



2004

Music Styles GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Students' responses to the examination paper, particularly in Section A, indicated that on the whole there was a good understanding of the requirements of most Areas of Study. It is again necessary to reinforce comments made in previous years' reports relating to careful reading of the questions, the balance of marks available, the inadvisability of using prepared answers and the need to be quite clear about the works studied, and how they fit into each semester's program.

The paper consisted of Sections A, B and C and a total of 97 marks was available. All sections of the paper were compulsory, and most students answered questions in each section as directed.

The assessment criteria for the 2004 examination were published on the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's website (www.vcaa.vic.edu.au), and the examination format followed the published description. Students and teachers should be familiar with the examination criteria when preparing for the examination. Teachers could also consider the criteria and the structure of the examination when developing school-assessed coursework assessment tasks. Some students would have benefited from more practice in reading questions and identifying key areas for response, and then putting answers on paper quickly, clearly and legibly. Noting the number of marks allocated to a specific question can be helpful when responding in a limited time.

A number of students made excellent use of headings or highlighter pens, showing links between aspects of the question to which they were responding. Legible writing is also important. If students run out of space, they should ask for another booklet. It is difficult for assessors if the writing deteriorates and/or the size becomes too small. Clear responses are important – although assessors look for opportunities to award marks, they are not mind-readers.

Section A comprised four questions worth a total of 30 marks, and was based on a series of musical excerpts provided on an audio compact disc. In this section, the time allocated for response was determined by the time allowed on the recording (the total time for this section was 32 minutes and 10 seconds). Students were expected to demonstrate their capacity for critical response by showing a good understanding of the elements of music (for example, tone colour, instrumentation, structure, melody, rhythm and texture). Most students were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the individual elements, with many providing long lists in a scattergun approach to listening to the excerpts. Some students struggled to use the elements to illustrate their understanding, or to answer the specific questions where more depth was required in a description or a discussion. Nearly all students attempted to answer every question in Section A. Some students who were clearly uncomfortable with Sections B and C still made a very good attempt at questions in Section A, indicating a knowledge of elements of music and compositional devices.

Section B consisted of four questions worth a total of 47 marks, and required students to answer questions about the composition and/or arrangement they had completed and the major works (or collections of minor works) in different styles that were studied in Unit 3. From this point onwards, students were in control of the amount of time they spent on each question. Some students could have planned their time more appropriately by noting the number of marks allocated to each question and responding accordingly, rather than assuming that all the lines provided on the paper had to be filled up with writing. A better indication of how much to write was apparent from reading the question and noting how many points were asked for and whether a description or a discussion was required. A question that requested the student to 'discuss' would generally require a fuller response.

Section C required students to write a more extended, structured response worth a total of 20 marks. A choice of questions appeared only in this section, with students required to identify their choice by ticking a box. Some students had not allowed enough time to answer this question, and some promising responses were clearly incomplete. There were some very extensive pre-prepared answers in this section. Many students clearly had a great deal of information which they were intent on presenting, regardless of the fact that both questions had quite specific requirements.

The works chosen for study in Units 3 and 4 are very important. The Music Styles Victorian Certificate of Education Study Design should be carefully consulted for advice on selecting works for study. Unit 3 requires students to study two major works (or collections of minor works) in two different musical styles. At this level, a substantial difference between the two selected styles assisted students in responding confidently and demonstrating a real understanding of the differences. Unit 4 requires the selection of two major works (or collections of minor works) of the same style from one of the prescribed Areas of Study for Unit 4. Teachers should note the key knowledge and key skills specified for the outcomes in each Unit, and ensure that the selected works provide the necessary material. The chosen works or movements do not need to be excessively long. In many cases, a movement of a work may be substantial enough, rather

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than trying to study an entire, large multi-movement work in detail. However, if one movement is studied, it is still important that the student is aware of the significance of that movement within the whole work.

The works chosen for study in Unit 3 should not have been used to answer questions in Section C. Students should be aware of exactly what works are required for each section of the study. They should also be able to provide accurate titles which clearly identify the works studied, and the names of the composers/creators.

In all sections of the paper students were able to respond using a range of formats such as bullet points, diagrams or prose. Students made use of all these styles of response, and often the bullet point responses in Section A were the most useful and efficient. A number of students used bullet points in Section A as a way of remembering what they heard – this can be a useful starting point, but even a long list does not necessarily answer a specific question. Bullet points can also be used successfully in more extended responses, as a number of students demonstrated, but some excellent prose responses better enabled students to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts, and to discuss the issues as required. However, the eloquent prose of some prepared answers did not always constitute a discussion as the specific requirements of the question itself were not always answered. In these cases, it was often clear that the student possessed a significant amount of information about the studied works, but had not been able to synthesise the material to demonstrate an understanding of the particular issues raised in the question.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Question 1

Excerpt: *Heinrick Biber Passacaglia for Solo Violin*

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	0	4	22	29	31	15	4.3

There were some excellent responses to this question; it was the most consistently well-answered question in Section A. Although students did not know the term 'passacaglia' (and were not required to do so), they were able to accurately describe key points of structure/form, and the way melody was used in the excerpt.

The best responses referred to the:

- **repeated** four-note descending **pattern** throughout
- **improvisatory** approach to the upper line
- **scale-like passages** ascending in contrary motion to the descending figure
- **elaboration** of the scale passage
- **scale** descending
- **arpeggios** and **broken chord** shapes both ascending and descending
- use of **repeated note patterns** of a second
- use of **individual notes repeated**
- **strong rhythmic feel** – repeated note changes the pattern.

A few responses provided music notation of the descending figure, and some of the key rhythmic features.

Question 2

Excerpt: *Balada Conducatorolui performed by La Bande Son*

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	0	1	6	18	33	31	12	6.2

The information in the question gave students the opportunity to focus on the way in which selected elements of music were used expressively to convey moods and/or emotions. The elements of music most frequently chosen were tone colour, melody, instrumentation, harmony, rhythm and texture. Less successful responses chose elements of music such as structure/form, and dynamics/volume, where there was much less to say that could relate to the emotions or moods.

The selected elements of music then also needed to be related to the conveyed emotion by using observations such as the following:

- the predominance of the descending passages, 'repeating the descending harmonic minor to illustrate crying or desperate emotion'
- the jarring and uncomfortable sound of the creaking

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- the free-ish rhythm that assists in telling the story
- the voice mimicking creaking and showing despair
- the arpeggiated ostinato (moving harmonically) in dulcimer, creating a constant base over which the sad story could be told
- the recitative nature of the song, to sympathise with storytelling
- the way the tremolo, trills, harmonics and grace notes contribute to the feeling of uncertainty, 'and chromatically express chaotic desperate emotions'
- the softness and slowness of the song
- the strain in the voice – 'we feel his pain'
- the gradually increasing pitch range of the vocal line
- the use of minor modality/tonality.

Question 3

Excerpt: *Anonymous Dindirindin*

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	0	2	10	19	37	22	11	6.0

This question was not very well answered by many students. Very few chose to use a diagram or chart, instead attempting a detailed and wordy 'blow-by-blow' description of the whole piece. The time available during the three hearings of this piece may have been better spent concentrating on contrasts between the sections. These contrasts could probably have been more clearly and efficiently set out in a diagram or chart, rather than in long prose responses that often contained lots of repetition.

Ways in which contrast was achieved included the following:

- instrumentation: broken consort. Percussion (tambourines, drum), recorder, plucked lutes, bowed strings, trombone (used in the refrain of the fanfare section)
- the use of percussion to highlight the differentiation of sections – structural issues
- the clarity of the vocal line in the episodes for b, c & d sections
- polyphony
- the upper voice (female voice) carries the melody; the instruments either follow closely or are in counterpoint
- the use of the title of the song (note the assonance or vowel and consonant rhyme) to establish duple metre, the basic octosyllabic structure of the first section; possibly nonsense syllables or 'vocables'
- sections: **aa** (with fermata); **bc, aa, d** (with change of metre, tempo, the addition of trombone/sackbutt, change of texture); **aa, bc, aa, d, aa**. A rondo-like form. The notion of a 'chorus' was also occasionally mentioned in students' answers
- the dotted rhythms and syncopations
- the repeated phrases in quatrain, agitated rhythms; the refrain is more melodic, more imitative
- the note change of melodic shape in each section, the different use of intervallic constructions, different tempi, metre, different rhythmic patterns.

Question 4

Excerpt: *John Williams Star Wars Main Title*

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	0	0	3	9	22	34	24	8	5.9

Surprisingly, a number of students appeared to have difficulty with this excerpt. Responses were often disorganised and repetitive, and the notion of 'texture' was often not well understood. Students sometimes made apt descriptions of 'mystery and enchantment', and 'an explosion of colour', but very often the points made about the elements of music were not linked to the creation of a 'sense of drama'. Few students made mention of the two sections of the excerpt, which convey different dramatic types and which could have been identified; for example, 'cosmic' and 'majestic' or 'reflective' and 'heroic'.

Ways in which texture, tone colour and rhythm were used to create a sense of drama include the following:

Texture

- strings – long flowing lines
- cello and bass – long melody
- the distance between high and low.

Tone Colour

- twinkling sounds of high woodwind with softer dynamic

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- use of the harp – for celestial suggestion
- cymbal crash
- building dynamics to highlight tone colour of brass and percussion.

Rhythm

- feeling of ebb and flow
- martial-like use of drums and brass
- characteristic march-like rhythm
- triplets
- repeated patterns
- gradually increasing rhythmic activity featuring a shortening of note lengths, used to transition to the more dramatic or fanfare-like section.

Section B

Question 5a

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
%	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	13	14	24	20	22	9.0

Many students were able to give a clear description of the music style of their composition and/or arrangement, with some providing excellent descriptions of the style. Some students also gave spectacular descriptions of the ways in which two elements of music were used to reflect characteristics of the style, and the way that one compositional device was used to develop the structure/form of the composition and/or arrangement.

The best responses gave a sense of the actual composition and/or arrangement which was under discussion. They made unambiguous reference to their personal work, and something of the personal ownership of the piece was apparent in the responses. Some obviously pre-prepared answers did not refer to the student's own work at all, instead merely generalising about the style on which they were writing.

It is important that the process of composition and/or arrangement that takes place in the Unit 3 coursework is considered thoughtfully, and that students take ownership of their work. The complexity of the composition is not necessarily important. A simple arrangement exercise that deals with the way elements of music are treated in order to achieve the desired effect can be discussed very successfully. A response that generalises the 'textbook' first movement of a symphony, without relating the discussion to specific issues, is not answering the question. For instance, there were some less convincing responses that dealt with 'structure' in a classical style and explained sonata form, including modulations and 'triumph of the tonic', but never actually referred at all to the specific composition and/or arrangement. These answers failed to identify any of the keys used in the particular piece of work, and although they mentioned contrasting first and second subjects, they did not actually say **how** these were contrasting.

Question 5b

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	4	16	25	51	3.2

Technical factors that influenced the composition might include the following:

- the standard of players if writing for specific performers
- the availability of instruments (as opposed to what would be usual for that particular style)
- the venue for performance and logistics issues (for example, no harp at this school, or no access to electricity at the performance venue – a school oval for example).

One very good response described the issues encountered in writing for the flute. The range of the instrument had to be considered and it needed to be a very quiet dynamic as the composition was a lullaby. The composer brought the pitch down an octave so that the required atmosphere could be achieved, because her fellow student flautist couldn't play pianissimo in a higher register. Another response, referring to a wind instrument, discussed the need for breathing spaces, and the role that breathing had in shaping the contours of the phrases.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	2	3	3	7	12	21	23	25	6.0

This question was reasonably well answered on the whole, with most students providing a description of structure/form in the studied work using appropriate terminology or section identification. Better responses used appropriate

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terminology and were more specific about sections, for example by referring to particular places in the music by key, text or musical landmark. Students who were awarded full marks gave an excellent description of structure/form, clearly pinpointing major sections and also more subtle indicators of form within those sections, and using appropriate terminology.

Although students were encouraged to use a diagram in the response, very few took up this option, instead using more time to write a long prose response. A clearly annotated diagram may have saved these students valuable time.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	0	2	2	8	12	21	31	24	6.3

Again, most students answered the question at some level, with the favoured choice of elements being melody, rhythm/time and tone colour. Some elements of music provided more scope for comment than others, and students who chose the latter found that, although they had identified the elements of music in the work, the description of their treatment was more difficult. The most successful responses gave detailed descriptions, making clear reference to the identified work. It should be noted that the question gave the opportunity for the description to relate to either 'the work', or 'a section of the work'.

Question 8 Influences

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	1	2	2	7	12	25	23	28	6.3

Effects

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	2	2	6	6	12	18	23	20	11	5.4

Students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to convince a friend to attend a concert which in some cases would involve the performance of an extremely unusual combination of contrasting works. The best responses described the contextual influences and explained how they had an effect on the works studied and their styles, and were able to inject some passion into their attempts to convince someone else of the reasons for attending the concert.

The most difficult task was to explain the effect of contextual influence. Although there were many excellent examples of contextual influence, fewer students were able to successfully explain the effect this had on the work or the style of the work. Weaker responses took more time over the pleasantries of communicating with a friend, passing on irrelevant gossip rather than dealing with the context and music.

Section C

Question Chosen	0	9	10
%	1	16	83

Questions 9a & 10a

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	2	3	11	19	31	33	4.7

Questions 9b & 10b

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average
%	6	0	1	3	4	6	7	4	5	9	13	10	12	12	11	9.2

Question 9

Question 9a required a description of the structure/form of **both** works studied during semester two. Although diagrams were encouraged, few students used them; again this made the responses wordier. On the whole, the few students who selected this question knew what they were writing about.

Question 9b required a discussion of the ways in which these structures/forms are characteristic of the style. The weaker responses here failed to really link the structure successfully with the style, often appearing to have run out of time, or not really having enough to say about the characteristics of the style of the works.

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Question 10

Question 10a required two characteristics of the style studied in semester two to be described, referring to ways they are represented in the works studied. This was generally done very well.

Question 10b required a description of similarities and differences between the styles, and a discussion of possible reasons for these, with specific examples from both works. Many students had a great deal to write here. Although there appeared to be some pre-prepared answers that did not specifically respond to the set question, there was a sense that many students knew a great deal about these works and were keen to demonstrate their knowledge. Sometimes extensive similarities and differences were described, but then the discussion of possible reasons was cut short, apparently because the student had run out of time. Specific examples from both works were required for very high marks to be awarded.