriate predominance, and the soloist was able to lead the performance with changes of tempi and dynamics. The accompanist was highly competent but played a supportive, not dominant role in the ensemble. Students, who did not perform highly in this criterion sometimes used accompanists who failed to provide adequate support. This meant that the ensemble was not properly synchronised, the accompanist dominated or overpowered the soloist, or the accompanist lost their place. While the accompanist was not being assessed, their role in supporting the student musically was vital, and for some students meant the difference between a high and a low mark in this criterion.

With regard to self-sufficient instruments, such as pianoforte or guitar – classical (as well as voice and single line instruments where unaccompanied performances are required), even in for example, an unaccompanied clarinet work, there are parts of the work that are less important or more important within the texture. At times there may be a false melody, which needs to be understood and appropriately projected within the texture. In a piano or classical guitar work, there may be melody and accompaniment (sometimes even three or more textures), which needs to be treated as in an ensemble situation, with appropriate voicing of each texture. Students who were awarded high marks in this criterion had sufficient technical control and musical understanding, so as to be able to create appropriate balance between melody and accompaniment, and between the parts and structures of the score. They were able to ‘orchestrate’ the various musical textures in demonstrating their understanding of the complexity of the parts and structures. Students who gained low marks often did not perform this complex ‘orchestration’ of a score, and thus created a performance that was confusing and difficult for the listener to understand. This created a lack of clarity in the performance.

9. Skill in historical and/or authentic interpretation in performance and use of contemporary conventions in interpretation

Students who performed best in this criterion had obviously listened to recordings of not only the works they performed, but had also other works in the styles they presented. This was evident through an adherence to stylistic conventions in the performance of each work presented and the performance conventions they both mimicked and borrowed from. These students were also able to demonstrate their ability to perform works from a variety of different styles and geographical locations.

Students who did not achieve high marks often presented programs of works in a similar style. Some students who presented on contemporary popular instruments, presented a narrow range of mainly rock styles. Students who perform only the minimum number of works required, (for example this is four for guitar – contemporary popular) must ensure that their selection allows them to explore the range of styles represented in the list. Often two of the four works were of a similar style, giving students little opportunity to demonstrate an adequate range of historical styles. While there is no minimum time specified for the performance examination, students do have up to twenty-five minutes to demonstrate the extent to which they fulfil each criterion. Students should plan to use this time to fully demonstrate their ability within this criterion.

10. Skill in personal interpretation and projection of musical intentions in performance

In this criterion students are invited to give something of themselves in their performance. Any performer who knows the work they are presenting with absolute confidence and security, will apply their own interpretation to a performance, either deliberately or accidentally. Students who were able to successfully maintain the tension of performing within strict guidelines of accuracy and stylistic conventions, and performing as a means of personal expression, gained the highest marks in this criterion. Through resolving this conflict, these students were best able to project musical intentions in performance. There is a clear correlation between performances that are clearly lacking in projection of musical intention, and performances that are also lacking security of notation. It is also vital that students understand this criterion in relation to the others. Some students who performed with a very ‘personal interpretation’ were off task in many of the other criteria, where these interpretations made little reference to the original notation. Perhaps the word ‘skill’ in the criterion was overlooked in these students’ preparation.

11. Presentation techniques appropriate to the styles represented in the works and to the conventions of performance in a formal recital

The best performances demonstrated much poise and focus. They flowed well from one work to the next, and were presented as recitals. This was equally true for classical as well as contemporary popular instruments. The best students not only faced their audience, but also, and more importantly, addressed musically their audience in performance. These students used appropriate and varied volume levels (particularly pertinent for drum kit and other amplified instruments), and they incorporated ‘best practice’ performance techniques throughout their performance. In some instances, this



involved a thoughtful programming order to create and maintain maximum variety and interest. Where much equipment was used (such as amplifiers, drum kits and percussion equipment), it was prepared prior to the performance time. Recorded backings were tested and the logistics of their use was well rehearsed (for example, starting, stopping, and tracking recorded backings). Often these students also dressed appropriately, which assisted them in creating a sense of 'occasion' for the performance. These students arrived at the performance venue with plenty of time to spare, and in some instances arranged for equipment to be delivered to the venue ahead of time. Students who performed poorly in this criterion were often ill prepared. One of the most common equipment problems was where students who had burnt their backing tracks onto a CD had not tested it in the CD player that was used in the performance. Students are reminded that not all CD players will play burnt CDs. Students who performed poorly in this criterion, also lacked modelling in performance conditions, and perhaps had seen few live performances, where they could find elements to imitate or incorporate into their own performance. Problems encountered in this criterion included facing away from the audience, taking excessive breaks (or no breaks) between performances, use of inappropriate gestures when they made mistakes, failing to tune or retune instruments, constantly playing licks between works, lack of control over nerves (perhaps through a lack of performing experience), overuse or inappropriate use of water bottles, page turns poorly rehearsed, CD backings at inappropriate levels, and the use of loose photocopies of music (that blow off the music stand).

COMMENTS ON PARTICULAR INSTRUMENTS

The following provides guidance to preparation of successful programs for particular instruments and may be useful for students and teachers.

Contemporary popular guitar and drum kit

- Students and teachers should check the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* on the VCAA website and read it carefully to establish that the requirements have been met. The arrangement/edition is critical as different arrangements to the ones listed may constitute a different piece to the one prescribed, and thus a possible penalty.
- Despite the minimum number of works for compliance, it is recommended that students consider how they can maximise their marks by playing the widest variety of styles possible within the 25 minute time allocation.
- Students should ensure that a wide variety of styles are represented.
- Students should ensure that volumes are appropriate for the performance space and that the volume of backings is appropriately balanced. Students must not perform at levels that are occupationally unsafe.
- Where possible, students should consider using some 'live' backing accompaniments to demonstrate a different approach of artistic interaction.
- Students should ensure that the CD backing(s) used are specified on the prescribed list.
- Students should make sure that the 'performance' is thoroughly rehearsed (and not just a compilation of pieces played without consideration to the movement from one piece to another). Students should consider industry presentation techniques that can be incorporated into the performance.

Electric bass

- The minimum number of works required is 6. Students should check the list carefully and ensure that all areas of compliance are met.
- Refer to points for contemporary popular guitar (above).

Voice – contemporary popular

- Students and teachers should check the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* on the VCAA website and read it carefully to establish that all requirements have been met.
- Students should make sure that 'variety of styles' is addressed in the choice of program as well as in the delivery of each song.
- Students should ensure that the accompanist is aware of providing a stylistic backing – especially make sure that the melody line is not present in the accompaniment.
- Students should check the rules about the number of CD backings allowed (maximum of three).
- If a CD accompaniment is used, ensure that burnt CDs are tested in the CD player you intend to use. Also, with the vocals, ensure that the correct track is used for the backing. Where a CD which has both an accompaniment only, and a melody and accompaniment, as provided with the sheet music, make sure the correct track is used for the performance examination.
- Students should consider vocal health. To avoid forcing of the voice, students should choose their program wisely. The keys and technical demands on the young voice should be considered as well as changing keys to suit a particular student's abilities.



- If using hand or body gestures, students should make them appropriate to the text.

Voice – classical

- Teachers should ensure that different styles are clearly understood (for example, avoid scooping in the baroque or classical work)
- Students who select a large number of works from the 'Ballads', 'Music Theatre' and 'Jazz/Pop' categories, should consider choosing Voice – contemporary popular rather than Voice – classical as their instrument.
- Teachers should ensure that the demands of the program are able to be accommodated by the student, particularly in regards to the program length (some students are fatigued before their last song).
- If using hand or body gestures, they should be appropriate to the text.
- Students should choose their accompanist wisely. Students need to be able to create an 'ensemble' in which the accompanist plays a supportive rather than dominating role.
- The highest achieving students ensured their unaccompanied folksong and vocalise were given as much attention to detail as the other works on their program.
- The highest achieving students chose a wide variety of interesting repertoire suited to their voice rather than performing 'standard' pieces.
- The highest achieving students included different languages in their programs. The words were pronounced with colour and fluency and the performer knew the meaning of each word and how to highlight important syllables, words, phrases or ideas.

Contemporary popular piano

- Students and teachers should check the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* on the VCAA website and read it carefully to establish that the requirements have been met. The arrangement/edition is critical, as different arrangements to the ones listed may constitute a different piece to the one prescribed
- The works on this list are technically comparable with works on the pianoforte. The complexity of syncopated rhythms can be extremely challenging, so a disciplined approach to learning is needed.
- Accompaniments are not accepted for any works in this list (ie. no CD backing is allowed).

Wind Instruments (particularly flute)

- Students and teachers should ensure that the program can be performed within 25 minutes.
- Where the total playing time is calculated to exceed twenty minutes, it could be useful to consider placing all 'required' works (Compliance – Criterion 1) early in the program.
- A students' physical stamina needs to be balanced with the need to fulfil the criteria to the highest level.