

2022 VCE Music Style and Composition aural and written external assessment report

General comments

The 2022 VCE Music Style and Composition aural and written examination was consistent with the *VCE Music Study Design 2017–2022* and the sample examination material published in April 2017.

The examination consisted of two sections worth a total of 100 marks. The questions in Section A focused exclusively on the key skills and knowledge found in Area of Study 1, Responses to Music. This section featured five questions based on short excerpts of music from a variety of geographical and historical backgrounds and was worth 70 marks. Section B featured three questions related to Area of Study 2 and was worth 30 marks.

In Section A, students responded well to questions that called for aural analysis of the use of harmony and texture. However, student responses that involved analysing melody, articulation and tone colour generally did not score as well. These elements of music remain fundamental components of aural analysis and are significant in the study of music more generally. It is important that students have a thorough understanding of these aspects. Teachers should develop learning activities that improve students' skills in analysing and describing composers' use of these elements of music.

The works that students referenced in Section B were mostly appropriate. In some instances, students wrote about multiple movements of the same work or wrote about extensive compositions. This approach was not necessary and in many cases limited students' performance. In these instances, confusion was shown about characteristics studied and/or students were not able to respond sufficiently within the time allowed.

There was a high level of compliance with the requirements of the study design. This was related to the categories of pieces chosen for study in Area of Study 2. Very few students wrote about works that did not meet the requirement of the specified categories. The variety of Australian, post-1950 and 'other' works was notable. These came from a wide variety of historical, geographical and stylistic traditions. It was also impressive to see genuine interaction with the questions. Few responses appeared to be memorised or formulaic. Many responses used graphic representations, music language and other direct references to the music works studied.

Specific 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.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	3	41	56	1.5

This excerpt contained four sections. Any clear communication of the following was awarded full marks.

A (introduction), B (female voice singing melody), C (male rap), B1 (female voice singing melody with minor variations).

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	3	12	22	34	21	6	3.8

Few students achieved full marks for this question. Students struggled to describe melody in their chosen sections with sufficient depth. It is recommended that students practise analysing and describing components of melody such as contour, intervals used, tonality, phrasing, range, register, harmonic outlines (arpeggios), duration and repetition. Some aspects of the melody that could have been referred to are as follows.

Section A (Intro):

- melody in backing keyboard
- repeated broken chord figure
- minor tonality
- mostly quavers
- small range of minor 6th
- medium high register.

Section B:

- based on natural minor scale / Aeolian mode
- repeated 4-bar phrases
- repetitive melody, simple and catchy
- small intervals, mostly 2nds and 3rds
- descending contour, then ascends at the end to lead into the next section
- simple rhythm, consisting of quavers, with longer notes and rests used to articulate lyrics clearly
- range of one octave.

Section C:

- melody in string accompaniment underneath rap
- simple repetitive bass line / ostinato
- repeats tonic note, alternates with submediant, then dominant in repeated pattern
- used to create harmony and emphasise tonality.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

B:

Speech-like articulation of simple, diatonic melody sung by female vocalist in a comfortable mid register

First two vocal phrases have a descending contour with third phrase ascending to the third, outlining major tonality

Climax occurs toward the end of the vocal melody as the pitch and register increase

Counter melody in the top voice of the acoustic guitar, emphasizing the tonic at the end of the accompaniment phrase

C:

Use of linear contour in low-mid register male vocals

Small range, with melody focusing on a single repeated note

High register piano interjection at the end of 4 bar phrases descending towards the tonic

Accompaniment counter melodies in the cello, placing sustained stepwise movement between notes to outline harmony

Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	1	2	8	20	18	23	18	10	5.4

This question involved two instructions. Students were required to identify instruments in the sections they played in and then describe their role. Some students misunderstood that the word 'role' in this instance referred to the instrument's function within the ensemble texture.

Observations that could have been included in responses are as follows.

Section A:

- Electric piano plays continuous broken chord figure, which provides accompaniment to spoken voice and harmony.
- Synthesised strings play repeated notes, which create a bass line function and reinforce keyboard harmony.
- Steel string guitar plays a single chord on the first beat of bars.
- Cymbal plays a single chord on the first beat of bars.

Section B:

- Female and male voice sings main melody and portray lyrics (8ve apart).
- Electric bass plays root of each chord on the first beat of each bar.
- Upper strings play accompaniment figure, which is based on broken chord figure from Section A. This outlines harmony and provides a countermelody to the vocal melody.
- Lower strings play sustained notes, which are the root of each chord outlined by the upper strings, providing a bassline.
- Bass drum plays on first and third beat of each bar, reinforcing the pulse. Ride cymbal hits on beat 3 of each bar.

Section C:

- Male voice speaks lyrics in 'rap' style.
- Strings plays short articulated bass line, outlining harmony and providing rhythmic pulse.
- Electric bass plays root of each chord on the first beat of each bar, adding bass depth.
- Drumkit is used to reinforce pulse and add rhythmic energy.

Question 2a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	0	1	20	79	2.8

Any accurate identification of three sound sources was awarded full marks.

Examples of what could be raised in response include but are not limited to the following:

- chordophones – stringed instruments (medium register; possibly kalimba)
- idiophones – percussion instruments that rattle and shake: maraca, rain stick
- membranophones – percussion instruments such as drums
- spoken voice.

Question 2b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	3	2	8	11	16	14	18	16	7	6	5.1

In general, this was due to a misunderstanding about articulation. Descriptions of articulation should make reference to the level of attack, decay and separation in relation to individual notes. Methods and techniques for producing sound are valid inclusions in responses. Many students included references to tone colour and other elements of music that were not related to articulation. Descriptions and terminology that could be included in responses are as follows.

Terminology that may be included:

- legato – slur – smooth
- staccato – short
- mezzo staccato – medium short, bouncy
- staccatissimo – as short as possible
- tenuto – for full length
- accent – marcato
- arco – to bow
- pizzicato – to pluck
- sampling
- reverb – delay, distortion

Overall:

- Chordophones/stringed instruments use predominantly plucked articulation.
- Idiophones (rattles, shakers, jingles) are struck, shaken, tapped. Crisp, accented articulation with short decay.
- Membranophones – struck with a stick (including bass drum, bongos). Use of accents, marcato.
- Spoken voice – short phrases, plosive consonants.
- Aerophones – pan pipes and whistle sound. Articulation is created by the tongue. Sound is usually long and smooth.
- Use of tam tam – sudden onset with long decay.
- Electrophones – sampled sounds, accented bass guitar lines. Use of electricity to create sound. Reverb used to add effects. Digital manipulation adds to intensity of overall texture.
- Sung vocals – female and male using only vowel sounds. Long, smooth phrases. Use of melisma and sliding between pitches.

The following high-scoring student response incorporated clear and accurate descriptions of articulation.

1 – Chordophone is plucked at a high register, creating a sharp sudden attack followed by a more subtle decay which is more gradual

2 – Male vocalist uses sustained legato articulation, with a gradual rounded onset followed by a more sustained, slightly faded decay which is extended through the use of added reverb, creating an overall smoother articulation of the male voice – a similar legato articulation of the male voice – a similar legato articulation can be heard in the female vocal part closer to the start of the excerpt, using a rounded attack and sustained decay to create smooth articulation

3 – Articulation is used in a more forceful way in the percussion membranophone parts, accenting certain notes within rhythmic phrases and patterns through the use of a more forceful hitting technique, creating a sharper attack and slightly more sustained decay. Non accented percussion notes use less forceful technique to produce a more rounded attack and sudden, muted decay, creating a ghost note effect which aids in maintaining rhythmic drive while still allowing emphasis on accented notes.

Question 3a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	0	3	13	20	28	35	4.8

As was the case in other questions, two different analysis skills were required of students in this question. As stated in the title of the work, the piece is for a trio. In this case the trio is comprised on piano, flute and cello. Identification of these instruments was required to achieve full marks. Descriptions of roles of instruments in this instance were very well handled. Students described accompaniment, melody and counter melody well.

Examples of what could be raised in response include but are not limited to the following.

The instruments are flute, cello and piano.

Flute:

- is often in its higher register and sits at the top of the texture
- takes the melody in most instances.

Cello:

- sits in the mid-range within the work, provides strength to the bass and melodic lines and fills out the texture
- often provides a counter melody to the flute melodies
- at times doubles the left-hand piano bass or flute melodies.

Piano:

- at times acts as an accompaniment, providing chordal support for melodic lines
- at times switches between the role of accompaniment or solo melody
- the piano part offers low, mid and upper registers.

Question 3b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0.5	4	6	9	11	19	18	13	12	4	4	5.5

High-scoring responses explained the changes in texture across the entire work. The more complex interplay between the voices challenged students' skills in analysis. In the highest-scoring responses, references to tessitura and degrees of prominence in the ensemble were included. Some points that could have been included in responses are as follows:

- The excerpt opens with a homophonic texture created by all instruments playing tutti. Chords are played in doubled octaves on the flute, cello and piano.
- A sudden reduction of texture from three instruments to one, marked by the solo piano cadence into silence, creates a thin texture to bring the introduction to a close.
- The texture becomes monophonic with the commencement of an unaccompanied melody in the flute and cello.
- The texture alters again with the entrance of the piano. The piano immediately takes an accompaniment role, creating a homophonic texture.
- The homophonic texture comprises the piano accompaniment, the flute melody and cello countermelody. These are discussed as follows:
 - The flute plays the melody in a higher register, providing separation between the parts by soaring above the more tightly interwoven texture of the cello and piano.
 - The cello provides broad mid-low register atmospheric notes, filling out the texture and providing countermelodic interest.
 - The flute and cello part could also be considered polyphonic with the two independent melodies.
 - The piano part utilises blocked chords to create a thicker texture.
- The texture changes again with the introduction of a new melodic idea in the right-hand piano part. This indicates a clear release from the piano's role of accompaniment, ceasing the homophonic texture.
- The new melodic idea in the piano is indicated by a descending running passage. The flute immediately follows with the same melodic idea, which is repeated a bar later by the cello, as a contrapuntal texture becomes evident between the parts. This section is short but complex, thick and dense, and indicative of imitative texture found in polyphony.
- The texture changes again with an unexpected entrance of a melody for solo flute with sparse piano accompaniment – a return to homophonic texture. This sudden sense of space contrasts the crowded texture of the previous section. The melody is immediately taken up and extended upon by the right

hand in the piano. The flute and cello provide the accompaniment in doubled parts (identical as the piano accompaniment for the flute); the texture is again homophonic.

- Bass note leaps commence in the left-hand piano during the extended melody, at times doubling the cello part and evolving into chords to thicken the texture.
- The three instruments meet in a final firm and decisive chord played tutti in octaves across registers to complete this section and the end of the excerpt.

Question 4a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	1	10	45	44	3.3

Any accurate identification of instruments and description of their tone colour was awarded full marks.

Examples of what could be raised in response include but are not limited to the following.

Female voice:

- use of a very breathy technique in the soprano register with limited vibrato
- legato throughout
- gradual onset and decay and a soft dynamic gives a bell-like, warm and airy tone colour.

Drumkit:

- use of brushes at a soft dynamic playing long dragged notes on the snare continuously throughout the excerpt to create a 'wash' or bed of gentle accompaniment, with gentle taps at crash cymbal or the snare to articulate or emphasise beats, but still at a soft dynamic
- creates warmth.

Acoustic double bass:

- playing root notes of chords using a resonant pizzicato technique
- long, ringing notes again at a soft dynamic
- blends well with the piano and drumkit to create a full, warm, ringing bass line.

Piano:

- playing block chords and some gentle arpeggiated/melodic moments in the middle-upper register of the piano softly
- use of pedal to blend the sound well with the bed provided by the snare brushes
- a warm, resonant, ringing tone colour created here, becomes a little fuller and darker in the lower register later in the excerpt, but still subtle.

Question 4b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	0.5	4	9	13	15	17	18	12	7	4	5.9

Student responses to this question lacked depth when discussing melody. This inability to analyse melody also impacted the veracity of observations about mood and character. Melody plays a vital role in many styles of music. The nature of melody is all-pervasive, and it is recommended that students focus on learning activities that improve their ability to describe and explain the role of melody in a wide variety of contexts. Responses on tone colour were also problematic. Responses that did not score well relied on simple adjectives. Responses that scored highly referred to specific instrumental techniques that contributed to the

comparative brightness and/or darkness of the sounds. This included the impact of articulation on tone colour.

The following high-scoring student response demonstrates a thorough approach to analysis and a clear understanding of melody and tone colour.

The main melody sung by the female vocalist uses long note values and mostly scalar movement to produce a wavy contour – vocalist also uses legato, smooth articulation to produce a light, airy, aspirate tone colour, aiding the in the creation of a tranquil, calm mood.

Bass plays a soft root notes with pizz. Articulation at the beginning of each bar. Pizz at a low register and soft dynamics creates a dark, muffled tone colour, contributing to tranquil mood of the piece – the bass also uses legato articulation letting notes ring out to add a sense of resonance to the tone colour to further evoke a calm, tranquil mood – the bass's simple melody, with slight walking movement between chords towards the end of the excerpt aids in evoking a calm, relaxed, tranquil mood.

High register piano single note melodic interjections at a soft dynamic have a bright, clear, tone colour, using legato articulation to aid in the creating a calm tranquil mood.

The piano countermelodies tend to be simple, using mostly scalar movement and small intervallic leaps of a third to outline the major tonality of the piece and aid in evoking a calm, tranquil mood

Towards the end of the excerpt the interjecting piano melodies are played in a lower register, creating a fuller, warmer tone colour which increases excitement through added energy.

Question 5

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	3	3	8	10	12	14	13	8	9	9	8	1	6.5

This question was quite well handled. Many students were able to use the listed components of harmony in the question in their analysis. Equally, the use of contrast in the excerpt was capably described. Students accurately identified the two sections of the work and noted the more dissonant approach to harmony in the first section and the more consonant second section.

Examples of what could be raised in response include, but are not limited to:

- Harmony in accompaniment is created by two string lines: upper one moves up and down in semitones; lower line remains for longer periods on the one pitch, creating a constant and consonance.
- The harmony changes according to the intervals between the two string lines, and the intervals between these lines and the vocal melody. The intervals fluctuate between dissonant and bare intervals, such as 4ths and 2nds, to resolve onto consonant intervals at the end of the phrase, such as 3rds.
- The vocal melody tends to remain on the one pitch, in a drone-like contour, so most of the tension and resolution is created by the upwards and downwards movement of the upper string line, and less frequently, the lower string line.
- When the harmony resolves, a sense of major tonality is created, but it is fleeting, as the lines are constantly moving, and consonance is quickly replaced by dissonance.
- The harmonic rhythm is quite fast, with the harmonies constantly shifting at irregular and unpredictable intervals.
- At the end of the first half, a sense of resolution is created by all three parts coming to rest briefly, outlining a minor triad.
- The second section contrasts because it has a stronger sense of tonality, using less dissonance and mostly pitches that outline a minor tonality.

- In the second section, the chant-like vocal melody of the first section gives way to a diatonic melody based on a minor tonality, using a wider range of notes and step-wise intervals. The melody consists of clear, 4-bar phrases in a minor tonality, which build up to a climax.
- The accompanying strings perform a more functional harmonic role in the second half; their lines sitting securely within a minor tonality.
- The intervals between the two string lines and the vocal melody are mostly consonant, with dissonant intervals occurring infrequently and being quickly resolved.
- The harmony in the second half follows a clear functional chordal progression, which repeats underneath the repeat of the same vocal melody and lyrics.
- The harmonic rhythm in the second half is slower, and more regular and predictable, changing every two beats.

Section B

Section B assessed students' understanding of the Outcome 2 works studied in Units 3 and 4. Students were only required to describe the use of the elements of music and compositional devices in relation to their chosen post-1950 work that they studied in Unit 4.

Other than this, 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.

In Section B, students responded to questions related to their chosen Australian, other and post-1950 works. It should be noted that if a response was completed about a work that did not fit the parameters for a question, no marks could 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.

A broad range of works was chosen for study. Selection of works was critical to students' success in this section of the examination and in most cases students were studying works that allowed them to access the full range of marks. In particular, it is important that there are sufficient resources available to thoroughly study the context and style of the works chosen.

Question 1

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	2	3	10	10	13	14	10	14	10	7	5.8

Students were required to answer this question in relation to the Australian work they had studied in Unit 3. In order to be awarded high marks, students were required to explain the nature of unity and diversity and substantiate this in relation to repetition and variation. Students responded well, with more than 30 per cent scoring eight marks or higher.

Question 2a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	8	14	78	1.7

Students were required to answer this question in relation to the 'other' work that they studied in Unit 3. This question was generally competently answered. It is important that students were able to clearly state the contextual issues they studied in relation to the work. In some cases, students showed confusion. It should be noted that contextual issues should have had clear connections to the musical characteristics of the work.

Question 2b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	5	3	5	10	13	17	21	14	12	5

This question called for an expansion of the response given in Question 2a. and to specifically link the issue to the creation of the work. As in previous years, students successfully explained contextual issues related to significant events in history, social movements, intellectual and philosophical schools of thought, technological advancements, characteristics and abilities of specific performers and the personal circumstances of the composers / music creators. The highest-scoring responses were able to evidence the contextual issues with information on the use of compositional devices and treatment of the elements of music in the work.

Question 3

For questions 3a, 3b and 3c, students were required to complete a response about the post-1950 work studied in Unit 4.

The three parts of the question were generally well-answered. Responses that were accurate, detailed and used appropriate terminology were awarded higher marks.

Question 3a.

Mark	0	1	Average
%	10	90	0.9

Most students were able to accurately identify the style of the work studied.

Question 3b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	5	14	22	56	3.3

Higher marks were awarded to responses where the description of two characteristics of the style were accurately described in detail, and demonstrated a clear understanding of aspects of the style using highly relevant music terminology and language.

Question 3c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	8	21	27	24	14	3

Full marks required a detailed explanation of how one of the characteristics described in part b was evident in this work.